

THE CHRISTIAN PROPHETS AT PHILIPPI.

WE have thus¹ explained two difficulties of the three which have hitherto puzzled the commentators in the narrative of Acts xvi. The first is the meaning of *the spirit of Jesus*. The second—which indeed has baffled them—is *first of the portion Macedonia*, as applied to Philippi, and the third remains. What is the meaning of the words, “where we supposed,” or were thinking, “that a place of prayer was” (Acts xvi. 13)? This is Westcott and Hort’s reading, and has the best testimony. The Sinaitic MS. does indeed give us a remarkable variant, “where he supposed,” presumably meaning Paul. The Western recension gives us “where it seemed (likely).” Blass has conjectured by a change of one letter “where they were wont to be engaged in prayer.” But this is pure conjecture and testifies to the difficulty of the reading “where we supposed” rather than to its unsoundness: the MSS. should not be given up if we find a reasonable sense in what they say.

And I think we can find the sense in accordance with the observations already given and in accordance with the prophetic ideas which especially at this time ruled the minds of Paul and Silas. We have seen that they were finding “much fulfilment” in their visit to Macedonia and that they did not and could not hesitate to take a text of the Old Testament, especially the Book of Joshua, upon its own merits and apart from its context. Possessed of the conviction that Philippi was their Jericho, first city of the Portion of Benjamin, although the complete fulfilment had not yet been vouchsafed to them, there was one place which they naturally sought to identify, and this was Gilgal on the banks of the Jordan. They proceeded in their journey as the writer of the Acts is careful to tell us, *συμβιβάζοντες*, putting one and one together and so “concluding” that

¹ See above, pp. 416 ff.

the spirit of Jesus was still with them. It may be thought that Gilgal and Jericho too should have been at Neapolis, for the Jordan was the corner of the Aegean Sea which they had already crossed. However it had not proved to be so, and they might well *be thinking* that as their Jordan was wider by ten times than even the Rabbinic Jordan, twelve miles in width, so their Gilgal might be on the same scale some eight miles further on near Philippi, which was their Jericho.

Now they had before their eyes the words in the LXX of Joshua (Josh. v. 9 f.): "And the Lord said to Jesus son of Naue, To-day I take away the reproach of Egypt from you. And he called the name of that place *Galgala*. And the sons of Israel made the passover on the 14th day of the month at evening, *on the west of Jericho beyond Jordan in the plain.*" When then they found on arriving at Philippi that the *Gangas*, otherwise called Gangites,¹ was the river of Philippi *to the west of it*, it is natural to understand how they *were thinking* that hard by its stream, approached by the Arch commemorating the Battle of Philippi, they would find the place of prayer. The great Via Egnatia, that artery of the Roman Empire which joined Rome with Byzantium, is lined near the Arch with rows of tombs. In that outskirt of the Roman colony the members of the small Jewish community were compelled to find their place of prayer.²

Let us now pass beyond the neighbourhood of Philippi looking forth toward the western side of *the portion Macedonia*. It is not necessary to make the reasonable supposition that the two Prophets, guided by the spirit of Jesus, on arriving at Neapolis or before, had gotten them a map or itinerary of the country in which they were wayfaring

¹ See Lightfoot, *Philippians*, p. 52, ed. 1879, though he sees no prophetic clue.

² See the admirable work of T. Lewin, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, for the topography of Philippi.

strangers. If a map were not allowed by the earliest prophetic Rule to those who might not take purse or scrip or shoes, then they must depend on the oral pronunciation of the names of places in the country they were to visit, and when these were pronounced by foreign lips, there was much room for doubt as to the spelling, and there would be a proportionate freedom in identifying the Macedonian name in its uncouth pronunciation with the odd Greek names of small and obscure Hebrew localities recorded in the book of Jesus as belonging to the portion of Benjamin. Probably the earliest prophetic Rule had been relaxed by this time in view of longer journeys for the Prophets. In any case the modern reader who will take a map in the one hand and a Bible in the other will be surprised to see what astonishing resemblances there are between Macedonian names and Benjamite. Let him however bear in mind that the identities discovered by Paul and Silas were the fruit of intense enthusiasm, of ecstasy, of a prophetic zeal which anticipated and so promoted the fulfilment of its own types. And let him remember that the anticipation was not always found to be exact, although on the whole its approach to exactness was remarkable.

The following coincidences then would first strike the eye or the ear—

LXX.¹

MACEDONIAN NAMES.

Azeka and Makeda = Akte and Makedonia.

Auein = Eion, port of Amphipolis, on the Strymon, one mile from the Egnatian road.

Phara = Phagres, three miles further along the coast.

Rogel = Trogilus, on the Egnatian road.

Sara = Serrhae or Siris, in the Strymon valley.

¹ Josh x. 10; xviii. 23.

Whether we can venture to carry identification any further except as to Beerotha (Beroea) is very problematical. Yet considering the two cities, the great Amphipolis on Lake Cercinitis, and the small Apollonia, receive mention in the Acts, though only a bare mention, as halting places on the Egnatian road, we may perhaps say that the following equations would be the result of more hesitating conjecture by the Prophets—

Karapha and Ammona and Aphnei = Kerkine and Amphipolis and Apollonia.

It is a strange fact that this is the reading of some MSS. of the Hexapla instead of the "Karapha and Kepheira and Monei" of the restored LXX text of Swete, and the "Kapharammon and Aphni" of Stier and Theile. The Benjamite cities in Joshua are grouped first (1) as twelve cities and their villages, in the East of Benjamin, and next (2) as thirteen cities and their villages in the Western section. It would then seem natural to the Prophets to find the corresponding division in (1) Macedonia Prima or Eastern, which consisted of the basin of the Strymon and outlying districts with Amphipolis and Philippi as capitals, and in (2) Macedonia Secunda and Tertia which extended as far West as the Peneus with Thessalonica and Pella as capitals. They would be confirmed in this latter identification by finding that whereas the above-named places were in the First, in the Second and more distant group the Benjamite Beerotha suggested Beroea, and also the Benjamite Seleka suggested again in another form Thes-Salonika. If they had variant texts of LXX before them, it is possible that they might have found in one text a place called Therala where another gave for the same place Nakan,¹ and if so there was nothing to prevent them from supposing that the two forms gave either half of the true name Theralanakan or Thessalonica.

¹ Field, *Origen's Hexapla, in loc.*

There was at least, from the prophetic point of view, this very striking piece of guidance to be found in Jesus: "And thus I will bring out for you a lot (*κληρον*) before the Lord in Selo" (Josh. xviii. 8). . . . "And Jesus cast in for them . . . a lot in Selo before the Lord" (Josh. xviii. 10). Selo, be it remembered, is the LXX form of *Shiloh* (Josh. xviii. 1). It was therefore plain that "a lot" was to be expected on the arrival of the Prophets at Selo. The nature of this "lot" appeared to be shown in a previous verse of Jesus: "And there was gathered together a whole *synagogue of the sons of Israel* unto Selo." Now there is not much ingenuity required for the identification of Selo as a prophetic name with the great seaport of Macedonia, Thessalonica. It would seem to Paul and Silas that they were led thither, and that if so the *synagogue* there was *the lot*, or part of the lot. Luke then, we observe, has duly marked the fulfilment of the prophecy by recording quietly the words: "They came to *Thessalonica*, where *was a synagogue of the Jews*" (Acts xvii. 1). The expression is perplexing on any other hypothesis but that the author of Acts means to point back to Joshua xviii. 1. For at a large place like Thessalonica there must have been more than one synagogue. Lewin and Alford say that we must read "*the synagogue*." Westcott and Hort are opposed to this. I take the true bearing of the words to be this: "There was at least one synagogue, and therefore Joshua xviii. 1 was fulfilled." The fact that the later name was Salonike suffices to show that the first syllable Thes- was not very strongly pronounced perhaps as early as St. Paul's time. The difference of sound would therefore not forbid the *fulfilment* of Selo in Thessalonica.

The narrative of the sojourn of Paul and Silas in Thessalonica itself exhibits a trace, though not so clearly as that of their sojourn at Philippi, of the fulfilment of a type of the Old Testament. Let me say that any one who has visited

the Passion Play of Ober-ammergau will be readily disposed to observe these New Testament fulfilments however far-fetched they may appear to us. The parallel in question happens to concern the personality of Lot, who was distinctly a favourite type with Luke.¹ Paul and Silas—for just here Timothy, though present, is not mentioned—arrived in the strange city of Thessalonica as the two angels arrived in Sodom. They appear to have been sheltered by Jason as the angels were received into the house of Lot. The *fulfilments* followed thus:

The Jews “took unto themselves certain *vile* (*πονηρούς*) fellows of the rabble and gathering a crowd set the city of Thessalonica on an uproar, and assaulting the house of Jason they sought to bring Paul and Silas forth to the people.” So of old had the men of the city encircled the house of Lot, all the people together; and they said to Lot, “Where are the men that came in to thee? Bring them out.”

At Thessalonica they “found not” the Apostles: at Sodom “the men at the house door were smitten with blindness.”

At Thessalonica they “dragged Jason . . . before the rulers.” At Sodom Lot came out and said, “Nay, brethren, be not ye *vile*” (*πονηρεύσηθε*). Here the parallel, which is just perceptible, appears to end.

We pass on to consider *much fulfilment* at Troas.

“And these having gone there (or gone before) tarried for us at Troas” (Acts xx. 5). This part of the We-document contains further notes of days and places on the journey from Europe to Asia and along the Asiatic coast, and one of the first incidents is the restoration of Eutychus to conscious life. We need not open the question whether the words “he was taken up a corpse” imply actual death or not. Now the type of this sign in the Old Testament is

¹ *The Christian Prophets*, p. 163.

quite unmistakable ; it is found in the raising of the widow's son at Zarephath.

The type occurred in a city facing the Western Sea (1 Kings xvii. 17 ff.): so did the fulfilment at Troas. The very name of Zarephath (Tsârâfâh in Hebrew) bore a strong resemblance in sound to Troas. It is quite likely that it was locally pronounced Tsrâfâh ; hence the Greek form Sarepta.

Again, the scene at Zarephath introduces us to a *loft* or upper storey (Acts xx. 8) : so does the fulfilment to the *third loft*.

The sufferer was a *boy* at Zarephath : at Troas he was a *young man*.

In the type Elijah's words are, "Let *this child's life* come into him again": in the fulfilment St. Paul says, "*His life is in him.*"

In the type Elijah *stretched himself upon* the child (breathed into him LXX) three times : St. Paul "*fell on Eutychus and embraced him.*"

Lastly, we may not fail to observe that the type is preceded in the story by the eating of "a *morsel of bread*," or rather "a little cake first" instead of "the morsel of bread" (*ψωμὸν ἄρτου*) which was asked for : this corresponds in the fulfilment to the description of St. Paul "having *broken the bread* and tasted" of this high token of communion.

Nor is the effect of the *spirit of Jesus* to be discerned only in the occurrences at Troas and in Macedonia. It began earlier still, if we may infer from two instances of fulfilment of the Book of Jesus by events in this memorable "second" journey of Paul and Silas.

"Jesus *circumcised* the sons of Israel . . . and the Lord said to Jesus son of Naue, To-day I take away the reproach of Egypt from among you" (Josh. v. 3, 9). St. Paul had *circumcised* Timothy, whom "he wished to *take the field*

with him"—to give the expression (ἐξελθεῖν) its military touch once more in accordance with the military tone of the book of Jesus—"because of the Jews which were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek (heathen)." The critics who are so positive that St. Paul never could do so inconsistent a thing as to circumcise Timothy, after all that he had said or was going to say about "circumcision availeth nothing," and who accordingly infer that the Acts is a falsification and romance, may perhaps think it worth their while to ponder this consideration. St. Paul as a Prophet was guided by the spirit of Jesus, and he would be compelled by that record of the circumcision of the people to obey the guidance of Jesus in this doubtful case of Timothy also; for his of course was the case of the son of a mixed marriage, and it was one of chronic disputation, especially where the father was the heathen parent. If St. Paul did not comply with the spirit of Jesus in "removing the reproach of Israel from among" his own company, how could he ever face a Jew again and profess that he was guided by the spirit of Moses' own chosen successor? It was therefore no desire of time-serving or "pleasing men" on St. Paul's part that induced him to circumcise Timothy while he afterwards declined to circumcise Titus; but it was a far higher dictate—the humble desire to obey the spirit of Jesus and to ensure the same guidance for the future.¹

The other act of obedience to the same spirit was even more in the course of ministration marked out for St. Paul in the "second" journey, though perhaps the correspondence is not so clear as in the case of the circumcision of Timothy. We read in Jesus: "Be ye very strong to keep and to do all the things that are written in the book of the law of Moses" (Josh. xxiii. 6). This solemn injunction of

¹ This question of inconsistency, which to many minds does not arise at all, is too large to be treated here.

the law by Jesus to the Israelites is made in accordance with the charge of the Lord to him at the first: "Be strong then to keep and to do according as Moses my servant commanded thee . . . and the book of this law shall not depart from thy mouth . . . *then shalt thou prosper . . .*" (Josh. i. 7 f.). It seems to be something more than fancy, considering what has been said above, to infer that when Paul and Silas "delivered them (the brethren in the cities of Asia Minor) *the decrees for to keep*, which had been ordained of the Apostles and Elders that were at Jerusalem," they did so in fulfilment of the passage in Jesus. At least it may be said that the conclusion of the Conciliar letter embodying the decrees is: "from which things if ye keep yourselves, *ye shall do well.*" This is essentially an antique ending, though not in actual form that of the Book of Jesus, as quoted above. Two out of the four Conciliar precepts of Jerusalem, those against idolatry and impurity, are enjoined clearly by Jesus in his final exhortation to the Israelites (Josh. xxiii. 7 ff.).

One more observation. It can hardly be doubted that when the Acts says that the Prophets delivered to *them* the decrees, it means to the synagogue congregations, around whom the Churches were gathered and out of which they invariably grew. The supposition of there being in the time of this "second" journey many Gentile Christians who were not and had never been connected with Judaism is purely a fiction of theological imagination, though it is a fiction which will die hard. One of the last verses of Jesus is very instructive to Jewish Christians of the time, and it is this: "And Israel worshipped the Lord all the days of Jesus and all the days of the elders, as many as had lived out the time with Jesus and as many as had seen all the works of the Lord which He had done to Israel." The effect of this passage on the early Church would be to increase the veneration in which the Christian Elders were

held, but also and especially to cause all the new Israel of God to persevere in the ancient worship of Temple and Synagogue throughout the lifetime of *the elders who had seen the Lord*. The effect of this veneration is discernible as late even as the time of Irenaeus,¹ long after the time at which the original basis of it in the Book of Jesus had been forgotten.

It will finally occur to the reader to ask whether the occurrences in Macedonia did then occur as they are related. The answer is certainly that they did occur so: there is nothing whatever to shake our acceptance of the history. Had the *consecutive* account in Acts corresponded with the *consecutive* account in Joshua, we should be inclined to say that this was a purely manufactured story, for history does not repeat itself in a considerable number of consecutive details. But such is not the case with these accounts. The fulfilment is not a fulfilment of one passage in Joshua, but of several *disjointed* pieces of several passages, which are patched together exactly as the Christian prophets were wont to patch them. I believe this account in Acts is true and accurate history.

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¹ See *The Christian Prophets*, p. 336 f., quoting Irenaeus' *Epistle to Florinus*: 'These decrees are not those which *the elders who were before us delivered to thee*. . . . The intercourse of *the rest who had seen the Lord*.'