

CORINTH IN ST. PAUL'S TIME

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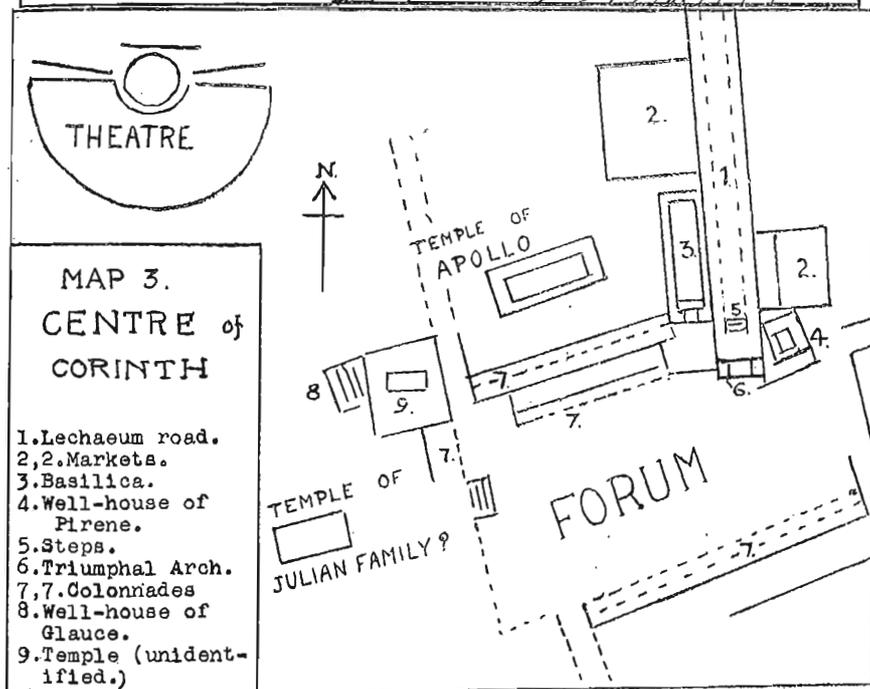
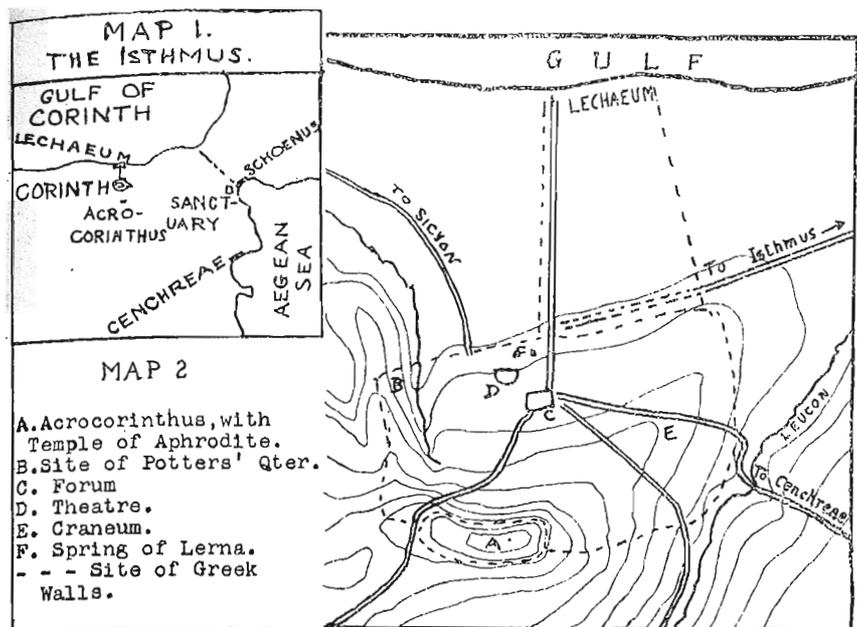
I.—TOPOGRAPHY.

THE Corinthians of St. Paul's time still regarded their city as a new Roman city founded upon alien Greek ruins. Yet the Corinth of former times had been no insignificant place. By 700 B.C. it already controlled the narrow part of the Isthmus and a territory twenty miles long, it had a great maritime trade and colonies, it was already known far and wide for its pottery and soon afterwards for its fine bronze and terracotta work. It later followed the Spartan leadership and harboured a special enmity and jealousy towards Athens. It was this rivalry which led, in the fifth century B.C., to the conversion of Corinth into a mighty fortress, the strongest in Greece. Upon the mountain-top above the city an immense citadel was built, two miles in circumference. Steeply-climbing walls joined it to the city and the two Long Walls connected the city with its port of Lechaëum on the Corinthian Gulf (Map 2). But Corinth like all Greece had to submit to Macedonia, and its walls became a mere instrument of Macedonian domination in Greece for more than a century. When the city was liberated by Rome, it enjoyed fifty years of semi-independence and then became the centre of a revolt against Rome. The Romans took it in 146 B.C. and decided to make a terrible example of it. Its people were sold into slavery, its territory was delivered to a neighbouring city, its walls were widely breached, and its site was doomed to remain desolate, and did so remain for 101 years. Its sacred buildings had been spared but very little else could have been standing at the end of the century of decay. All its poorer streets, built of wood and sun-brick, must have been level with the earth, and the more solid houses would be crumbling ruins. In 45 B.C. Julius Caesar formally assigned the site and territory of Corinth for the establishment of a new city, a "colony" to be composed of Roman citizens and to be called Laus Julia. The first generation seems to have been a period of hard struggle and poverty, then the new city began to take shape and to prosper. It was especially in the years from about 15 B.C. to 15 A.D. that important new buildings arose, constructed not of marble but of grey volcanic stone. The city now became the capital of the Roman province of Achaëa.

Corinth was not actually on the Isthmus (See Map 1), but some five miles south-west of it. The Isthmus was however included in the Corinthian territory. The rocky summit of Acrocorinthus (1880 feet) stands three or four miles south of the Gulf of Corinth. The descent on the seaward side begins as a tremendous precipice; below this is a steep hillside which finally slopes out into two broad shelves or terraces overlooking a flat coastal strip (Map 2). On these terraces the main part

of the city stood, more than a thousand feet below the summit. The Greek city had been a long rectangle, about two miles from east to west. But the western part of this area, formerly called the Potters' Quarter (Map 2, B), seems not to have been built on in St. Paul's time. It may be that Roman Corinth took in more of the low ground towards the sea, where excavation is considerably impeded by the vineyards which now cover it, and this region may well have been the poorest quarter and the home of many Jews and Christians. Both in Greek and Roman times the wealthier citizens occupied the suburb of Craneum, south-east of the central portion. This was pleasantly situated on a spur well above the main city and commanding wide views towards the Isthmus and across the Gulf (Map 2, E). In the early days of the colony long stretches of the Greek walls still stood, but they gradually disappeared except for a few lower courses: Roman Corinth was an "open city." Defences were neither needed nor permitted. But in St. Paul's time no doubt some portions of the old fortifications were still visible.

From the Forum or main square of the city the colonists built a new straight road (Map 2) two miles long to the quayside at Lechaëum, running over the debris of Old Corinth. A traveller coming by sea from Italy would approach the city by this road. The last portion as one came near the Forum was bordered on either side by colonnades. The street ended in a massive flight of stairs, after ascending which one entered the Forum through the Propylæa or triumphal arch, a triple gateway built on the familiar Roman plan, and surmounted by two glittering four-horse chariots (Map 3—1, 5, 6). On the way to this entrance were several interesting buildings new and old. A little to the left stood the new and showy Baths, a gift of the notorious Eurycles of Sparta. The interior was adorned with green porphyry, quarried near Sparta. The last building on the right before one ascended the stairs was the basilica or city hall, built near the beginning of the Christian era (Map 3—3). The building was 200 feet by 60, and a gallery supported on pillars ran all round the interior. Portions of the statues which adorned this interior, have been found, especially a group of three, the emperor Augustus and his two young grandsons, Gaius and Lucius, whose untimely deaths occurred in 2 and 4 A.D. It was no doubt in this hall that Paul appeared for trial before Gallio, and these marble faces must have looked down on the scene. The riot which followed the trial would have taken place before the entrance which was on the south side. On the opposite side of the pillared street some steps led down to a courtyard enclosing a great open cistern (Map 3—4). This was the most famous of the many fine well-houses of Corinth, and claimed to be fed by the legendary fountain of Pirene, from which the winged horse Pegasus drank. The city had abundance of excellent water springing on its site, and several great well-houses had been built in the sixth



century before Christ and owing to their sacred associations were among the best-preserved relics of Old Corinth. They continued to be numbered among the sights of the city.

Passing under the grand archway the traveller would find himself in the main square, about 600 x 300 feet. It was dotted with statues and almost completely lined with colonnades. On the south side one great double colonnade ran almost the whole length, forming a shady walk at the hottest part of the day. Somewhere within or near this square St. Paul must have seen the new altar of Victoria Britannica, erected to commemorate the recent conquest of Britain. The altar, wherever it stood, has disappeared, but a stone has been found with VICTORIAI SACRUM on it, which pretty certainly refers to the same event—the deliberately archaic spelling fixes its date about 50 A.D. On the west side of the Forum a broad flight of steps led up a slope to a new temple (Map 3), probably the temple to the Julian family, whose tutelary goddess was sculptured with the beautiful face of Octavia, sister of Augustus, one of the noblest women of the pagan world. Perhaps it was the prominent Corinthian citizen of the first generation, Antonius Theophilus, who was responsible for this compliment to her, for he had been a freedman, and perhaps a slave, in her household.

From the north-west corner of the Forum a street ran northwards, and close to this on the right hand was the Temple of Apollo (Map 3—). This was the largest temple at Corinth and stood on a slight rise close to the Forum. It dated from about 500 B.C. or a little earlier and was built in the Doric style like the Parthenon at Athens. It was almost as long as the Parthenon but considerably narrower, and its columns were more squat, the sign of an earlier date. It was built of limestone and each column, unlike those of the Parthenon, was hewn out of a single block. Seven of its original total of thirty-eight columns are still upright, the only ruin standing above ground at Corinth. Its antique style would give it a venerable appearance in St. Paul's time, rather like that of a medieval cathedral in a modern city, but the surface probably did not look weathered or mellowed, but of a marble whiteness for its new masters would have thoroughly renewed the stucco which covered it. The same northerly street, as it proceeded, passed a little to the right of the Theatre (Map 3), restored but little altered by the Roman inhabitants. Its great semi-circular auditorium, with seats for at least twenty thousand, was scooped out of the edge of the natural terrace, and gave a view over the Gulf towards Mount Parnassus. A little further on a side street on the right led to another famous spring, that of Lerna (Map 2—F), set in pleasant surroundings, with colonnades, seats, trees, two ancient temples and an athletic training-ground. Its ruins are misnamed the "Baths of Aphrodite." To the west the Corinth of St. Paul's time reached only to the small ravine beyond which lay the site of the Potters' Quarter, then partly used as a burial-ground.

The road to Acrocorinthus left the Forum near its south-west corner and climbed steeply (Map 2) to a high saddle west of the summit, which is now encircled by a medieval stronghold less extensive than the Greek one and embodying few remains of the Greek walls, which must have been rapidly vanishing in St. Paul's time. But in his time the small Greek temple of Aphrodite (Map 2—A) was still standing at the very top of the mountain. There is a wonderful view from the summit, both northwards across the Gulf to Boeotia and Phocis, and also eastwards over the Aegean Sea to the island of Salamis and on a clear day to Athens itself more than forty miles away. The temple therefore must have been visible over a vast area, a lasting monument to the infamy of Old Corinth. For although it was only thirty feet long, its position seems to mark it out as the goddess's foremost temple at Corinth, and to it therefore must have belonged that great horde of slave-prostitutes (a thousand or more, it is said) which had distinguished Corinth from the cities of the Greek mainland and had sunk it to the level of Tyre and Sidon. The vile institution had perished with the Greek city. The abundant spring which rises near the summit is perhaps the original Pirene—the one near the Forum claimed to have an underground connexion with it in order to share its fame.

The port of Lechaëum was only a small place in St. Paul's time, and the same may probably be said of the two ports which Corinth possessed on the Ægean Sea—Schoenus and Cenchreae (Map 1), both seven or eight miles from Corinth. The nearest way to Cenchreae was by a street which ran eastwards from the Forum. Above the road, on the right hand, was Craneum (Map 2—E) which seems to have again become the home of the wealthier citizens. In Roman times it was regarded as a suburb, although it had been within the circuit of the ancient walls. Here was another temple of Aphrodite, with a grove of cypresses and probably a park or training-ground (as there had been in Greek times), and no doubt many spacious and elaborate private gardens planned after the Italian fashion. After passing the site of the old city-gate the road descended sharply into the considerable ravine of the Leucon stream (Map 2). Near this spot a part of the ravine had been converted into a makeshift amphitheatre (the only one in Greece) where the usual murderous shows were given from time to time in accordance with another and less innocent Italian fashion, for the New Corinthians were determined to be thoroughly Roman. The road ascended and after going east for some miles it forked; the left branch went to Schoenus which was on the narrow part of the Isthmus, but does not seem to have had such a good anchorage as Cenchreae which was some miles south of the Isthmus. Just before reaching Schoenus the road passed the Isthmian sanctuary, a sacred enclosure about half a mile long surrounded by high walls. It contained several temples, the most famous of which was a small temple of Poseidon god of the sea, the patron divinity of the

Isthmus. There were also a celebrated grove of pines, and a multitude of statues representing victors in the Isthmian Games. These were among the most frequented and ancient of the Greek contests, and were held in alternate years at the stadium outside the sanctuary walls, and at the theatre to the west of it. Corinth controlled the Games and the presidency of them was a coveted honour among its citizens. Between the sanctuary and Schoenus ran the Diolcus, the concrete trackway about four miles long which crossed the Isthmus. Along this not only goods for transshipment but ships themselves up to a certain size were hauled from sea to sea, to avoid the dangerous voyage round Cape Melea. The *fact* is indisputable, but the method is not certain. It seems likely that the vessel was floated into some sort of cradle that had wheels under it and that this was drawn by a large team of oxen across the Isthmus, which is here all low ground. The Diolcus was in Corinthian territory, and a part, or perhaps the whole, of the profits derived from it went to the city.

(The maps are, I hope, substantially correct, but have no claim to perfect accuracy.)

PALESTINE LETTER

THE valley of the Wady Far'ah, on the eastern slopes of the highlands of Samaria, forms an area enclosed on all sides by mountain barriers except to the south east, where it gives access to the Jordan valley and Transjordan. Besides this natural independence, the valley has the additional advantage of being an important line of communication between Central Palestine and the countries to the east. The river which flows through it, is, after the Jordan and the river of Jaffa, the largest in Palestine and with efficient management could make the valley fertile enough to produce crops of all kinds. It is easy to understand therefore, in the light of these facts, why this area has been the scene of human settlement from remote antiquity. Tell Far'ah, the mound or hill containing the remains of the successive civilizations which have occupied the flat space dominating the spring, covers an area reached by few of the Palestinian Tells.

The Directors of the French Archaeological School (a section of the Biblical School) had long noted the evident importance of the site. The main object of the first campaign of excavation undertaken by the Rev. Father de Vaux, O.P., during the months, June to October 1946, was to determine the chief periods of occupation of the site. To do this it was of course necessary to cut through the hill vertically at