

false witness brought against fellow-Christians. Perhaps the three most prominent English Jesuits are Fathers Rickaby, Gerard, and Thurston, each of whom I have convicted of publishing plain misstatements for "the cause," which they neither could justify nor would retract. To plead that these men are in other respects typical English gentlemen, incapable of prevarication in the ordinary concerns of daily life, is simply to emphasize the mischief done by a system which assumes infallibility at its source, and strives to reduce the priest from a sentient being to a mere connecting-rod in the huge machine. The only infallible truth about such a system is this : that when anything goes wrong at the source of propulsion, the rods must either break or suffer strange distortion. The modern invidious connotation of the word *Jesuitical* is not due, as a charitable reviewer recently hinted, to the genius of Pascal. It comes out with renewed clearness in every generation ; it is incarnate in that spirit against which Tyrrell protested by his life and death.



A Living Church.

A STUDY IN ACTS XI. 19-30 ; XIII. 1-3.

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THE above grouping of passages may be the subject of some surprise, but it is made deliberately, with a purpose which will be manifest before the close of the paper. It is true that the call of Barnabas and Saul to foreign missionary work is intimately connected with the account of their first missionary journey in Acts xiii. and xiv., but it is scarcely less closely linked with their relation to the Church in Antioch as described at the close of chap. xi. Chap. xii. comes in as a parenthesis which in no way affects the course of the narrative. And while it is undoubtedly instructive to examine xiii. 1-3 from the

standpoint of the Divine call, it is none the less so if we consider the response made to that call, and the resulting growth and expansion which, no less than its vigorous internal life, marked the infant Church that is here pictured for us. At any rate, we are bound by no arbitrary theory of a distinct division of the Acts at the close of chap. xii. A new era does certainly begin with chap. xiii., and Paul is, equally certainly, the prominent character from that point onwards, as Peter had been before it; but the book is a comprehensive whole, and, if it may in any way tend to illuminate some of its purposes to make the division of the subject which is now proposed, we are quite free to do so.

Our purpose, then, is to examine the state of Church life at Antioch, which is the most prominent example given us of an infant Church outside Jerusalem. There are several indications of Antioch's special eminence as a centre of early Church life, particularly from the point of view adopted by St. Luke in this history. It was the first main outpost from Jerusalem—a strategic point of great importance, at a distance of about three hundred miles from headquarters. From Antioch, “the uttermost part of the earth” seems more within reach than at Jerusalem, and that not only in the matter of distance, but in consideration of the prevailing spiritual atmosphere. Viewed merely as a strategic outpost, it became the starting-point of the three missionary journeys which are shortly to be described. This in itself gives a lasting distinction to the city. But, also, the circumstances of the foundation of the Church there make it plain that the prevailing tone of thought was admirably adapted to the extension which was soon to take place from this centre. Some of the scattered preachers, whose movements after the death of Stephen may be traced also in chaps. viii. and ix., were the first to sow the seed in this fruitful field,¹ and among them were some of sufficient breadth of view to preach to the

¹ The fact of the first step towards the foundation of this important Church having been taken by unnamed individuals is an example of the point that obscure disciples are often used for especially honourable service. Cf. ix. 10-19.

heathen.¹ Great success marked their efforts. It is uncertain whether these conversions were parallel to, and independent of, the reception of Cornelius, the work advancing in two directions simultaneously, or whether the direct work among the "Greeks" at Antioch followed the sanction given by the case of Cornelius.² Whichever be the fact, the coming advance is foreshadowed by both cases, and we may, at any rate, say that in Cornelius and his friends we have the first recorded Gentile conversions, and in Antioch the first largely Gentile Church.

The atmosphere that would prevail at Antioch, then, was especially fitted for the coming forward movement, which would not be so liable to be thwarted by the narrow prejudices common in more conservative Jerusalem. The geographical position of the city, and its intimate connection with Rome, gave it further advantages as a starting-point for the evangelization of the Empire, and, finally, of the outside world, while the terribly debasing heathen rites, which made it infamous as a stronghold of Satan, mark with special significance the triumphs of the Cross, which are recorded as emblems of the ultimate victory of the King of kings in all lands.

There are also other distinctive features of unique interest in this Church. It was the first main sphere of the work of Barnabas and Paul, and the circumstances under which they came there are instructive. Barnabas came on a mission of inspection from the central Church.³ With broad-minded fervour, he commended all he had seen, and his faithful attitude was rewarded by further triumphs of the Gospel (xi. 24). His experience probably led him to feel that the circumstances were exactly suitable to an advance on the lines which, we may be

¹ The R.V. adopts the preferable reading in xi. 20. Even if they were of the same class as Cornelius, the point remains the same. They would be numbered among the uncircumcised.

² Probabilities favour the latter view, as the tone of the history marks Cornelius' baptism with such special prominence, and both St. Peter and the Jewish party seem to have regarded it as the first case; but there is no insuperable objection to the former theory. At the most, however, it is only possible.

³ Cf. the similar mission in viii. 14.

sure,¹ he knew were favoured by St. Paul (still hitherto called Saul); and he determined to seek his aid. Their early association is to be observed in ix. 27. The helping hand which he then extended to the great Apostle was now given, through him, to the Church at Antioch, and the two laboured happily and fruitfully there for a whole year, their long stay again proclaiming the importance of the work.

Barnabas is a singularly attractive character as presented to us here, and in iv. 36, 37 and ix. 27. Whole-hearted, single-eyed, and without the least desire for a solitary triumph in the work, he is one of those most favourably described in the history; and he, too, like others, was "full of the Holy Ghost." Is the lack of fulness which we often deplore sometimes due to the absence of qualities such as Barnabas possessed? Jealousy of other workers, and self-seeking in spiritual work, are fatal obstacles to the power of the Spirit.

So the two faithful leaders laboured on, and there is added a remarkable touch: "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Whatever the exact reason for the statement of the fact, it imparts one more distinctive feature to the Church there. If, as seems agreed, the title was first given with some scorn, it may testify unconsciously to the lives of marked consistency lived by the believers; and so, as is often the case, a name of derision becomes a name of honour. Further, a singular fitness in the introduction of the name at this particular point in the history is noted by the Rev. Harrington C. Lees,² who says: "The name Christian, Hebrew in conception, Greek in form, Latin in termination, is coined and applied just when Jew, Greek, and Roman are beginning to flow as one stream in Christ."

Such variety of statement about the course of events in an infant Church will not seem disjointed if considered with the main object in view. It is evident, as we have seen, that the position of affairs at Antioch was a very remarkable one, with

¹ Cf. Dean Plumptre in Bishop Ellicott's "Commentary," ver. 25.

² "The Joy of Bible Study," p. 90.

regard to what is to follow. Already we have seen abundant evidence that it was, as it is above described, "a living Church." But the greatest proof in this direction is to come. There remain two notable paragraphs which we have not yet touched. These, again, are not simply disjointed statements, but present to us from two points of view the feature of Church life which made it so vigorous and so fruitful. One word sums up the lesson of both. It is the word *unselfishness*. This quality was manifested by the whole Church (as we have already seen it displayed in another way by Barnabas, its principal founder) in two directions. There was consideration for the needs of others, both bodily and spiritual.

1. They sent famine relief to their brethren in Judæa. Here is an instructive picture. We may believe that the prophecy about the famine (which otherwise might seem to have a less distinct connection here)¹ is recorded partly with the direct purpose of bringing out this bright feature in their life. This young Church—itsself an offshoot—does not think that help is only due to it from the Churches of Jerusalem and Judæa, as from older and more firmly established branches, but takes the initiative in sending help to them. Surely we may find here not only a proof of unselfishness of spirit and a tender regard for the bodily needs of others, but an evidence also of gratitude for spiritual blessings received, and an indication of solid belief in the Communion of Saints. The spirit of the Church at Antioch is not yet dead. The boys in a Mission institution at Cawnpore, who sent their Lenten savings to the English waifs and strays, and the Christians of Tinnevely, who made a collection for their brethren in Uganda, were moved by the same Spirit of God in our own day as those who were first of all called Christians of old.

Various other points of great interest which have been

¹ Even if the presence of the prophets from Jerusalem is to be taken as a further sanction to the work (see Dean Plumtre in Bishop Ellicott's "Commentary"), the insertion of this particular prophecy demands some explanation. Other reasons are suggested in the following paragraph.

observed in connection with the collection at Antioch and the poverty in Judæa can only be noted briefly here. There is the suggestive theory (it cannot be called more)¹ that the chronic poverty in the older Church—afterwards frequently mentioned in the New Testament—was the result of the exhaustion of its resources by the liberality of the common fund—a theory which, if true, both illustrates the difficulties in the way of a permanent communism, and extols the true devotion of the primitive Church, and the generous recognition of it by the Churches of the Gentiles. There is also the fact that implicit reliance was placed on the inspired word of prophecy, as the collection was evidently made before the famine came, and the relief was thus despatched in time²—a further proof, too, of God's care for the needs of His people. And there is the much more important point that this is the first mention of the collection for the poor saints, which was afterwards so fully organized by St. Paul, and used by him as a bond of union between the Jewish and Gentile Churches.³ There could scarcely be a more fruitful bond than the active exercise of unselfish charity such as we find in the Church at Antioch.

2. Even more impressive is the account of their concern for the spiritual needs of others, as given us in xiii. 1-3. The lessons under this head may be grouped round the Divine call, and their response to it.

(i.) The call came to those who were already quietly doing their appointed duty. As when Philip was sent to the desert, and Peter to Cæsarea, so were Barnabas and Saul called to a wider sphere while they were faithfully doing their allotted

¹ Especially as there is evidence that *all* the people of Jerusalem (not the Christians only) were greatly distressed and in need of relief, during this particular famine at any rate. Besides, the relief was not limited to Jerusalem (ver. 29), and there is no evidence that the other Judæan Churches had ever adopted the plan of a common fund.

² See Ramsay, "St. Paul the Traveller," p. 50, etc.

³ Cf. frequent allusions in the Epistles. See Rom. xv. 25, 26; 1 Cor. xvi. 1-3; 2 Cor. viii. and ix.; Gal. ii. 10.

work ; and so was the Church called to give them to God while it was truly and devotedly serving Him.¹

(ii.) The call is from the Holy Ghost.² It is not to be thought a light thing when a new worker is called to the Mission Field, at home or abroad, nor is the movement to be checked.

(iii.) The call of God is confirmed by the true Church. This is our special point here. What was it that this struggling infant Church was asked to do? Let it be remembered how much they had already done by a contribution of their means. And now they were called to send forth two out of five chief leaders of their number to the regions beyond ; moreover, the very two whom they could probably least easily spare. It is not, of course, to be assumed that there were no other workers to whom they looked up, except these five ; nor is it to be taken for granted that three of the five were comparatively insignificant because the names of Paul and Barnabas alone meet the eye in the subsequent record. We have not a full Church history of this period in the Acts ; and these two were the leaders in the line of work specially chosen for description—in fact, Barnabas himself drops out of the narrative later on. But, at any rate, these were the two to whom the Church at Antioch owed the most, under God. That is distinctly written. Consequently it might have been said that these were the very two they most needed at home. Yet there was no hesitation in confirming the call. They were “sent forth” by God the Holy Ghost, it is true ; but the Church “let them go.”³

The lesson is obvious, and the point need not be greatly

¹ The language of the first clause of xiii. 2 suggests that the call came at a special time of worship, just as Peter also was at prayer when he saw the vision (x. 9).

² Of special importance is the evidence of xiii. 2, 4 to the *personality* and *Deity* of the Holy Spirit—“separate *Me* Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto *I* have called them. . . . They, being *sent forth* by the Holy Ghost . . .” Such terms are only applicable to sovereign, personal Deity.

³ In v. 4, ἐκπεμφθέντες . . . ; in v. 3, ἀπέλυσαν The latter word is the one used for *giving permission to depart* ; or it might be rendered “dismiss,” in the sense of our missionary dismissals. It occurs, e.g., in iv. 21, 23 ; xvi. 35 ; xix. 40. In noting the faithful response made by the Church to the call to this surrender, we should not fail to observe also the faithfulness of those who were sent—Barnabas and Saul.

laboured; it speaks much too plainly for itself. What is, too often, the attitude of the home Church now towards the work abroad? Leaving out of account the critics and opponents of the work, what is the attitude of the Church? Do we always confirm the Divine call, or do we resist it? Have we approached anything like the proportion in giving, either of men or means, which was reached by this struggling infant Church in the midst of rampant heathenism? Whatever our difficulties, we are not in such a position as that! Yet how infinitely, how absurdly short we fall of giving two-fifths of our best workers, or, indeed, of giving anything which we really feel; and, whether the gift be of persons or of offerings, whether it be the surrender of ourselves or of our nearest relatives or most valued friends, the giving of what we feel is all that marks a genuine gift. Antioch had "heathen at home" with a vengeance! But the Church there was wiser than we, for it realized that it is only an unselfish Church that is either fruitful or even alive, and that the main object of the spiritual life is not the nurture of our own souls, but the glory of God in the salvation of others—and that the former end can only be accomplished by the attainment of the latter. For it is indeed true that concern for the souls of others brings a reflex blessing, and that a vigorous internal Church life depends upon a large-hearted external charity. No wonder Antioch was used as a mighty strategic centre! So might we also be used, if we would.

But encouragement is not altogether lacking in the present attitude of the Church. At Antioch we see "the uttermost part of the earth" in full view, and the armies of the King mobilizing for immediate advance and conquest. There is some ground for hope that those uttermost parts are coming at least within the vision of our later Church, and that the time of real advance and triumph will not long be delayed. To this end we must pray without fainting and work without ceasing.

