

THE FEEDINGS OF THE THOUSANDS : AN INQUIRY.

II.

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IT only remains, before piecing the narratives together into a connected whole, to notice the questions concerning the provision of food. There may be on the surface a " seeming difference " between St. John's account and that of the Synoptists, but they do not even reach the stage of apparent, still less of absolute contradiction. The thrice recorded request of the disciples to dismiss the crowd to purchase food is supplemented by John's version of our Lord's question to Philip, which obviously held precedence in point of time,¹ and was the seed from which the former sprang. This simply means putting John vi. 5 before Matthew xiv. 15, Mark vi. 35, and Luke ix. 12—a legitimate process which Trench and Westcott ably defend, the latter thus :

" St. John appears to have brought together into one scene, as we now regard it, the first words spoken to Philip on the approach of the crowd, and the words in which they were afterwards taken up by Andrew, when the disciples themselves at evening re-stated the difficulty. If this view be true, so that the words addressed to Philip with his answer preceded the whole day's work, then the mention of ' two hundred pennyworth of bread ' made by the disciples in St. Mark (vi. 37) gains great point, and so too the phrase, ' what He was about to do ' (v. 6), which otherwise appears to be followed too quickly by its fulfilment."

But it is time to let the Evangelists be their own interpreters by blending the details supplied by each in chronological sequence, in effecting which I adopt Edersheim's method with passages here and there borrowed from his text. The narrative thus treated presents a complete and continuous history.

A triple combination or fortuitous concurrence of circumstances or events had, immediately prior to His fifth Passover, provided

¹ " A day of teaching and healing must be intercalated before the miracle of feeding was wrought " (Westcott). This is inferentially deducible from all four narratives, although Edersheim (I. 679) " cannot see any reason for this. All the events fit well into one day."

motives for the Lord's withdrawal "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife," viz. grief consequent upon the death of John Baptist (Matt. xiv. 13), the fatigue of the disciples from their recent laborious missionary itinerary (Mark vi. 30, 31) and present disturbance from the increasingly thronging crowds of sight-seers, and (Luke ix. 9) the murderous Herod's determination "to see Him."¹

"And He said unto them: Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile" (Mark vi. 31); "and He took them and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida" (Luke ix. 10), crossing by ship "over the sea of Galilee, which is *the sea* of Tiberias" (John vi. 1), "the name by which the lake was known to classical writers (Paus. v. 7, p. 391, *λίμνη Τιβεριάς*)" (Westcott), and so called from the magnificent city built on its shore by Herod Antipas in honour of the Emperor Tiberius Claudius Nero (A.D. 14–A.D. 37), (Josephus, *Antiq.* XVIII; *Bell. Jud.* II. 9, § 1), and where the Mishna was compiled (A.D. 190), and the Musorah originated. It was "a well-known spot where Christ and the Apostles touched the shore. South of it was Gergesa, and beyond mountains and hills recede, and plains widen along the shore of the north side of the lake. A few ruins mark the site of Bethsaida-Julias on the edge of a hill, three or four miles north, and a mile further is the ford by which the crowd crossed the Jordan from Capernaum—a wide expanse of grass" (Edersheim).

"And the people saw them departing, and many knew Him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities and outwent them, and came together unto Him" (Mark vi. 33); "and a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company" [of Passover pilgrims with the other over 5,000 combined] "come unto Him, He saith unto Philip: Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him; for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him: Two hundred pennyworth² of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little" (John vi. 2–7).

¹ Westcott rightly sees in this "the link which combines" the other motives, and "made a brief season of quiet retirement, and that outside the dominions of Herod, the natural counsel of wisdom and tenderness."

² "A hasty, indeterminate estimate, but one pointing to a considerable

“ And Jesus went forth,” descending the mountain to the desert plain of Bethsaida, “ and was moved with compassion toward them, and He healed their sick ” (Matt. xiv. 14), “ and began to teach them many things ” (Mark vi. 34), “ and spake unto them of the Kingdom of God ” (Luke ix. 11).

So the long bright day, filled with loving toil and speech, wears on apace, and when the shadows were lengthening on land and sea “ His disciples came to Him, saying : This is a desert place, and the time is now past ; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them : They need not depart ; give ye them to eat ” (Matt. xiv. 15, 16) ; “ how many loaves have ye ? go and see ” (Mark vi. 38). “ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto Him : There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes ; but what are they among so many ” (John vi. 8, 9) — (“ For they were about five thousand men ”) (Luke ix. 14)—And “ He said : Bring them hither to Me ” (Matt. xiv. 18). “ And He commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties ” (Mark vi. 39, 40), “ with their bright many-coloured dresses, like garden-beds (the literal rendering of *πρασιά* is *garden-bed*) on the turf ” (Edersheim). “ And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, He looked up to heaven ” (“ and when He had given thanks,” John vi. 11), “ blessed¹ and brake the loaves, and gave *them* to His disciples to set before them ; and the two fishes² divided He among them all ” (Mark vi. 41), and “ when they were filled, He said unto His disciples : Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered *them* together,

sum,” is Dr. Salmond’s “ hasty indeterminate ” comment. Why “ hasty,” if the sum was “ considerable ” ? Andrew was far more hasty in judging it to be inadequate, and less hasty than the Doctor who knows it to be “ considerable,” calculating it to be “ something over £7 of our money,” and admitting that it would mean about a third of a penny for each.”

¹ Edersheim answers the very pertinent curiosity : What form of blessing would the Lord use ? “ There can be little doubt that the words which Jesus spake, whether in Aramaean, Greek, or Hebrew were those so well known : ‘ Blessed art Thou, Jehovah our God, King of the World, Who causes to come forth (אֵלֶיךָ) bread from the earth.’ ”

² ὀψάριον (John vi. 9), dried fish, sardines, “ a familiar Galilean word (אֵפְסוֹנִין, ophsonin, savoury dish, and אֵפְסָן, Aphyan, or אֵפְסָן, Aphits, small fish, sardines), thus showing accurate local knowledge. This is one of those undesignated traits in the narrative which carry almost irresistible evidence.—(Edersheim).

and filled twelve baskets¹ with the fragments of the five barley loaves" ("and of the fishes," Mark vi. 43), "which remained over and above unto them that had eaten" (John vi. 12, 13). "And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children" (Matt. xiv. 21). "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said: This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (John vi. 14). For "the murmur ran through the ranks: 'This is truly the Prophet, *the Coming One* (הבבא) *habba* into the world.' And so the Baptist's last inquiry, 'Art Thou the Coming One?' was fully and publicly answered, and that by the Jews themselves" (Edersheim). "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a King, He departed *again* into a mountain Himself alone" (John vi. 15).

So the simple four-told incident, harmonised, i.e. "fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every" narrator "supplieth," ends simply, and from its concluding sentences two salient facts result: (1) In addition to St. John's mention of the Passover, the *κοφίνοι* (*ut infra*) and the (somehow manifested) intention "to make Him a King" are clear suggestions by the narrators of the Jewish nationality of both the "great multitude" and the "great company." Edersheim rightly calls them "life touches," which confirm the historicity of the entire episode. (2) It is clear, even with the second word omitted, from *ἀνεχώρησε πάλιν εἰς τὸ ὄρος* that the Lord had come down from the mountain, which He had previously ascended, towards the shore to teach and cure, and afterwards withdrew to it again and alone.

B. The Feeding of the Four Thousand (Matt. xv. 29-39; Mark

¹ "Twelve baskets." Why "twelve"? Opinions vary and waver. "It has been suggested that they may have been those in which the Twelve Apostles had carried the food which they required on their Missionary journey recently finished" (Salmond). "Probably the property of the twelve disciples, a basket being the usual travelling wallet of a Jew" (McClymont). "Twelve baskets: one for each apostle. Juvenal says that the furniture of a Jew consisted of a basket (for food) and some dried grass (for a bed): these were provided to avoid contamination. The testimony of the four, and minute agreement in the Synoptics, establish the historic certainty of the account" (Prof. Slater). Juvenal's pleasantries, although worn thread-bare in this connection, deserve a final transference:

Judaeis, quorum *cophinus* fœnumque supellex. *Sat.* III. 14.

Quorum dedit ille locum, *cofino* fœnoque relicto. *Ibid.* VI. 542.

Westcott's explanation, whilst obviously embracing those just advanced, is the straightest: "The number implies that the work was given to the apostles, though they have not been specially mentioned."

viii. 1-10). It is idle to endeavour to account for the silence of Luke and John on this incident ; it is more than idle to seek to identify it with that other just considered. Yet many otherwise precious moments have been idled away lavishly in vain strivings over both. The silences of Scripture are notoriously past finding out ; hence " we may not know, we cannot tell " why Matthew and Mark do, and Luke and John do not, chronicle this deed of Christ. It is sheer knocking its head against the wall of the unknowable for exegesis to attempt the solution of either problem. Equally useless is it to try to coalesce the Feeding of the Four Thousand with the Feeding of the Five Thousand. An impartial examination of their resemblances and differences will, without further cavil, prove this to be so. Prior, however, to entering upon this, the artless story of the occurrence now about to be considered must lie before us, in blended form and without comment, as told by the narrators themselves. By " artless " I by no means mean void of art—which it certainly is not—but as composed, in both presentments, naturally (and therefore simply), i.e. manifesting art while concealing it.

" And Jesus departed " (Matt. xv. 29) " from the borders of Tyre and Sidon," and " came unto the sea of Galilee through the midst of the borders of Decapolis " (Mark vii. 31), " and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto Him, having with them " some that were " lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast themselves down at Jesus' feet ; and He healed them, insomuch that the multitude wondered when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk and the blind to see ; and they glorified the God of Israel. Then Jesus called His disciples and said : I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat, and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way. And His disciples say unto Him : Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude ? And Jesus saith unto them : How many loaves have ye ? And they said : Seven, and a few little fishes. And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake " them, " and gave to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled : and they

took up of the broken "meat" that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children. And He sent away the multitude" (Matt. xv. 29-39), "and straightway He entered into a ship with His disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha," (Mark viii. 10), "into the coast of Magdala" (Matt. xv. 39).

In eleven verses each the two narrators write the simple story down straightforwardly. There is no need to seek the sources of it, nor to subject it to the "science of emendation." The story tells its own unvarnished tale, and does not suffer from merely adjusting prologue and epilogue to it in its own words, so as to lie a connected and graphic whole before us. Only the prologue and epilogue, as I have termed them, need delay us for a moment by way of defence of the adjustment.

As to the first, we need not linger over the possible whereabouts of Christ (as suggested by the ἦλθεν διὰ Σιδῶνος of *κ* B.D. Latt., "Came through Sidon," R.V.), nor over the intervening episodes, but note that Decapolis (region or confederation of the "Ten Cities") was a large and indefinable district, on both sides of the Jordan, populous in those days, but, except Damascus, utterly barren in these. Pliny (V. 18) enumerates the ten cities (which lay east of Jordan) as Scythopolis (called by Josephus the largest, B. J. III. 9, § 8), Hippos, Gadara, Pella, Philadelphia, Gerasa, Dion, Canatha, Damascus, and Raphana; Ptolemy (V. 17) gives Capitobis as one of the ten, and Smith adds that "an old Palmyrene inscription quoted by Reland includes Aliba, a town which, according to Eusebius, was twelve Roman miles east of Gadara." They were rebuilt after the Roman conquest B.C. 65; and it was through them that, on a previous occasion, the Gerasene demoniac "began to publish how great things Jesus had done for him" (Mark v. 20), and through their "borders" that He now came once more "unto the Sea of Galilee," closing His first northern and Decapolis ministries by one incident and His passing by ship "into the coasts of Magdala" and "the parts of Dalmanutha."

Secondly, the two expressions "coasts of Magdala" ("borders of Magadan," R.V.) and "parts of Dalmanutha" are not contradictory, their vicinity near the plain of Gennesaret precluding that charge. And little more profit is to be gained by heated disputes over the rival claims of *Μαγδαλά* and *Μαγδαῦν*. It is a case

of *utrum horum mavis accipe*. The former may have the support of the T.R. and A.V. only, and the latter of B.D. and Sinait, but *cuius bono?* The Vulg. has Magedan and Syr. Magedun. All three situations are pure guess-work, and it is *opus et oleum perdere* to essay to locate them.

Here¹ I reach the main purport of this inquiry—the relationship (if any) between the two Feedings of the Multitudes; their resemblances and dissemblances and their separateness one from the other.

The often alleged kinship between the two incidents is entirely apparent and superficial. They stand as entirely disconnected as they would do had one of the two been non-existent. Beyond community of occasion and aim and slight similarity of outline there is absolutely no affinity between them, still less assimilation in and of the two reports by primitive (that is, oral) or any other tradition. The oldest gospel tradition of Matthew xvi. 9–10 and Mark viii. 20 (of which presently) demolishes the doublet theory.

The points of resemblance, to minimise or emphasise which no useful purpose is served, are interesting: (1) the *locus in quo* is, in both instances, of the same desert character and near to the sea; (2) a similar anxiety of the disciples concerning the provisioning of the crowds;¹ (3) Christ's compassion for them repeated; (4) the identity of the materials of both meals; (5) the self-same methods were observed: the order to sit, the blessing, the distribution, and the gathering of the fragments; and (6) the departure by ship. Prof. Slater adds a seventh with a curious comment: "To these similarities should be added the item that the number in both cases *excludes* 'women and children.'"

¹ This so-called resemblance is not one in reality. Though the anxiety was similar at both occurrences, it was manifested differently. Principal Salmond's answer (on Mark viii. 4) is conclusive: "The deficiencies of the disciples are never concealed. Their question betrayed their forgetfulness and the little they had yet learned. It is to be noticed also that it is not quite the same as their question on the previous occasion. Then their difficulty was about the large sum of money that would be needed to purchase provisions. Here it is the difficulty of finding anywhere in the sparsely-peopled district in which they were now a sufficient supply for such a multitude of mouths." This amply invalidates Prof. Slater's comment on Matt. xv. 33 that "Meyer's suggestion [of assimilation of the two accounts in the course of oral transmission] would partly remove the difficulty found in the question of the disciples, which in that case might not belong to the second occurrence." "Might not" is, to a logician, too flimsy a method of disposing of an even supposed difficulty to be entertained for a moment.

The italicised word is inaccurate. *Χωρὶς* means "beside," in addition to, as well as "without," or "not counting." But either word suggests inclusion, substantially if not numerically.

If resemblances, which are more than "undesigned coincidences," could and should establish identity of facts these certainly do so. But, unfortunately for the adherents of the doublet theory, these resemblances *are* precisely "undesigned coincidences." Hence their utter worthlessness as arguments. They are on a par with circumstantial evidence, which is notoriously faulty. Extrinsic similarity, down to details, between two given facts is no proof of their intrinsic identity, else were the narratives of Waterloo and Inkerman two separate accounts of the same battle.¹

But the three outstanding facts which demolish this contention and entirely differentiate the two incidents are—

(a) The characteristic difference between the two multitudes. This was more than "apparent" as Bishop Drury terms it—an expression which his own comment (*l.c.* p. 58) neutralises: "In estimating the relation of the miracle of the Four Thousand to that of the Five Thousand, one thing at least claims careful notice, namely, the apparent difference of character between the two multitudes. In the first place all four Evangelists describe the Five Thousand as composed in the main of crowds who saw Jesus departing from the western shore and followed Him on foot so as to outrun Him and meet Him when He landed on the eastern shore. St. John gives the clue to the occasion by telling us that the Passover was near. They were a Jewish multitude, largely composed of people travelling to Jerusalem, with which their desire to 'make Him a King' is perfectly consistent. On the other hand, the Four Thousand seem to have been more or less inhabitants of the district, doubtless having their numbers swelled from more distant parts, 'for divers of them came from far.' There is no trace of *political* excitement, or of Jewish origin. The whole context points to a crowd mainly gathered from the cities of Decapolis, 'having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed,' a feature much less prominent at the earlier miracle, where we only read 'He

¹ "There is no need," remarks Edersheim, "for the ingenious apology [of Bleek] that, in the remembrance and tradition of the first and second feeding, the similarity of the two events had led to greater similarity in their narration than the actual circumstances would perhaps have warranted."

healed the sick.' . . . Once more, St. Matthew's phrase 'They glorified *the God of Israel*,' in his record of the second miracle, comes most naturally from a non-Jewish crowd, who despite their belief in their own local deities were moved by our Lord's works of mercy to glorify the God of His people."

Thus the radically distinct mental attitudes of the two crowds towards Christ establish beyond reasonable cavil their radically distinct nationalities, and irrefragably the utter separateness of the two happenings.

(b) The second unmistakable point which marks off the two bodies of guests at the two banquets lies in the respective use of, and remarkable distinction between, *κόφινος* and *σπύρις* on the two occasions. Too much cannot be made of this otherwise curious change of word, which is no mean factor in determining the component national elements of those guests, and was clearly meant to indicate the difference between those elements as well as to record two sets of facts. Between the *κόφινος* and the *σπύρις* there was just the relationship of genus and species, both belonging to the former whilst being variants of the latter. Both were baskets in the sense that our picnic-baskets and hampers are; and both differed from each other in equal proportions to those, as all four also indicate journeys of shorter and longer distances. It is by this latter indication that *σπύρις* settles the semi-Gentile character of the second multitude as *κόφινος*¹ does the Jewish one of the first. There is no "undesigned coincidence" theory admissible here. The word was deliberately chosen to paint what had occurred. And this is strikingly confirmed by the two subsequent references (Matt. xvi. 9-10; Mark viii. 19-20) to the two Feedings which carefully preserve and emphasise the distinction between the two words. Both our Lord in His distinguishing use, and the Evangelists in their distinguishing record, of them show their anxiety for accuracy of fact. It is a pity that our A.V. suggests no such vital difference in its rendering of both words by "baskets" repeated only too faithfully in each case; even the R.V. makes but a pitiful attempt at distinction by "basketfuls," and that only in Mark. Beza wisely and accurately distinguished them by "cophinus" and

¹ "Those baskets (*κόφινος*), known in Jewish writings by a similar name (Kephiphah, כִּפְיָה מְצוּיִת, from מְצוּרָה metser-wicker or willow), made of wicker or willows, were in common use, but considered of the poorest kind."—Eder-sheim.

“ sporta ” respectively in the two narratives and emphatically at Matthew xvi. 9–10 and Mark viii. 19–20 ; and Wiclif equally wisely renders the first by “ coffens ful of broken mete,” and the second by “ legsis of broken mete.” Except the Italian (which gives *corbello* and *paniere* to distinguish the two kinds) most modern vernacular versions (German, French, Russian, Swedish, Baskish, Spanish, Welsh, and Irish Gaelic) are as expert as the A.V. and R.V., in clumsily hiding the two meanings under the self-same word. Bishop Drury’s comment is well worth reproducing here to clinch this limb of my argument (*l.c.* p. 59) : “ This contrast between the crowds is emphasised (as Bishop Lightfoot pointed out) by the well-known difference of vessels used in collecting the fragments. The *κόφινος* was the recognized note of a Jew, and the Five Thousand used *κόφινοι*. The *σπύρις*, used by the Four Thousand, was a larger vessel, a rough country maund or hamper, large and strong enough in some cases to carry a man, for St. Paul’s life once hung on a *σπύρις*¹ in which he was let down from the window on the walls of Damascus ! ‘ Just fancy,’ Bishop Lightfoot once said to his pupils, ‘ the Great Apostle St. Paul let down in a fish-basket ! ’ Thus the difference of word used in either miracle, and repeated when the two miracles are named together, is not merely an interesting differentiation of terms, but it confirms the *difference of nationality* which the narratives themselves suggest.”

(c) The third proof of non-identity is that of *season*, which no impartial observer of facts can dismiss as nugatory. This is markedly indicated by the phrases both of Matthew (xv. 35) and Mark (viii. 6) : *ἀναπεσεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν* and *ἀναπεσεῖν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* respectively. This second group of guests are seated now, not on “ the green grass,” but “ on the ground,” which points to an altogether different, that is later, period of the year when, as Edersheim observes, “ in the East the grass was burnt up.” In some respects this fact separates the two Feedings even more conclusively than the two preceding ones.

And, amongst minor differences, the following may be instanced as not devoid of weight : (1) The *πολιν παλλου* of Mark viii. 1 in

¹ ἐν σπυρίδι (Acts ix. 25) ; ἐν σαργάνῃ (2 Cor. xi. 33), a word that is somewhat wider in its meaning than *σπύρις* though its equivalent, signifying a net-work of twisted cords or a basket of the same. There is no contradiction between Luke and Paul as the *σπύρις* was also made of plaited rope, but Bishop Lightfoot’s pleasantry loses its piquancy somewhat.

a reading of great value, though not adopted by Griesbach nor in the A.V., but rightly inserted in the R.V., emphatically cuts the second Feeding from the first Feeding and thus establishes two separate facts. On this Principal Salmond trenchantly remarks :

“The evangelist says simply and distinctly that there was *again* a great multitude, and they had nothing to eat.’ Why should we not accept his statement ? ”

(2) Numerical discrepancies : In one case 5,000, in the other 4,000 are fed ; in the first instance there were five loaves and two fishes, in the second seven loaves and “ a few small fishes,” and again, twelve baskets were filled with fragments at the first Feeding, and seven at the second. All this must be reckoned with on grounds other than an insinuation of numerical jugglery.

(3) It is not without significance that at the first Feeding thanks were given by our Lord, *according to the Jewish custom* once and only over the bread, whereas at the second the fishes also were included in the blessing. This has all the appearance of a separate rite observed for a *Gentile* audience.

But the crowning proof of separateness between the two Feedings, which should over-ride all cavilling and smooth out all difficulties, is supplied by Him who presided at both as recorded by Matthew at xvi. 9-10, and Mark at viii. 19-20. Verily here, if anywhere, *Scriptura per scripturam interpretetur*.

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