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St. Paul's Infirmity.

By the Rev. Wm. Menzies Alexander, M.A., B.Sc., B.D., C.M., M.D., Glasgow, Professor of Divinity of the Free Church of Scotland.

THE following is a new and independent investigation of a well-worn theme. The nature of the apostle's illness was no secret to the Galatians, Corinthians, and others in his day. But his reticence on the subject has baffled the inquiries of later ages. Our information is meagre and couched in obscure language. Competent scholars have made the most of it, and their labours have been supplemented by the results of travel. Yet the enigma remains. Ingenious theories have been often evolved from what is little more than a single phrase or symptom. It is still customary to speak of Paul's 'infirmity' as if it were coextensive with the conventional 'thorn in the No opinion will be satisfactory which fails to take account of the whole evidence available. That has not been by any means exhausted. There are still hints and suggestions which may be turned to good account. There remains also one of the most promising fields of research really unexplored. We refer to the diseases, endemic and epidemic, prevalent in the regions traversed by Paul. When these and other points are scrutinized, the problem assumes an aspect altogether new. It may not attain finality,

but it approaches thereto. The treatment of the subject must be in part retrospective. Previous opinions must be considered and their merits tested. The fundamental facts are those furnished by the apostle himself in the two classical passages: 'That I should not be exalted over much, there was given to me a σκόλοψ for the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch. Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He has said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may overshadow me' (2 Co 127-9); 'Ye know that because of an infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you the first time: and that which was a trial to you in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but ye received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where then is that gratulation of yourselves? For I bear you witness, that, if possible, ye would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me' (Gal 418-15).

These two passages have generally been taken as referring to one and the same 'infirmity.'