

THE SIXTH HOUR.

IN the EXPOSITOR, vol. vii., pp. 216-223 (fourth series), it is argued that there is no justification for the theory frequently advanced¹ that the ancients reckoned the hours of the day in two ways: (1) beginning from sunrise, (2) beginning from midnight. The few reasons that have been advanced in favour of the existence of a second method of counting the hours, beginning from midnight, are there shown to possess no value, and to rest mainly on a confusion between the Roman civil Day, which was reckoned from midnight to midnight, and the popular day, in the sense of the period of light (as distinguished and separate from the period of night and darkness), which was divided into twelve hours. As the point is an interesting and important one in the comparative study of the Gospels, it seems worth while to add some further arguments, which point to the same conclusion.

(1) It has been supposed by some scholars that John in this case employed a mode of reckoning the hours from midnight current on the coast of Asia Minor, having become familiar with it during his residence in Ephesus, whereas Mark used the ordinary reckoning current elsewhere. In the article already referred to the chief example of this supposed Asia Minor reckoning (the martyrdom of Polycarp) is proved to tell strongly in favour of the ordinary reckoning from sunrise. Further, Unger, in two elaborate articles on the "Beginning of the Day,"² argues that there was a Macedonian method of reckoning even the civil

¹ To reconcile John xix. 14 with Mark xv. 25 it has been often asserted that the "sixth hour" of the former was about 6 a.m., while the "third hour" of the latter was about 9 a.m.

² *Tagesanfang*, in *Philologus*, 1892, pp. 14 ff., 212 ff.

twenty-four hours Day from sunrise to sunrise, and that this method was used in Pergamos and wherever the Macedonian calendar prevailed (*i.e.* widely in the western parts of Asia Minor). If Unger is right, it is clear that no system of hours starting from midnight was current in those parts of Asia Minor. If, on the other hand, the facts to which he appeals merely show (as I incline to think) that the universal popular conception of the day as beginning with daylight¹ tended to affect even the conception of the civil Day, it is equally made clear that in the popular conception the numbering of hours began invariably from daybreak or sunrise.

(2) Other scholars have supposed that the Roman civil Day was sometimes reckoned by hours, which, as they infer, must have started from midnight (when the civil Day began). Not merely, as was already pointed, are they unable to quote any case where the Roman hours are reckoned from midnight. Even when a Roman was describing a civil Day, or series of civil Days, he still counted his "first hour" as beginning from sunrise; and he called midnight, which was the beginning of his twenty-four hours day, "the sixth hour of the night."² Such language is plainly inconsistent with the idea that the beginning of the civil twenty-four hours Day was used as a starting-point for counting the hours.

(3) Nor can any Greek idea with regard to the Day be appealed to as supporting a reckoning from midnight. Unger shows conclusively that the Greek civil Day began

¹ It is clear that in the rough popular sense day began with the appearance of light (Unger, *l.c.*, p. 15); but the hours rigidly reckoned began from sunrise, the "first hour" being one hour after sunrise.

² See *e.g.* Ulpian (quoted in *Digest* XLI. 3, 7) *qui horâ VI diei Kal. Ian. possidere coepit, horâ sextâ noctis pridie Kal. Ian. implet usucaptionem*. Here the subject is the lapse of so many civil Days, but mid-day (*plena sexta*) is called *hora VI diei*, and midnight is *hora sexta noctis*; yet the whole point lies in the fact that *hora sexta noctis* is the end of the Day and beginning of a new Day. Cp. also *Digest* XL. 1, 1; XXVIII. 1, 5. (See Unger *l.c.*)

from sunset (like the Hebrew Day and the Ecclesiastical Day).¹

Whatever be the solution of the discrepancy between the Second and the Fourth Gospel, it cannot be reasonably maintained any longer that different reckonings were employed in them. No modern scholar who investigates the subject apart from the passage in St. John finds any evidence to suggest such a view. All are clear that the hours were reckoned in one way alone. For my own part, Turkish experience is still so strong in me that I cannot feel anything serious in such difference of estimate between witnesses who naturally would be thinking little about the hour. The numerous incidents that occurred on that morning (especially according to Luke) make it probable that John's estimate is nearer the truth than Mark's.

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¹ The view of Bilfinger is still more thoroughly opposed to the theory against which I am arguing. He maintains that both Greeks and Romans (except in Roman legal matters) reckoned the civil Day from sunrise (or sometimes in popular rough fashion, from dawn of light). See his treatise *Der bürgerliche Tag*. Unger, however, has conclusively refuted his arguments.