

*THE SITE OF CAPERNAUM.*

WHERE was the town which was the home of Jesus Christ, and the chief centre of His work, during the three years of His public ministry? It is an old controversy, not yet settled to the satisfaction of experts. From the days of Dr. Robinson, of New York—the pioneer of Palestinian topography—whose *Researches* are still unrivalled and indispensable to all students of the subject, and who in 1836 fixed on Khan Minyeh as the site, down to Carl Ritter (who in 1850 decided on Tell Hum, and tried to prove it was the place) there have been many oscillations of opinion between the two—the only possible two—sites. Dean Stanley in 1856 reverted to Khan Minyeh, followed by Keim in 1867. Then Dr. Thomson, Sir Charles Wilson, Schenkel, Schürer (from 1869 to 1874), approved of Tell Hum; while most of the greater experts, from Major C. R. Conder in 1879, Selah Merill, George Adam Smith, Von Soden, Rider Haggard, and Professor Sanday down to 1903, support Khan Minyeh.

I have formed a very decided opinion in favour of Khan Minyeh; and, from aneroid observations on the spot in January of this year, have perhaps obtained a tiny ray of fresh light on the fascinating problem. Before presenting it, a glance may be given to the only other possible site suggested; not from any evidence in its favour, but from the eminence of the distinguished Biblical and Natural History expert, recently gone from us, Canon Tristram, of Durham. He will be long remembered from his books on Palestine; and, as one of the main points in the evidence we have to deal with concerns the fountain which watered the plain of Gennesareth, to which Josephus refers, Tristram's guess as to that fountain must be considered. After much research he thought it was the fountain of Ain-em-Madowwerah (the round fountain) in the centre of

the plain of Gennesareth, which he describes in a very interesting manner ; referring especially to his discovery in it of the *coracin* fish, about which Josephus writes. But there is no sign whatsoever of any kind of ruin near this fountain, and nothing to lead us to suppose that " a city " ever existed there ; while the *coracin* fish which ascend from the lake are to be found in other streams and fountains.

Putting aside, then, that guess of Tristram's, there are just two other places on the shore of the lake at one of which the Capernaum of old must have been situated, the modern Khan Minyeh and Tell Hum. Before discussing their respective claims, the following points should be noted. Wherever it was (and it was always called a city, *πόλις*), it was (1) a military station, in which a body of Roman soldiers lived (St. Matt. viii. 5) ; (2) it was a place where tax collectors sat at the receipt of custom (St. Matt. ix. 9) ; (3) it was a city made important by the residence of an official representing the king (St. John iv. 46) ; (4) it was close to the shore of the lake (St. Matt. iv. 13) ; (5) it was also near the plain of Gennesareth (St. John vi. 17-21 ; St. Mark vi. 53 ; St. Matt. xiv. 34).

Briefly to describe these two sites. Khan Minyeh is now the ruin of an inn or caravansery, a little way above the " fountain of the fig tree," *Ain-et-Tin*, at the northern end of the plain of Gennesareth. It is near the lake, it is in Gennesareth, and it is on the main highway of communication with Damascus on the north-east, and Jerusalem on the south. Tell Hum is four miles further north than Khan Minyeh, and, while also on the lake, is a mile and a half from its northern end, where the Jordan enters it ; a now ruined station, where some remarkable ruins have been unearthed, and whence the ground rises inland very gently up towards the probable site of Chorazin, three miles to the north-west.

We get very little help—scarcely even a remote clue—from the words which describe these two hypothetical sites of Capernaum. Kephâr Nahum=the village of Nahum, could not have been contracted (or corrupted) into Tell Hum; and as Tell signifies a “mound,” and there is no mound of any kind at the place in question, it is discredited *ab initio*. Tell Hum cannot be a likely contraction for Nahum’s mound. It would have needed to be *Tell-Num*. But there is no “tell,” no “mound” of any kind, near the place now quite inaccurately designated “Tell Hum.” The spot thus named may have been near one of the minor roads of the district leading northwards, but it could never have been a “Custom’s City,” such an one as that from which St. Matthew was called.

One of the most important, although indirect, witness-bearers as to the site of Capernaum is Josephus. As military governor of Galilee, a few years after the death of Christ, he commanded 10,000 men, and tells us that he sent a captain with 2,000 soldiers to oppose Sylla, the Roman general; but that he himself met with an accident, falling from his horse into a quagmire; that he was injured in the wrist, and carried into a village named Cepharnome, or Capernaum. He was feverish all day and “removed at night to Tarichæa.”<sup>1</sup> The whole passage is so well known that it need not be quoted at length. The important point is this. If the accident occurred in the delta at the mouth of the Jordan, or even near the modern Tell Hum, he may have been carried as far down the shore of the lake as the fountain of Ain-et-Tin, and there been taken by boat—of which there were hundreds on the lake—to Tarichæa, which he evidently wished to reach, and would prefer to reach it “by the way of the sea,” rather than by taking the road—(the *via maris*) behind Tiberias. Tiberias was in the

<sup>1</sup> See *Jewish Wars*, book III. chap. x. § 8.

hands of the Romans, and Tarichæa was held by the Jews.

More important than the indirect testimony of Josephus is the account in the Gospels of the disciples going from the eastern side of the lake after the feeding of the multitude to Capernaum (St. John vi. 17), where it is said that they "were soon at the land whither they were going." But St. Matthew and St. Mark both say that "they came to the land of Gennesareth," and there it was that Jesus was found next morning in the synagogue by the people who sought Him. Some have supposed that if the feeding of the mixed multitude took place on the north-eastern shore of the lake (which is certainly the most probable site), the vast crowd would be sent round by the northern delta across the Jordan in some way, and downwards to their various cities or villages on that western shore; and that therefore the disciples would take ship, and sail over to such a spot as Tell Hum now is. But why should they go due west across the lake? Why not rather south-west, towards their village fisher-home Bethsaida, and Capernaum near at hand?

I think, from all the evidence discoverable, that there were two Bethsaidas; (1) the Bethsaida-Julius up on the delta beyond the inflow of the Jordan, the town rebuilt and enlarged in honour of a scion of the Roman Emperor; and (2) the fishing village lower down near Capernaum, which was the dwelling-place of Andrew, Philip, Peter, and the rest of those noble "fisher-folk" of Galilee.

Next, it is almost certain that a large "city" once existed on the site of the present ruin of Khan Minyeh. This is evidenced by the ruins which are to be seen above it at Tell Oreimeh, where the synagogue (which our Lord frequented) may have been; and the ruins below, between it and the sea.

Again, and still more important, it is certain that the

great road for caravan-traffic, between Judea the whole west of Galilee, and away to Damascus on the north-east, must have passed close to this ruined khan of Minyeh, and then struck almost due northwards. Nothing but a mere foot-track led up the north-western shore of the lake to where Tell Hum now stands. Where would it ever have led to, except to hamlets and villages of the poor? The great Damascus road passed on by Khan-Jubb-Yusef to the north; and—what is most important by way of evidence—there would certainly be a station at this particular spot of Khan Minyeh for the collection of the customs that were due. We are told that it was when “sitting at the receipt of custom” that St. Matthew was “called” to be an apostle; but we have no evidence of a custom-house, or of the likelihood of its existence, on the minor pathway by Tell Hum.

And now as to the *Fountain* of which Josephus writes—which watered the plain of Gennesareth—it certainly was not the *Ain-em-Madowwerah* which Canon Tristram thought it was, and where he found the coracin fish; and it was not *Ain-et-Tin* (the fountain of the fig tree), which is almost on the same level as the latter. Neither of these could convey water to irrigate the plain. But comparatively close at hand, at Et-Tabigah, there is the second largest—if not the most copious—fountain in Galilee, a wondrous cluster of springs; and, what is much more important, the remains of an old aqueduct exist there, an aqueduct cut across the face of the rock between the fountain and the plain of Gennesareth, showing that water had, at some distant time, been brought from this fountain southwards, and round the cliff artificially, to water the garden and the plain underneath. Some have fancied that this rock-cut channel was a roadway for horses. It is impossible. It is too narrow for horses to pass each other, and it bears traces,

in its ancient masonry, of being a water channel. But the most important point of all is its height, as compared with the fountain source of the spring, Et-Tabigah. I was advised before going out to Galilee that the only thing I could do, which had not been done by many visitors before me, was to determine heights. And so I took a pocket aneroid barometer, which had been a trustworthy assistant on many a Swiss mountain and British height before. Numerous writers have alluded to this aqueduct, many drawings of it have been given; but the question of questions was the height of the fountain, or stream, of Et-Tabigah, in relation to this now ruined aqueduct. By careful measurement I found that, at its highest point, the aqueduct is 10 to 15 feet lower than the spring, thus proving that it at least *could* convey the water in an artificial stream which might water the whole plain of Gennesareth. The Romans of old were splendid builders of aqueducts—as their imperial city and many another proves—but the plan of bringing water from the glen (or waddy) of Tabigah to irrigate Gennesareth seems to a modern eye so simply obvious that it is a mystery how any doubt can exist as to the actual fact. To those who are interested in the question of how the whole plain of Gennesareth could be watered artificially by this aqueduct, an examination of the way in which much larger valleys in the Canary Islands are irrigated by much tinier streamlets may be suggested. Nothing surprised me more in the long descent to Orotava under Teneriffe than the way in which a small stream of water from a spring may be made the source of supply to many miles of agricultural land.

It is also worth noting that as the aqueduct rounds the rock, and descends to where Khan Minyeh now is, there is a break in its course, which suggests that, from this point, the water may have been carried by other

artificial methods, known to all early agriculturists, down to the valley below.

I come now to the historical testimony and teaching, if it be not evidence. It must always be remembered that the early Christian writers were not topographers, or geographers. How could they be so? They accepted tradition gladly. They did not scrutinize collateral testimony as to details, when they considered that they had the central evidence of all in their own hands. But, afterwards, the spirit of inquiry was aroused, and it is most instructive to trace its evolution. Arculfus in the seventh century, St. Willibald in the eighth, Eugesippus in the twelfth, Brocardius in the thirteenth, and Quarasimus in the seventeenth, give us many suggestions, many conjectures, and some dates. The last writer says that what was Capernaum is a ruin called *Minieh* (in Arabic). Now we find, in the *Talmud*, that the Christians were named *Minim*=sorcerers or sinners. Capernaum was, to the Jews, the city of the *Minim*, or *Menai*, during almost the whole of the Middle Age, down nearly to the rise of our modern era. Thus, we have an important link in the chain of evidence in the very word Khan Minyeh.

The ruins at Tell Hum have recently been, and are still being, excavated; but there is no evidence in what has been discovered against the Khan Minyeh site of Capernaum. In my opinion, if the arguments on the subject may be divided into positive and negative, the negative ones are all against Tell Hum, while the positive ones are in favour of Khan Minyeh. There may have been a costly synagogue erected there by some wealthy Jew, and when the city—let us suppose that it was one of 16,000 people like the rest—was decadent, its stones may have been carried elsewhere, as we know that many marble ones were taken down to Tiberias, and some of them converted into lime. But of

the ruins at Tell Hum—which are perhaps the most interesting of all which exist on the shores of the lake—many may have been (and most likely were) of a much later date than the Christian era. It has been conjectured by Von Soden that, after that era began, some Jews from Tiberias settled at Tell Hum, and built a synagogue there.

I must not omit to mention the kindly father Biever, at the hospice of Et-Tabigah. He is a German, now long resident in Palestine, a farmer as much as a priest—because he has no flock to tend! none of the Roman fraternity to minister to—but is a most intelligent, thoughtful, kindly man, with much out-of-the-way learning, and a most genial personality. I cannot quite make out what his opinions are as to the site of Capernaum. He spoke to me in a decided way as to Tell Hum being the site, and I find quite different opinions given by him to other visitors to his hospice. All I can say is that the good man, referring to the ruins recently discovered at Tell Hum, said, “If they are not the ruins of Capernaum, of whatever are they the ruins?” It was not a satisfactory question in reply to a puzzled investigator; and it recalled a boyish experience. I once heard a Roman priest lecture on the supposed discovery of a relic of St. Mungo, at the close of which he said—holding up a tiny bone to his audience—“If this is not the great toe of St. Mungo, whose toe is it?” No; we cannot settle questions of topography by a series of negative questions; and I turned from father Biever’s query to the more positive and suggestive evidence I had found in the researches of Mr. MacGregor (Rob Roy MacGregor), who has so laboriously traversed, and so acutely written on, this lake of lakes, and has found evidence of subaqueous ruins in it below Khan Minyeh; thus connecting the scattered evidence of buildings to the north and the west with those long buried in the water.

Other evidence exists which leads me to localize Capernaum at Khan Minyeh, but I do not give it here and now. If there is any defender of Tell Hum who cares to write in its defence, I shall most respectfully consider his arguments, and deal with them in the light of the evidence at my disposal.

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*THE LIFE OF CHRIST ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.*<sup>1</sup>

XLI. THE DENUNCIATION OF THE TRAITOR, XIV. 17-21.

IN the evening Jesus and His disciples came to the guest-chamber where the supper was prepared, and took their last meal together ; and the Master spoke to His followers for the last time of the Kingdom of God. The next few hours were crowded with poignant memories, and of this last conversation, only a few sentences on two topics are recorded. Indeed, at this time Jesus seems to have been preoccupied and reserved, and His manner might quell the spirits of His companions, so that the meal proceeded in silence, broken only by the brief utterances called for by ritual or etiquette. He may have received a warning. Treacherous plots are seldom kept secret for days together. When Jesus spoke it was only to plunge His hearers into deeper gloom by His ominous words.

“In truth I tell you that one of you shall betray me, one of you who are eating with me.”<sup>2</sup>

The disciples broke in upon Him with eager protests :

<sup>1</sup> These studies do not profess to be an adequate historical or dogmatic account of Christ ; they simply attempt to state the impression which the Second Gospel would make upon a reader who had no other sources of information as to Jesus, and was unacquainted with Christian doctrine.

<sup>2</sup> These paraphrases of verses 18 and 20 might be challenged ; they would not be *primâ facie* the most natural renderings of the Greek taken as isolated sentences ; but they are required by the context. Perhaps the Greek misrepresents an original Aramaic or has been corrupted by parallel narratives.