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*A HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE
TO THE GALATIANS.*

ADDITION TO SECTION XL.

THROUGH a mistake on my own part, I allowed this section to be printed without the improvements which I intended to make, thinking it was not to appear till February. The insertion of the following sentence at the end of Section XXXIX., p. 60, will be enough to make clear my intention.

In order to test the idea that St. Paul's expression in this Epistle was influenced by the terms of a letter from the Galatic Churches, we must suppose for the moment that the idea is true: accordingly in Section XL. all that can be advanced in its favour is brought together. Thus in the succeeding sections the truth or error of the idea will be tested more easily.

Perhaps the fact that the first three and a half chapters obviously spring from the report of a delegate, and not from a letter of the Galatians, may seem to many to constitute a proof that the whole Epistle should be taken in the same way; and it must be conceded that nothing in the Epistle imperatively demands that such a letter lay before Paul as he wrote. The knowledge which he shows of the Galatian desires and aims may quite well have been gained from the report of a trusty messenger like Timothy. The strongest argument in favour of a letter, and the one which suggested the idea to me, is contained in v. 2 f. (fully discussed in p. 60 f.): Paul would hardly urge that they who adopt part of the Law are bound to adopt the whole Law, except in answer to a plea that they wished to adopt only part. They who are bent on complete acceptance of the Law will not be deterred by an argument that if they begin they must go through to the end. The confident assumption that their aim was limited seems more likely

to be founded on their own statement than on that of a messenger.

XLI. ST. PAUL'S VISITS TO THE GALATIC CHURCHES.

Nowhere are the immediate personal relations between Paul and the Galatic Christians so minutely described as in the verses iv. 12 ff. Here, therefore, is the suitable place to collect the evidence which the Epistle affords as to the previous connexion between them. The following points have been generally accepted as naturally following from the words used by the Apostle. It is better to avoid disputed points as far as possible; and therefore I would concentrate attention chiefly on the facts on which Lightfoot and Zöckler are agreed; for they may be taken as specially good representatives of the general opinion in Britain and Germany on the interpretation of all details in the text.

Paul had already visited the Galatic Churches twice, and distinguishes between his first and his second visit,¹ iv. 13, "I preached the Gospel to you the former time" (marginal reading of Revised Version).

It might seem sufficient that Lightfoot and Zöckler are agreed in this interpretation. But the point is occasionally disputed, and Prof. Blass² has recently added his weighty authority to the opposite view—viz., that τὸ πρότερον here merely means "at a former time." Lightfoot's note seems to me to show beyond question the fallacy of this view, which he carefully considers and dismisses. His argument is elucidated and confirmed by the two following considerations.

(a) On the opposite side 1 *Timothy* i. 13 is quoted as a case in which Paul uses τὸ πρότερον in the sense of

¹ On the sense of τὸ πρότερον see Lightfoot's note. Zöckler assumes the same sense without discussion (pp. 69b, 113).

² *Grammatik des N.T. Griech.*

“formerly.” Lightfoot, however, sees what escapes his opponents—that this is not a parallel case. In 1 *Timothy* i. 13¹ τὸ πρότερον materially influences the meaning of the whole sentence; it means “previously, but not at the time in question”; and the sentence would not be correct if τὸ πρότερον were omitted. Thus the adverb expresses a direct and emphatic contrast between the earlier and the later time.

Now, it is impossible to understand that in Galatians iv. 13 τὸ πρότερον indicates such a contrast as in 1 *Timothy* i. 13. It would be absurd to translate “You know that it was because of bodily disease that I preached the Gospel to you at a former, but not at a later, time.” This would be meaningless, except as distinguishing two visits.

Suppose now that Prof. Blass is right, and that the verse only means, “You know that it was because of disease that I preached to you at a former time.” The adverb here might be omitted, and the meaning would be as perfect and complete as it is when the adverb is expressed. Is this characteristic of Paul? Is it even permissible? For my own part I cannot admit that in this letter a single word is used in an otiose and useless way. Τὸ πρότερον must have a marked and distinct sense—all the more so because it occupies the emphatic position at the end of a clause. As Lightfoot says, “it is difficult to explain the emphasis,” except by interpreting “the former of my two visits to Galatia.”

The only objection to this is that it is true Greek; and some scholars have made up their mind that Paul and Luke were quite unable to distinguish between a comparative and a superlative.

¹ Πιστὸν με ἠγήσατο, θέμενος εἰς διακονίαν, τὸ πρότερον ὄντα βλάσφημον: “he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service, though I had previously been a blasphemer.” Paul had ceased to be a blasphemer before he was appointed. If τὸ πρότερον were omitted, the meaning would be that he was appointed while still a blasphemer.

(b) Again, if we take τὸ πρότερον here in the bare sense of "formerly," we must infer that Paul had preached the Gospel to the Galatic Churches only once. It would be absurd in itself, and is wholly irreconcilable with the historical narrative in *Acts*, that Paul should claim to have preached twice by reason of bodily illness. Here he distinctly refers to one definite occasion, one definite visit, on which sickness was the reason why it came about that he evangelized.¹ Therefore, either he had only once before "preached the Gospel" to the Galatians,² or he must make some distinction between the two visits, and use words referring only to one of them; and the distinction can lie only in the adverb τὸ πρότερον. Sickness was the cause on the former occasion, but not on the second.

We know from *Acts*, alike on the North and the South Galatian theory, that Paul's words can only refer to the first visit, for his second visit was planned with the firm resolve and intention to preach to those Churches. Why struggle to avoid the obvious truth, that τὸ πρότερον has its plain and natural sense of "the former of two occasions?"

Assuming, then, that in iv. 13 Paul indicates that he had twice visited the Galatic territory, we ask whether any further references occur in the Epistle to the two visits and to the relations between him and the Galatic Christians on each occasion.

On the first visit the reception given the Apostle and his gospel by the Galatians was extraordinarily kind, cordial, and even enthusiastic. "Ye received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." They were hardly satisfied

¹ Notice the aorist εὐγγελισάμην.

² Mr. Vernon Bartlet takes this view, placing the composition of *Galatians* at Antioch in the interval between Paul's return from Pamphylia and his visit to Jerusalem in *Acts* xv. 3 ff. He thus avoids one difficulty; but τὸ πρότερον remains idle and unnecessary. According to Zöckler, the same date was advocated by Calvin, and by some German scholars.

with treating him as an ordinary human being: they regarded him as a special heaven-sent messenger. They congratulated themselves on their happy lot in that Paul had come among them (iv. 15).

On the second visit the reception had not been so absolutely cordial and enthusiastic. Twice in this letter¹ he refers to the fact that he is now repeating warnings and reproofs which he had already given: "as we said before, so say I now again" (i. 9): "I testify again to every man that receiveth circumcision that he is a debtor to do the whole Law" (v. 3). These former warnings would not have been given unless Paul had felt they were needed. Moreover the words of iv. 16, "Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" must refer to free exhortation, not unmingled with reproof, during the second visit. Paul feels that there has already come into existence a feeling amongst the Galatians that he has been holding them back from what is best for them; and he regards this as due to former plain speaking on his part, which can only be the language used by him during the second visit.

It is, however, also clear that, on the whole, the second visit was a successful one. "Ye were running well" (v. 7), proves that; and moreover the Epistle as a whole indubitably implies (as all interpreters are agreed) that the bad news which elicited the letter had come to Paul as a complete surprise. He left them running, apparently, a good race in the proper course; and the first news that he received (after a certain interval had elapsed) was that disaffection and change were rapidly spreading, and that his own Churches were moving rapidly in a retrograde direction.²

¹ As Zöckler, p. 73, points out.

² Lightfoot, p. 25 (who puts *Gal.* late, and near *Rom.*) admits (as he was bound to do) that Paul at Ephesus was in regular correspondence with the Galatic Churches. This would be quite inconsistent with the idea that a schism

A certain interval had elapsed between the second visit and the Epistle, so that he can contrast their conduct in his absence and in his presence.¹ The length of interval needed will be estimated variously by different persons according to their conception of the possible scope of the words "so quickly" in i. 6.² There came emissaries (doubtless from Jerusalem ultimately) not long after Paul's second visit; and these produced a marked effect, which spread rapidly from congregation to congregation. But the change began some time before Paul heard of it; and he did not learn about it till it was well advanced.

At the same time, while Paul, during his second visit, was speaking very freely on a tendency towards Judaism which was already perceptible in the Galatic Churches, he also used words or performed acts which were taken by some persons as equivalent to an admission (1) that he regarded circumcision (implying, of course, observance of the Law as a whole) as incumbent either on Christians generally, or at least on those who were to attain a position of importance and responsibility in the Church; (2) that he was only a messenger and subordinate of the original and leading apostles in Jerusalem.

The former of these two misconceptions is clearly referred to in v. 11, "If I still preach circumcision, why do the Judaistic party persecute me?" and it led to the further misrepresentation that Paul was insincere in these words or acts, and used them only to curry favour with a party which was so powerful that he shrank from offending it openly (i. 10). See Section VI. p. 17 ff.

The second misconception obviously underlies the whole

had begun, and was progressing shortly after he left Galatia, for he would have learned what was going on in the churches (see section v. p. 413).

¹ "*Doch scheint nach Gal. iv. 18 seit des Apostel's Abreise aus Galatien immerhin einige Zeit vergangen zu sein*"; Zöckler, p. 72 *ad fin.*

² See above, section v. p. 411 f. Lightfoot's view that the interval is to be measured from the first visit seems not justifiable.

argument in chapters i. and ii., and has already been considered in Section VI. p. 19.

Probably no one will maintain that these misconceptions were caused by Paul's words and acts during his first visit. The Epistle, as a whole, from first to last, bears on its face the plain intention to bring back the Galatic Christians to their first frame of mind. "They began spiritually, they seek to complete their religious course by physical ritual." On this see Section VI. p. 17.

The historical inferences from the Epistle as to Paul's relations to the Galatic Churches are, then, clear. His first visit had been one of unclouded and brilliant success, calculated to give extraordinary encouragement to the non-Jewish Christians everywhere. A new step had been taken, and it was entirely confirmed by the manifest signs of God's favour. God had "supplied to them the Spirit; He had wrought miracles among them"; and all this had resulted, not from their "performing any part of the Jewish ritual," but purely from "the willing hearing which comes of faith"¹ (iii. 2 and 5). That was the confirmation which had defended Peter's action in the case of Cornelius: "The Spirit fell on all them which heard the word: and the champions of circumcision were amazed because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit (*Acts* x. 44, 45).

Now at what point in the narrative of Acts does such a stage of the great question naturally fall? Here we have a Gentile province, in the heart of Asia Minor, evangelized; and at once the Divine Spirit, by manifest, indubitable, external signs—signs which were clearly displayed to the senses of every onlooker—is imparted to them and recognised generally as dwelling among them. It is obvious that this is the precise stage which was made

¹ This is Lightfoot's rendering. Zöckler similarly, "*Aufnahme der evangelischen Predigt im Glauben.*"

known by Paul and Barnabas to the Christians of Phœnicia and Samaria, when they "declared the conversion of the Gentiles, and caused great joy to all the brethren" (*Acts* xv. 3). It was an epoch-making step; and, if this step in advance resulted soon afterwards in those Galatic Churches retrogressing into Judaism, the blow to Paul's gospel would have been most severe and probably fatal. The very importance of the step, the joy that it caused to the non-Hebrew Churches, made the possible defection of those Galatic Churches a crisis of the gravest character. From *Acts* we see what an epoch-making step was taken when the South-Galatian Churches were converted. From the Epistle we gather what a serious crisis it was to Paul when the Churches of Galatia showed symptoms of schism. Why suppose that the Churches in South Galatia are not "Churches of Galatia"? Why try to make an artificial separation? It is answered that Paul could not call his Churches in South Galatia by the title of the "Churches of Galatia." Yet it is admitted that only a very few years later Peter summed up these Churches in South Galatia among his Churches of Galatia. If Peter used about A.D. 64¹ the Roman system of classifying these Pauline Churches according to the Province in which they were situated—the invariable method of the Church in all later time—why could not Paul classify his own Churches in that way about 53-57? Whether is it more likely that Paul the Roman would employ the Roman principle from the first, or that Peter the Palestinian would substitute the Roman principle for Paul's non-Roman system? But this is a digression.

Now, as to the second visit, we have seen that during it there were some signs of trouble: the ideal harmony that reigned between Paul and his Galatian converts on the

¹ Our argument here is directed against scholars who admit that date: for my own part, I think that Peter wrote about 80.

first visit was not maintained on the second. At what point in the narrative of *Acts* are the complications of that visit most naturally to be placed?

The answer cannot be for a moment doubtful. In *Acts* we have a picture of the Church as it passed through the stages of this struggle; and the second Galatian visit clearly harmonizes with the stage described as resulting from the apostolic council. Every feature of the second visit, shown in the Epistle, is either expressly attested or natural and probable in Paul's second journey through South Galatia (xvi. 1-5).

1. With the constant stream of communication between Syria and the West that poured along the great route, it is practically certain that the struggle in Antioch would rouse some echo in the South-Galatian Churches. There was a considerable Jewish population in that country; it was influential, politically, socially, and, above all, as regards religion;¹ many of the pagans had long been to some degree under the influence of Jewish ideas. There were Jews in the new Churches, though the mass were converted pagans.

It is natural and probable that some tendency towards Judaic ceremonies should exist from beforehand among many of the converts: indeed, it was inevitable that this should be so. They had of old been influenced by the impressive character of the Jewish faith; they heard the Gospel first in the synagogue; and Paul's arguments were regularly drawn from the Jewish Prophets and Law. This produced a tendency which Paul had to warn them against on his second visit; and the man who had just come from the conflict in Jerusalem and Antioch would not be slow to warn them of the possible dangers of that tendency.

2. Paul's words and acts on the second visit had

¹ On this point see my *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, ch. xv., The Jews in Phrygia.

created the impression that he regarded circumcision as a duty. Lightfoot fully recognises¹ that this impression was due to Paul's action at Lystra in his second journey, *Acts* xvi. 2, and that this affords an argument in favour of the South-Galatian theory. He circumcised Timothy. The act was seized on by his enemies, and was certainly open to misconstruction.

3. His words and acts on that second Galatian visit had also been construed as an attempt to please men. Such, too, was sure to be the case on his journey in South Galatia, *Acts* xvi. 1-5. It was natural that one who was loyally carrying out a compromise and going as far as possible in the hope of conciliating the Jews should thus be misunderstood. His action to Timothy was easily set in that light. The action can be defended; but every one must feel that it is one of those acts which need defence, not one whose propriety is obvious and indisputable.

4. His conduct on the second visit further suggested that he was merely a messenger and subordinate of the apostolic leaders in Jerusalem. Similarly, on his journey in South Galatia, he actually appeared as a messenger, and "delivered them the decrees for to keep, which had been ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem" (*Acts* xvi. 4): the misinterpretation referred to in the Epistle was quite natural as a corollary from that action.

5. The second visit was successful in its issue: Paul seemed to have eradicated the dangerous tendencies. That also was the case with the second journey through the Churches in South Galatia; "the Churches were strengthened in the Faith" (*Acts* xvi. 5). The words read as if they were an explanatory note on the Epistle to the Galatians. And that is the character of the narrative of *Acts* as a whole, when the South-Galatian theory is

¹ See his note on v. 11, p. 206. See also his remarks on p. 29.

applied. The facts recorded in the History fit the Epistle: the Epistle is elucidated throughout by the History.

Now, let any one attempt to do this for the North-Galatian theory. It is admittedly impossible. The one authority does not fit the other. The events and emotions recorded in *Acts* xvi. do not suit the first visit, those recorded in *Acts* xviii. do not suit the second visit, as these visits are alluded to in the Epistle. The North-Galatian theory ends in that pathetic conclusion, the refuge of despair, that the most striking fact about the History of Luke is "the gaps" in it. And the inevitable inference from that theory—an inference drawn by all its adherents—is that the author of that History, the intimate friend and companion of Paul, was not acquainted with the Epistles of Paul or the real facts about the Galatian Churches.

He who judges from *Acts* must expect that the South-Galatian Churches would play an important part in the struggle for freedom on one side or on the other; and that is so as the South-Galatian theorists read the Epistles of Paul.

But on the North-Galatian theory, the Churches whose foundation is heralded by Paul to the Phœnician and Samaritan Christians as so important a step towards freedom disappear at once from history: they play no part in subsequent events, except that Paul pays a passing visit to some of them¹ in (xvi. 1-5): though they lie on the main track² of communication by land between East and West, yet they participate in no further stage of the great struggle: their action is never referred to by

¹ It is explicitly maintained by some North-Galatian theorists (and is obviously forced on any who try to work that theory into a geographical possibility) that Paul went north from Iconium, without going westwards as far as Pisidian Antioch).

² Except Lystra, which was ten or twelve miles off the track in a retired glen.

Paul either as a pattern or an encouragement to his other Churches: his first-born spiritual offspring,¹ whose birth was celebrated by him as an encouragement to distant peoples, is never alluded to by him in writing any of the letters that have come down to us. The place they might be expected to fill is said to be taken by a different group of Churches in the northern part of the same Province.

One further inference from the Epistle as to the relations of Paul and the Galatians remains. It is evident (as Zöckler, p. 73, rightly points out) that, when Paul was writing, the schism was not yet completed. It was only in process (i. 6). The whole of Paul's appeal in the Epistle is directed to prevent a process which is going on, not to undo what has already been completed. The "little leaven is leavening the whole"; but it may be removed in time to prevent the worst and irretrievable consequences; especially (as Zöckler emphasizes) the Galatians had not yet accepted circumcision. Paul says: "If ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing" (v. 2). Contrast this with iv. 10, "ye are observing days and months"; and it is clear that the latter step has been taken, and the Jewish ceremonial is commonly observed, but the more serious step has not yet been made.

Is it not clear, then, that Paul's appeal succeeded? The letter fulfilled its purpose of rekindling the old feelings of the Galatians. Paul's confident expectation, v. 10, was justified. The letter is, as a whole, the work of one who had full confidence in his power over the minds of his people, his children. It is not written by one who was destined to find that they had passed beyond his influence. If Paul had made such a miscalculation of his power with these Churches, he would never have achieved his mar-

¹ Compare *Gal.* iv. 19.

vellous success. He knew, as he wrote, that he could move at will the Galatian people.

Acts completes the natural result of the Epistle: soon after, the effect was confirmed by Paul's personal presence¹ among these Galatians: he went through Galatic Lycaonia and Galatic Phrygia in order from first to last, "stablishing all the disciples" (*Acts* xviii. 23).

The great struggle was won; the religion of the first Roman province on the road to the west was determined as free and non-Judaistic; and that meant that the religion of the Roman Empire was determined. Can we doubt that this struggle was critical and decisive? If Paul had been vanquished in the first Province that he entered, and in the first Churches that he founded, he would have been vanquished definitely; but the first great victory made the remaining stages easier. It is obvious that the Church in Corinth passed through the same struggle, but that it surmounted it far more easily. So with the Churches of Asia. They were distinctively free and Pauline in character; and it is evident that the Galatic struggle was practically conclusive for them.

Taken in conjunction with later evidence, we can thus make some steps towards a picture of Christian and Jewish-Christian history in Asia Minor. But on the North-Galatian theory the issue of the Epistle remains as obscure as the Churches to which it was addressed. The Churches are created to receive the Epistle. After it is received they vanish, and leave not a trace behind.

W. M. RAMSAY.

¹ Accompanied, as I believe, by Titus: *St. Paul the Trav.*, p. 285.