

ONLY LET US BE MINDFUL OF THE POOR.

GALATIANS II. 10.

It is generally assumed that in the words "only that we should remember the poor" reference is made to those for whom Paul later made collection, namely, "the poor of the saints that are at Jerusalem" (Rom. xv. 26). But if so, why does he not express this specific thought more explicitly, in order to make his meaning clear to his Galatian readers? Of course, if it be taken for granted, as it was by Lightfoot, that the subject of such a collection had already been brought before them when the epistle was written (c. 57-58), then the looseness of expression, though still strange and unparalleled, is at least defensible. But this situation itself is now challenged, and attempt must first be made to give the phrase a more natural exegesis on its own merits.

It is well known what a central place in the Jewish ideal of piety was at this time held by acts of mercy towards the poor. "Almsgiving," says *Ecclesiasticus*,¹ "will make atonement for sins." And this is the universal sentiment from his day to the time when a Christian preacher, in whom lived the more Judaic side of the Church's consciousness, could virtually echo the judgment of Tobit (iv. 9, 10; xii. 9), that "Alms doth deliver from death, and it shall purge away all sin; they that do alms and righteousness shall be filled with life." For the Homily known as *ii.*

¹ *Ecclus.* iii. 30. Full proof that this estimate was not the exception but rather the rule in later Judaism, will be found in Weber, *Jüdische Theologie* (the latest form of the *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie*), §§ 61, 71, where the doctrine of Talmud and Midrash is set forth. The tendency to put alms in the place once occupied by more formal sacrifice, a tendency emphasized by the loss of the Temple, was no doubt already strong in Pharisaic circles, and outside Jerusalem quite generally, throughout the first century A.D. (See *Ecclus.* xxxv. 1-7, esp. v. 2).

Clement exclaims, "Almsgiving, therefore, is a good thing, even as repentance from sin. Fasting is better than prayer, but almsgiving than both. And love covereth a multitude of sins, but prayer out of the good conscience delivereth from death. Blessed is every man that is found full of these. For almsgiving lifteth off the burden of sin" (xvi. 4). Like sentiments are also found in *Barnabas* and *Hermas*.¹

Now while it is true that the New Testament estimate of almsgiving is free from the taint of legalistic merit and the exaggeration which marked contemporary Judaism and even reasserted itself in second century Christianity, still it accords like pre-eminence to this virtue as indicative of brotherly love, in keeping with its own essential spirit. Thus in the Sermon on the Mount Christ refers to it first, in developing the new Righteousness in formal antithesis to the old (Matt. vi. 1 ff.): while He bases a new doctrine of purity, in contrast to the Pharisaic, upon its typical worth² (Luke xi. 41; cf. xix. 8, the vow of *Zacchæus*). In the story of *Cornelius* we learn that alms were regarded as a prime element in that "righteousness" wherein this Gentile worshipper of Israel's God was held acceptable to Him (Acts x. 2, 4, 31). And as this is given as Peter's own estimate of alms, as a form under which a man of any nation could "work righteousness," it is

¹ *Barn.* xix. 10: "Thou shalt work with thy hands for a ransom for thy sins" (i.e. by alms). In *Hermas*, *Sim.* ii. 4 ff., there is an elaborate theory of the mutual dependence of the rich and poor, turning on the alms of the former and the prayers of the latter.

² The emphasis on mercy to the poor is very marked in Luke's Gospel, a phenomenon sometimes described as the "Ebionism" of Luke (see *Campbell, Critical Studies in Luke*, part ii.). As this is most marked in the sections peculiar to his Gospel, it probably goes back to a special Palestinian source used by him, and closely related to, if not part of, the source lying behind the picture of early Church life in Acts ii.-vi. But the idea is also very marked in the Judgment scene in Matt. xxv. 35-40, as well as in the Anointing scene at Bethany.

surely very pertinent to the matter in hand, namely, the fitness of the emphasis apparently laid by Peter, along with James and John, upon charity or almsgiving as a characteristic Christian grace. In this way Gentile believers could prove that their "free" faith was not a dead or fruitless faith, but produced a type of piety recognisable as at bottom identical with that fostered by aid of the Mosaic Law.

So viewed, the provision was one meant to ensure that in the sister mission one and the same "religion" was produced, the "pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father," which is "to tend the fatherless and widows in their affliction," and so, as it seems, "keep oneself unspotted from the world."¹ This solicitude for the poor among the brethren anywhere and everywhere is but the generalization of what we find in Acts ii.-vi., in what is incorrectly styled the "communism" of the primitive Jerusalem Christians.² To them the wonderfully fraternal attitude there reflected was an integral part of Messiah's religion, the practical sanctification of life, and the constant confession of His Lordship in denial of worldliness. And hence they can put forth mindfulness of the poor, not as one virtue among many, but as the touchstone of the

¹ James i. 27. The evidence of this Epistle is very marked, e.g. ii. 5, 6, iv, 4, 9, 10, v. 1, 5; and it is also very weighty as an index of the criteria of genuine piety current in the Jerusalem community. With this agrees the tradition (even if with heightening touches) regarding James' unworldly temper preserved in Hegesippus as cited by Eusebius (ii. 23).

² Compare the *Didaché*, iv. 5-8, a part almost certainly implying a prior Jewish basis and still partaking somewhat of its "interested" spirit in such things. But the last paragraph at least is typical of early Judæo-Christian piety: "Thou shalt not turn away from him that is in need, but shalt share all things with thy brother, and shalt not say that they are thy private property; for if ye are fellow-sharers in that which is immortal, how much more in things perishable." So, too, among the works of the "Way of Death" in v. 2 is "not pitying the poor man." Eusebius in his picture of primitive Evangelists (iii. 37) makes them, prior to their "going forth," distribute their possessions among the needy.

genuine tone of Messiah's *Ecclesia*. Men so living were morally purified from the hard, selfish, Gentile spirit. And nothing could show forth the new piety more manifestly than those occasions on which Gentiles might remember "the poor" among their Jewish brethren. Accordingly this view would put a fresh fulness of meaning into the Antiochene Famine Fund, and explain how Paul and Barnabas would be even eager to go up to Jerusalem to present it themselves, if it were indeed the firstfruits of the private understanding arrived at shortly before. But while I believe such to have been the case, I do not see in the words,¹ "which very thing was already a matter of special concern with me," any specific reference to this collection or any other. It seems rather to be an assertion that this was no new condition of Gentile membership in the Messianic *Ecclesia*—as Judaizers might insinuate—but a thing which had already, and from the first, been a prime point in Paul's teaching to his converts touching "the fruit of the Spirit" (cf. Gal. v. 22 f., vi. 2-6). He was as much in earnest for such "works" in a justified life, and in the power of a justifying faith, as James could be (Jas. ii. 14 ff.) To this his own example signally conformed (Acts xx. 34, 35); and the chief saying of his Master's which he has helped to preserve for us is that *makarism* of the generous spirit, which yields the palm of blessedness to

¹ As regards the grammar of the verse, Ramsay has elaborately discussed the careful way in which St. Paul uses his tenses throughout the historical summary in Gal. i. ii. (EXPOSITOR V. ii. 107 ff.) Verse 10 runs, *μόνον τῶν πτωχῶν ἵνα μνημονεύωμεν, ὃ καὶ ἐσπούδασα αὐτὸ τοῦτο ποιῆσαι*, which I would render: "Only let us make a practice of being mindful of the poor—which very thing I was already even forward to do." Nor can I see how the aorist suits his special view, that Paul was at this very moment *actually engaged in doing* such work. The imperfect, of "those actions which continued for a period but are not thought of as continuing at the moment of writing," would seem rather to be looked for. On my own theory, which also makes the change from the first person plural to the singular more natural, Paul simply records his then state of mind as a matter of fact.

him who gives.¹ How could Paul do other than hail with enthusiasm this aid to insisting on a duty which he esteemed a privilege? Henceforth in case of need he could cite the emphatic and expressed desire of his colleagues, the leading Apostles to the Jews. For in both missions there was from the first the common spirit, symptomatic of their religious unity, which responded to the exhortation: "But to be beneficent and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. xiii. 16).

I am quite alive to the excellent sense in many ways resulting from the specific reference which most see in "the poor," namely, to the believing poor of the Circumcision. Yet the more one considers the difficulties of reading so specific a meaning into the simple phrase "the poor," the greater they appear. The only possible apology for it, namely that the context suggests it, is neither convincing, as far as it goes, nor is it adequate. For the immediate antecedent is not the Jerusalem Church, but the Circumcision as the sphere of the original Apostolate.² Hence the reference cannot be

¹ See also the emphasis on communicating to a brother's need, in 1 Tim. vi. 17, 18; Titus iii. 14; also the marked reference to its place as a work of piety (1 Cor. xiii. 4).

² This would practically make "Ebionites" or "the poor men" almost a technical term for Judæo-Christianity as a whole even at this early date—a conclusion for which one is hardly prepared. On the other hand the alternative view, that regard for the poor was the most characteristic manifestation of true piety, gives the only reasonable account of the origin of the term "Ebionites," when once it did arise. For it is far easier to suppose that it was the chosen name of the Judæo-Christians in question than that it was a nickname. They felt towards poverty as did the early Franciscans, *poverello*, "the humble poor one," being only another aspect of *frater minor*, and each denoting a certain humble or meek type of piety (*religio*). This is just the attitude underlying the Epistle of James. And how natural that it should be so, once we recollect the guise in which Jesus of Nazareth Himself must have appealed to the imagination of natives of Palestine, where He would be remembered as emphatically the Poor Man, dependent upon the alms of others, "not having where to lay His head"! Like Master, like disciples. This must have been the Christian type *par excellence* to Palestinian Christianity; and it would have full sway once the primitive community was detached from the life of Jerusalem, where other influences would operate, and isolated in Peræa.

contextually narrowed to the former, but at best to the latter. But evidence is not to hand that Jewish Christians, as a class and apart from those in Jerusalem, ever received material aid from their Gentile brethren, save during the Famine.¹ And further, it remains open to grave doubt whether Paul would have expected the distant Galatian Christians to perceive so allusive a reference to the supposed special condition of the poor of the Circumcision. How easy it would have been to give some specific turn to the bare phrase "the poor," if such had been his meaning.² Again, does the sense traditionally given to the passage really fit into the course of the Apostle's argument? The usual reading of the phrase does not seem to fall in with the aim of the Epistle. For how would it support his *authority* to state that as a matter of fact he had been zealous to do what was suggested and had since shown it by initiating collections among his Churches for the "Jerusalem poor"? What is the point of the remark relative to his dialectic purpose? Had his object, for the moment, been to show the unity of spirit felt on his side in spite of the apparent diversity of his policy, then the observation would have been telling. As it is, it seems, on the current theory, quite gratuitous, if it does not afford the other side a fresh argument to prove subservience to the Jerusalem apostles to be his true and normal relation.

Even Paul felt the power of the humble estate in which his Lord had "lived as a beggar," to enrich men's souls (2 Cor. viii. 9).

¹ With the more restricted sense of "the poor" fall away also the Pauline references to actual collections among his Churches, which are the ultimate source of the traditional gloss "the poor of the Jerusalem Church": and the idea "the poor" is left in its native simplicity.

² Observe that the collection among the Galatians (1 Cor. xvi. 1) for the Jerusalem Saints, on the Third Missionary Journey, cannot here be used to clear up the phrase to the readers' minds, by those who, like Rendall, Zahn, and McGiffert, place *Galatians* before the Third Missionary Journey. But this opinion is the dominant one on the Continent and is likely to gain ground in England more and more.

Once more, is it not a strange and rather undignified request for the mother Church to make, if one supposes its Pillar Apostles making it and its offshoots a *permanent* charge on Paul's converts?

If, on the other hand, we take "the poor" without any limitation as between Jew and Gentile, then the request would be that Paul should instil into his converts the very genius of true piety as understood in certain Jewish circles and in the Judæo-Christian Church universally. For without going as far as the Rabbinic maxim, "Almsgiving is equivalent to all virtues," yet they surely believed, with James, that brotherliness is the parent of all virtues, even as "the love of money is root of all vices." It is at any rate suggestive that the shutting up of one's compassions towards a brother's need is taken by James, as later by John, as the best proof of a dead and formal faith (Jas. ii. 15-17).

If this, then, be the true meaning, namely, that it is a prime *moral guarantee that by different roads they are reaching the same type of fruitful piety in Christ*, then we can see why Paul is concerned to show that this was *not a new idea* for his Gospel, but that it simply voiced one of his most ardent aspirations in all his work; it was simply a fresh point of common understanding, and nothing more. And on the theory, that the visit of Galatians ii. 1-10 preceded that of Acts xi. 29, Paul soon had a splendid chance of proving his assurances of keenness in this cause (given probably as soon as the subject came up in conference), when he returned with the Antiochene Fund—possibly already in progress, and if so, doubtless mainly at his suggestion.

But while this may or may not be historically true, we cannot recognise in Paul's words to the Galatians any reference to it. His real point is that *no new lesson in the Gospel* came to him when the Pillar Apostles asked

guarantees that the poor anywhere and everywhere should have due attention from his converts, who, as trained under Gentile ideals, were open to some doubt on this point as compared with those who, even as Jews and nothing else, had viewed their fellows as "brethren" and been wont to act on this sentiment in relation to the poor.

VERNON BARTLET.