

## St. Paul's Infirmary.

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### II.

THUS far only negations have been reached, and positive results are now to be sought. A fresh study of the records throws a new light upon the nature of the apostle's 'infirmary.' He had several attacks of illness, the features of which, with places and dates, are of prime importance.

*The First Illness.*—'I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago, such a one caught up even to the third heaven. On behalf of such a one will I glory: but on mine own behalf I will not glory, save in mine infirmities. And by reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn for the flesh, a messenger 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' (2 Co 12<sup>2, 5, 7, 8</sup>).

The acute stage of Paul's illness was marked by excessive pain, and followed by extreme depression. His recovery was incomplete. He prayed for the removal of the dregs of his disease, yet these continued in chronic form. This attack occurred in the province of Cilicia, where the apostle was resident for some seven or eight years. His stay there terminated about the year 43 or 44 A.D. A little before his departure from this region, he had his first attack of illness: for it occurred fourteen years previous to the writing of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. That letter is dated about the year 56 or 57 A.D. It brings us back, therefore, to the year 42 or 43 A.D., which is just about a year prior to the departure from Cilicia. During his stay in the province, Paul had his headquarters in Tarsus. Thither he had been sent from Jerusalem by the brethren; and thither Barnabas had come to seek him. The first illness of the apostle thus belongs to his native city of Tarsus: not less than the preceding visions and revelations. He went thence with Barnabas to Antioch in Syria. There he spent nearly four years, interrupted only by a visit to Jerusalem. That allowed ample time for rest, before setting

out on the first missionary journey. Paul was then so far restored that he was able to evangelize Cyprus in brilliant style, though all traces of his previous sickness may not have vanished at that date.

*The Second Illness.*—'Paul and his company set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem. But they went across from Perga and arrived at Pisidian Antioch' (Ac 13<sup>13, 14</sup>).

Leaving Cyprus, the party proceeded to the mainland; reaching Perga, the capital of the province of Pamphylia. That district was naturally the next sphere of labour. Luke certainly intends to suggest that Paul and Barnabas thus regarded it. But the stay in Perga was brief, and marked by disruption. Pamphylia was meanwhile passed over. Mark went on to Jerusalem, while the 'apostles' proceeded to Pisidian Antioch. Ramsay finds the reason of these movements in the illness of Paul, which required his departure from Perga to the higher ground of the interior. *But did Paul fall sick in Perga?* Ramsay admits the gravity of the case, but fails to observe how that would be a bar to an invalid undergoing the long and fatiguing journey to Pisidian Antioch, amid 'perils of rivers and perils of robbers.' Weizsäcker, on the other hand, believes that the illness occurred not in Perga, but in Pisidian Antioch. McGiffert holds that otherwise Paul would have gone home or back to Cyprus; while Mark would not have been said to have refused to go to 'the work,' had the journey to Antioch been for the sake of Paul's health. But the first argument here has no great cogency; for this attack was evidently acute, and the apostle's removal from Perga might have been impossible. The second argument, however, is valid, and must be allowed due weight. The whole evidence thus shows that the illness did not occur in Pamphylia, but in Southern Galatia. But why was nothing attempted in Perga? No hostility on the part of the people or of the Government is even hinted at; and none

of the party was as yet laid aside with sickness. Yet all with one consent hasten to clear out of the town. It thus becomes manifest that, for some reason or other, work in this district was at present impracticable, and removal from it a necessity. The whole circumstances suggest the prevalence of an epidemic in this region. Paul may have carried from Perga the germs of the disease which was afterwards fully developed in Pisidian Antioch. Eight days of hard travelling were sufficient for traversing the intervening distance of a hundred miles. Paul seems to have been an excellent walker, judging by his journey from Troas to Assos, covering some twenty miles in an afternoon (Ac 20<sup>13</sup>). Probably the close of the journey inland was coincident with the ending of the period of incubation of the disease, for the Galatians witnessed an acute attack of illness. If they saw an eruption or dreaded contagion, their contempt and loathing are easily intelligible. The scene of this fresh attack is therefore Pisidian Antioch; and according to Ramsay the date is either July or August in the year 47 A.D. Paul ultimately made such a good recovery that even the stoning at Lystra had little effect on him; but that does not prove the absence of all residual evil consequences.

*The Third Illness.*—‘We would not, brethren, have you ignorant concerning our affliction which befell us in (the province of) Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, inasmuch that we despaired even of life. Yea, we ourselves had the sentence of death within ourselves’ (2 Co 1<sup>8,9</sup>).

On his first visit to Corinth, Paul arrived ‘in weakness and in fear and in much trembling’ (1 Co 2<sup>3</sup>). Writing to the Thessalonians shortly afterwards, he mentions his ‘distress and affliction’ (1 Th 3<sup>7</sup>). Hence the inference that he was again suffering from his ‘infirmity.’ Lightfoot would trace it in the note that Satan had hindered the apostle’s return to his converts (1 Th 2<sup>18</sup>). That, however, is a mistake; for the Rabbis drew a distinction between Satan as the author of all evil, and his subordinates as angels of punishment. Paul may, indeed, have come to Corinth disheartened by persecution in the northern cities and his meagre success in Athens. But his ‘weakness and fear and much trembling’ have no discoverable physical basis. There is no trace of illness, such as that at Tarsus or Pisidian Antioch.

He was well enough to work at his own trade and to preach every Sabbath. On the arrival of Silas and Timothy, there was such an outburst of energy that he surprised the blasphemous Jews and astonished the godless Greeks. So there could have been no fresh recurrence of the former illness on this first visit to Corinth. That overtook Paul afterwards in the Roman province of Asia, in the interval between the writing of the First and the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. During this period the apostle was resident in two cities only. These were Ephesus and Troas. But in the former he enjoyed such an excellent measure of health that he was there ‘at all seasons,’ for the space of three years, warning every man, night and day with tears. At the same time he maintained himself and his companions by the labour of his own hands. Though, speaking after the manner of men, he had fought with beasts at Ephesus, he had no intention of leaving the place before his own time at Pentecost. The riot there had no terrors for him. He was so full of adventure that the combined efforts of both Christians and Asiarchs scarce held him in. On quitting Ephesus, he proceeded to evangelize Troas without seeking any rest. Everything thus shows how well he was in Ephesus, and for a time in Troas also. In the latter town he was struck down by that illness which so nearly proved fatal. The date of it depends on that of the departure from Ephesus. That could not have been later than Pentecost (1 Co 16<sup>8</sup>), nor earlier than the Passover. Most authorities accept the latter date as that for the writing of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The letter was expected to anticipate the arrival of Timothy, who was then in Macedonia (Ac 19<sup>22</sup>, 1 Co 4<sup>17</sup> 16<sup>10</sup>). As the sea was ‘open’ between 5th March and 10th November, it was likely to be sent by that route. The Epistle failed in its purpose, and Timothy in his mission. Beyschlag, Pfeiderer, and others think that the latter was insulted in Corinth. If so, a new situation was created and reported to Paul, possibly by Titus or Timothy. The former, indeed, was in that city organizing the ‘collection’ at this time. Thereupon Paul wrote the ‘lost’ or ‘painful’ letter (2 Co 2<sup>3ff.</sup> 7<sup>8ff.</sup>). Titus may have carried the same to Corinth by sea, as the matter was urgent and navigation still unimpeded. The next tidings is that Paul has left Ephesus, and awaits Titus at Troas. A simple calculation shows that some

eight or ten weeks must have been consumed by these transactions. Add to that, the time spent in evangelizing Troas, which may in part have preceded these events, and the date of the third illness falls about July or August in the year 56 or 57 A.D. The severity of this attack draws forth the pathetic words: 'Death is working in us'; 'our outward man is perishing' (2 Co 4<sup>12, 16</sup>). Paul had hitherto entertained the hope of averting the shock of dissolution (1 Co 15<sup>51ff.</sup>); henceforth he renounced it (2 Co 5<sup>1ff.</sup>). Meantime his plans were changed; and that involved him in a charge of fickleness (2 Co 1<sup>15ff.</sup>). He was also called a fool (2 Co 11<sup>16, 19</sup>). He was further spoken of as insane (2 Co 5<sup>13</sup>). His memory and his reason seem to have been clouded for a season. An improvement in his health permitted him to change from Troas to Philippi in Macedonia. There he had a relapse (2 Co 7<sup>5</sup>), and suffered great depression of spirit. There also he found Luke, who had been left in that city several years earlier. 'The beloved physician' seems to have done him much good during the autumn of this year. Paul's journey from Troas to Assos, through the oak woods of Mount Ida, and his capacity for work otherwise, are proofs of the same. But the residual evil effects are not eliminated; for Luke henceforth continues in close attendance upon him.

These points, then, complete our knowledge of Paul's three illnesses as far as these can be ascertained from Scripture. The descriptions of them are not antagonistic, but supplementary. The apostle declares to the Corinthians what he suffered; to the Galatians what they saw and how they felt. The first enumeration of symptoms is thus *subjective*; the second is *objective*. The two lists naturally differ in detail; but in combination they represent different aspects or stages of one and the same disease. There are also several traditional allusions of early date which seem to be in place in this regard. Thus Tertullian, Jerome, Pelagius, Primasius, Chrysostom, and others mention headache. The antiquity and persistency of these notices, which are not all mere echoes, point to this as an element in the 'infirmity' of Paul. Nicephorus speaks of him as slightly crooked and somewhat stooping, perhaps the result of those illnesses. The whole evidence now begins to indicate Malta fever as the 'infirmity' of Paul.

*Malta Fever.*—There is distinct evidence that this disease was known to Hippocrates in its epi-

demio form. It haunts the littoral of the Mediterranean Sea, and is also known as 'Mediterranean fever.' It bears likewise a variety of local names, being the 'rock fever' of Gibraltar, the 'Neapolitan fever' of Naples, and the 'country fever' of Constantinople. It frequents the sea-coast and the banks of large rivers, but does not penetrate far inland. It is most common in June, July, and August, though it is not confined to these months. The onset of this fever may be rather sudden or more gradual. Its usual precursors are weariness, headache, pains in the bones and muscles. The person may be able to go about for a time until the increasing illness lays him aside. The headache has now become intense and almost beyond endurance. The weakness progresses till the sufferer becomes listless and loses interest in his surroundings. At the same time, he is restless, irritable, and emotional even to tears. Memory for names and dates is not uncommonly impaired. Delirium is frequent by night. The fever generally increases in the evening and declines towards morning when the patient is bathed in perspiration. After a week or two of these pains and perspirations, the more urgent symptoms abate. The headache becomes less intense, and the delirium ceases. But rheumatic-like pains now invade the joints, both large and small, till almost all have been attacked in succession. Neuralgic pains are felt in various nerves; the sciatic being most frequently attacked. Cutaneous eruptions are not uncommon at this stage; and in nearly every case the hair falls out. The illness may terminate in three weeks or so; but that is exceptional. After a show of convalescence a relapse occurs, and the same series of events is passed through. One relapse may follow another till the succession may spread over eighteen months; but that is unusual. The remanent effects of this fever are excessive debility and anæmia. Pains also in the joints may cause crippling, while there may remain sciatica, facial neuralgia, and affections of other nerves. Yet the risk to life is remarkably slight after all: the mortality being about 2 per cent. Death may occur from acute disease of the heart or the lungs. This fever is sometimes epidemic, but it is no more contagious than malarial fever. The period of incubation may range from six to seventeen days, ten being a common limit. One attack predisposes to others.

Between this description of Malta fever and Paul's 'infirmity' a close parallelism may now be established, despite the scanty and fugitive notices of the latter.

<i>Malta Fever.</i>	<i>Paul's Infirmity.</i>
Haunts river banks and the sea-coast.	Infection at Tarsus, Perga, and Troas.
Fever not strictly seasonal.	Month of the first illness unknown.
Most prevalent when rainfall least.	Second and third illnesses, July or August.
Headache, pains in joints, and muscles.	A stake for the flesh.
Temporary impairment of memory.	Charge of fickleness.
Nocturnal delirium.	Called a madman.
Rheumatic-like pains and neuralgias.	Buffeting of Satan's angel.
Crippling and skin eruptions.	Excitement of contempt and loathing.
Hair commonly falls out.	Traditional feature in Paul's person.
Apparent convalescence.	Removal from Troas to Philippi.
Chronic pains, neuralgias, and debility.	Constant impalement and buffeting.
Occasional endocarditis or pneumonia.	Sentence of death in himself.

*Malta Fever.*

Fever sometimes epidemic.  
Incubation about ten days.  
One attack draws on others.

*Paul's Infirmity.*

Pamphylia to be evangelized again.  
Journey from Perga to Pisidian Antioch.  
Three illnesses; of increasing severity.

These coincidences are numerous and unforced. The list of them might easily be extended; but these are sufficient to form a sound basis for the induction that the 'infirmity' of Paul was nought else than Malta fever. Its significance is manifold; but its more immediate bearings cannot be indicated here. One point, however, must not be passed over. *Thrice* did the apostle suffer from this malady, and *thrice* did he pray that 'this thing might depart' from him. But the residual effects of these illnesses remained, so that he was 'always being delivered unto death.' Yet in the intervals between these acute attacks, Paul displays the most marvellous energy. Is that then merely a proof of his fortitude and zeal? Surely here is the demonstration that the promise had been fulfilled, 'Sufficient is my grace for thee: for power is perfected in weakness.'

## The Great Text Commentary.

### THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

#### ACTS XVI. 30, 31.

'He brought them out, and said, **Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house.**'—R.V.

#### EXPOSITION.

'He brought them out.'—Not from the house into the street or open air, but from the 'inner' to the 'outer prison,' which was no doubt a more spacious, light, and airy place. This was, therefore, of itself an act of deference, which prepares the way for what subsequently passed between them.—ALEXANDER.

'And said, **Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**'—By the time that these words were uttered, the jailer's immediate fear for his personal safety must have subsided: but in the quickened consciousness of a moment of great danger, when a man's end seems near, dormant feelings touching his spiritual state and destiny are apt to awake to vivid life. Hence the question, though vague in its purport, and devoid of clear notion touching the 'salvation' of which these calm

men were the heralds, must be taken as having a deeper meaning than concern for bodily safety.—BARTLET.

MORUS, Stolz, Rosenmüller render it: 'in order that I may escape the punishment of the gods on account of your harsh treatment.' But, if Luke desired to have *σωθῶ* and *σωθήσθη* understood in different senses, he must have appended to *σωθῶ* a more precise definition; for the meaning thus assigned to it suggests itself the less naturally, as the jailer, who had only acted as an instrument under higher direction (comp. Chrysost.), could not reasonably apprehend any vengeance of the gods.—MEYER.

'And they said.'—Silas bore his part.—COOK. '**Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.**'

'Lord.'—The Greek presents a contrast which is lost in the English. He had called them by the usual title of respect *κύριοι* = sirs, or lords; they answer that there is one *Κύριος*, the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can save.—ELLCOTT.

THEY lay down faith in Jesus as the condition of *σωτηρία* and nothing else; but saving faith is always in the N.T. that which has holiness as its effect (Ro 6), not 'a human figment and opinion which the depths of the heart never get