

*THE STRUGGLE FOR CHRISTIAN LIBERTY
IN GALATIA.¹*

SCARCELY two years had passed since St. Paul had been required to interpose at Thessalonica in order to recall some over-excited brethren to the wisdom of the just, when it became necessary for him to write also to the Churches of Galatia in vindication of Christian liberty, which was seriously threatened among them. Just what the Act of Emancipation was to the slaves in the English colonies, was the Epistle to the Galatians to the primitive Church. It marked a new stage in its development. This Epistle is the manifesto of the spiritual enfranchisement won by Christ for all believers. It was by studying and appropriating this Epistle, that Luther was enabled to strike off the fetters weighing down the spiritual and moral life of one section of the Christian world. In this Epistle he found the secret of his own deliverance; hence he declares himself "wedded" to this letter, and called it his "Catherine Bora." Taking this as his weapon, he plunged into the fearful conflict with the papistry and religious materialism of his time. This was the pebble from the brook, with which, like another David, he went forth to meet the papal giant, and smote him in the forehead.

In our own time, this Epistle has again been brought into prominence by a man of genius of a very different order. It is from this Epistle mainly that the leader of the Tübingen school, F. Baur, has derived his most specious arguments, in support of the idea which forms the basis of his system of criticism. His idea is, that there was a radical opposition of principle between St. Paul and the twelve Apostles. This very suggestive idea, originating in the brain of the *savant*, and becoming diffused first among theologians, has in our day found its way down to the

¹ Written for the *EXPOSITOR* by Professor Godet, and translated by Mrs. Harwood-Holmden.

masses of the people, and has contributed, with other causes, to undermine their Christian belief.

So mighty an influence, then, is this Epistle to the Galatians, as it is rightly or wrongly interpreted, both for evil or for good.

Who were these Galatians, whose name points directly to the Celts, Gauls, or Gaëls? History tells us that somewhat later than the middle of the third century before Christ, a king of Bithynia in Asia Minor, called to his aid some tribes of Gauls; and that these tribes, mingled with some of Germanic origin, were settled by him in the centre of the peninsula, in the fertile plains watered by the river Halys, now the Kizil-Irmak. Living there in the midst of the old Greek populations, they adopted their language, and hence this province received the name either of *Galatia* or of Gallo-Græcia. The attempt recently made by the theologian Wieseler to establish the Germanic origin of the Galatians, and to represent their conversion as the beginning of the Christianization of the Germanic peoples, has totally failed. The relation between the name of *Galatian* and that of *Celt*, the declaration of Justin that one of the tribes that had come to settle in the country, the Techtosages, had Toulouse as their capital, and other facts too numerous to be detailed here, leave no room for doubt that the Galatians came originally from Gaul; and if Jerome, who had visited that country, thought he discovered certain resemblances between their language and that of the inhabitants of Treves on the Rhine, this coincidence (which might indeed have been only imaginary) is easily to be explained by the declarations of Cæsar and Tacitus, who tell us that the inhabitants of Treves were themselves at this time of Gallic origin.

The Galatians had built for themselves three cities of some celebrity. Ancyra, the best known, Pessinus, and Tavium; and it was probably to the Christian congregations

in these cities that Paul addressed the letter to which our attention is now directed. In the midst of the pagan population there was found, especially at Ancyra, a large and wealthy Jewish colony. In the famous bronze tablet, called the *Monumentum Ancyranum*, which is let into the wall above the altar of the temple of Augustus at Ancyra, and on which is inscribed a copy of all the decrees passed by the monarch in favour of the inhabitants of that city, special mention is made of the rights and franchises granted to the Jewish population of the country.

The foundation of the Church in these regions is not narrated in the Book of Acts; hence certain writers have supposed that the Churches of Galatia were no other than those founded by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey into the more southerly provinces of Asia Minor. This seems the more probable from the fact that Augustus, after reducing Galatia to a Roman province in the year 26 B.C., extended the name of that province to Lycaonia and Pisidia, the very regions into which Paul and Barnabas carried the Gospel on their first missionary tour. Nevertheless, the theory does not seem to us admissible. In the first place, such administrative denominations are not rapidly adopted into the popular speech, which St. Paul uses; in the second place, it is a positive fact that in Acts xvi. 5, 6, Luke distinguishes Galatia from the more southern provinces. Lastly, there is this yet more conclusive argument derived from the Epistle itself, that in Chap. iv. 12-15, St. Paul alludes to an illness which had detained him in Galatia, and had thus led to the foundation of the Churches in that province. Now it is certain that the mission of Paul and Barnabas was not in consequence of any illness, since they were sent out by the Church at Antioch, entirely with a view to preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Since then we cannot assign the foundations of these

Churches to the first missionary journey, it must be assigned, at the earliest, to the beginning of the second journey, the time indicated in the words (Acts xvi. 6), "When they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia. . . ." Paul was then travelling with Silas and Timotheus. He was attacked with an illness which, judging from certain expressions he uses in his Epistle, must have been of a humiliating and repulsive character (Gal. iv. 14), "*that which was a temptation to you in my flesh ye despised not nor rejected,*" and which detained him some time among these people. They showed an extraordinary love for him; they opened their hearts to the Gospel, and several Churches were founded (Gal. i. 2). It is evident from the Epistle that these Churches were composed mainly of Gentiles (Chap. iv. 8, v. 2, vi. 12). But it may be assumed that some among the Jews recognised Jesus as the promised Messiah (iii. 28, iv. 3). We cannot explain why the founding of this Church is not mentioned in the narrative in the Acts. Perhaps Luke was not sufficiently acquainted with the details of Paul's sojourn in Galatia, to attempt a narrative of it. In the same way, Luke makes no mention of Paul's journey into Arabia at the beginning of his ministry, though Paul himself refers to it in the first chapter of this Epistle.

After accomplishing his mission in Greece, from the autumn of 52 A.D. to the summer of 54, and after visiting Jerusalem and Antioch, as was his custom at the close of each of his mission journeys, Paul passed again through Galatia on his way to Ephesus, where he was to carry on his third mission. Luke says indeed (Acts xviii. 23) that "having spent some time at Antioch, he departed and went through the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, stablishing all the disciples." These closing words are very suggestive. They show first, that the Church had really been founded by Paul on his previous journey; for

it cannot be doubted that he was at least its chief founder. (Comp. Gal. i. 8, iv. 13, 19.) This expression, "stablishing all the disciples" indicates that difficulties had already arisen among these young Churches, and this conclusion is confirmed by certain expressions in the Epistle, in which Paul alludes to the earnest warnings he had already addressed to them. Thus in Chap. i. 9 he says: "As we have said before, so say I now again, If any man preacheth unto you any other gospel than that which ye received, let him be anathema." And again (Chap. iv. 16): "So then am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" And again (Chap. v. 21): "I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they which practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The Apostle hoped, however, that he had left the Galatians confirmed in the true faith of the Gospel, and in the way of Christian holiness. "Ye were running well," he says to them (Chap. v. 7). It was then a sad surprise and grief to him to hear, soon after his arrival at Ephesus, that troublesome persons had been in Galatia and had so quickly shaken the faith of the Christians.¹ Who were these disturbers of the Churches? It is easy to divine. Those same Judaising teachers who had previously troubled the Church at Antioch, had now travelled into Galatia, swooping down like birds of prey upon every place where the new life, awakened by the preaching of Paul, was asserting itself. The Galatians had lent an ear to these new teachers. They were on the point of submitting to the rite of circumcision by which they would be identified with the Jewish people (Chap. v. 2, 4). Already they were observing the feast days fixed by the Mosaic law (Chap. iv. 10). They had come to look with suspicion upon Paul himself. Their apostle seemed to have become their enemy (Chap. iv. 16). These strangers had come between

¹ "I marvel that ye are so quickly removed," etc. (Chap. i. 6.)

him and them and had separated them from him (Chap. iv. 17). They accused him of modifying his teaching to suit the people with whom he had to do (Chap. i. 10); and the poor ignorant Galatians listened to such calumnies! All the fruit of the Apostle's labour was thus in danger of being brought to nought. "I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Chap. iv. 11).

Such was the situation when St. Paul took up the pen. These words may be taken here in a literal sense, for what he says in Chap. vi. 11, rightly understood, implies that Paul, contrary to his custom, wrote this letter with his own hand, evidently with the intention of impressing on the Galatians the great importance which he attached to what he had to say. The Epistle to Philemon is the only other Epistle thus distinguished.

In order to carry their point the adversaries of Paul had begun by raising doubts in the minds of the Galatians as to his apostolic authority. As Paul was not one of the twelve Apostles, chosen by Jesus Christ, they asserted that he was merely an evangelist who, after receiving the knowledge of Christianity from the Twelve, had lifted up his heel against his teachers; and in order to please the Gentiles, whose Apostle he claimed to be, was preaching a Gospel opposed to the apostolic model. The Twelve, they said, continued to observe the Mosaic law, as Jesus Himself had done, and made it incumbent upon the new converts; while Paul, on his own authority, arbitrarily broke every yoke, and baptised all the Gentiles who believed, without requiring them to be circumcised or to keep the law of Moses.

The question of Paul's authority as an apostle obviously lay at the root of the matter. It is with this therefore the Apostle begins his letter. It is treated in the first two chapters. In the very words with which he opens

(Chap. i. 1-5) he refers to this disputed point, declaring that if he had not been made an apostle during the life of Jesus on earth, he had been so made by the Risen Jesus, and herein his apostleship was assuredly not inferior to that of the Twelve (Ver. 1). Then by introducing (Ver. 2) all the brethren who were with him at Ephesus as co-senders of this letter, he adds their testimony to his own as to this purely personal matter. After this preamble, the Apostle, omitting the usual thanksgiving, proceeds at once to express the sorrowful surprise which filled his heart. "I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ, unto a different gospel" (Ver. 6), and he pronounces a curse upon those who have thus troubled them. For, he says, the Gospel he preached to them he had received from Jesus Christ Himself. When from a persecuting Jew of the strictest sect, God made him an apostle of the Lord Jesus, no other apostle had any part in his conversion nor in the ministry which followed. For three years he preached both at Damascus and in Arabia without having seen one of the apostles, simply declaring the Gospel which he had received by revelation from the Lord Himself, that he might be the minister of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

To this primary fact, which vindicates his entire independence, as an apostle, of the Twelve, he adds a second in the early part of Chapter ii. He shows that his authority as an apostle had been clearly recognised by the other apostles themselves, when he went up to Jerusalem to discuss with them his methods of evangelisation among the Gentiles. He had then taken with him, undoubtedly of express design, a young Christian named Titus, of Gentile birth and uncircumcised, in order to ascertain whether he would be received at Jerusalem into the fellowship of the Christian community. A formidable opposition was raised

by one party composed of false brethren privily brought in, who tried to force upon the Gentiles the observance of the Mosaic ritual. But this attempt failed.¹ The apostles themselves refused to add anything to St. Paul's Gospel teaching; and not only did they endorse the doctrine by which he exonerated the Gentile believers from all legal bondage, but they recognised his apostleship as of equal authority with their own, admitting that the Gospel of the uncircumcision was committed to Paul as the Gospel of the circumcision was to Peter. This did not at all imply, as has been asserted, that these were two different Gospels, Paul being the apostle of one and the Twelve of the other, which would be equivalent to two different ways of salvation, and two opposing Christianities. On the contrary, they recognised that it was *the same God* (Chap. ii. 7, 8), who had intrusted the Twelve with the ministry of the Jews, maintaining the old legal ceremonies, who had commissioned Paul to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles without these observances. And in token of their complete equality as apostles and of their true oneness of spirit, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas, as workers together with them in one and the same cause. This solemn recognition on their part, must put to silence all the accusations of Paul's adversaries in Galatia.

To this second decisive fact, Paul adds a third, which should satisfy the Galatians, not only of his dignity but of his competence as an apostle, namely, the contest which he had had with Peter himself at Antioch. Peter had been taught by the vision given to him at Joppa (Acts x.), that he was not to regard as unclean the believing Gentiles who did not observe the Mosaic ritual. But this vision did not decide the question whether the believing Jews should or

¹ It seems to me impossible to accept with M. Renan, the reading of the Cantabrigiensis and of Tertullian, which omits the words *οἱ οὐ δεῖ*, at the beginning of verse 5.

should not hold themselves free from such obligation. In the assembly at Jerusalem (Acts xv. and Gal. ii.), there had been a general consent on the point of not imposing any Jewish ceremonials on the Gentile Christians; but the believing Jews had been tacitly left *in statu quo*, so that they would still continue to keep the law of Moses. During his stay in Antioch, in a Church composed for the greater part of Gentiles, Peter yielded to the broad and generous impulses of his heart, and to the permission he had received from God when he went to the house of Cornelius (Acts x. 28). He fraternised freely with these new brethren, and unhesitatingly set aside the legal observances which would have separated him from them. But, recalled to order by brethren who came from Jerusalem, he suddenly drew back and refused longer to eat with any but Jewish Christians. Then Paul, before the whole assembly, vigorously pointed out the inconsistency of his conduct; and then he openly laid down the principle, that in the cross of Christ was contained the abolition of the law, not only for the Gentiles, but for the believing Jews (Chap. ii. 19, 20), "For I through the law died unto the law, that I might live unto God. I have been crucified with Christ." We may gather from Paul's silence as to the effect of this argument, that Peter had nothing to reply to it.

This then is the gist of the first part of the Epistle. How was it possible, after three such facts, that the Galatians should call in question the reality of Paul's vocation as an apostle, his apostolic dignity and qualification for his high office? But important as was this preliminary point, it was after all, only a question of competence and therefore of form. It was needful to go to the root of things. Was the enfranchisement of the believers both Jew and Gentile, which Paul had preached in Galatia, a truth or an imposture? The adversaries of the Apostle had powerful arguments to urge—the example of Jesus Christ Himself,

who had to the end observed the law—the example of the apostles, who still observed it; the Messianic promises of the Old Testament which proclaimed salvation only to the Jews, thus implying that the Gentiles must needs incorporate themselves with the Jewish nation by the rite of circumcision, and the acceptance of the Mosaic code; finally, the many passages in the Old Testament in which the perpetuity of the law was declared to be like that of the ordinances of the heaven. The fabled labours of Hercules were light compared to the burden laid upon any one who would undertake, in face of such arguments as these, to defend the cause of Christian emancipation from the law. It is to this arduous task the Apostle devotes himself in the second part of his letter (Chap. iii. iv.).

He commences by appealing to the experience of the Galatians themselves. The graces of the Holy Spirit had been manifested in their Churches. He asks, Did you receive these gifts by virtue of any legal rites, or through simple faith in the Crucified One? The facts themselves give the answer. Their regeneration took place under the simple preaching of the Gospel, and before any one had hinted that they must be subject to rites and ceremonies (Chap. iii. 1-5). After this introduction, the Apostle goes into the question itself.

There is in the Scripture one great model example of justification, the case, that is, of the man Abraham, who, though still a sinner, was placed in relation to God, in the position of a just man. How did he obtain this privilege? The book of Genesis tells us. He believed the promise of God, and this act of faith God counted to him for righteousness. Now God Himself has made this example of Abraham the type of the way of justification for all men, saying: "All nations shall be blessed in thee," consequently in the same way (Chap. iii. 6-9). And it is easy to understand why God acted in this way. If He had annexed the gift of

righteousness to the fulfilment of the law, the gift would be nullified. For the law of Moses proclaims a curse on any one who breaks it any way whatsoever, and this is done by all men; so that if Christ had not been made accursed for us we should all be under the curse. How then could the blessing promised to Abraham come upon us either as Jews or Gentiles? We must cling, then, to the means by which Abraham himself was justified, that is, to simple faith (Chap. iii. 10-14).

This becomes still more evident if we consider that the promise of justification and salvation was made to Abraham and to his spiritual seed many centuries before the giving of the Law. How then could this gift, coming so long after the original promise, suddenly annex to the fulfilment of the promise a condition of which no mention was made at the first? Even between men no such thing would be permissible. An engagement being once made, no new clause can be afterwards introduced to modify it. Here St. Paul draws attention, in passing, to the fact that the promise made to Abraham referred to *one seed* not to many. Many interpreters have imagined that Paul means here to point to Christ Himself as the *one seed* in opposition to the multitude of individuals composing the Israelitish nation, as though Paul was ignorant of the collective sense of the Hebrew term which signifies posterity. But it is enough to read Rom. iv. 11, 12, 16; ix. 6-8, in order to be convinced that Paul knows and applies the collective sense of the term used both in Hebrew and Greek. The opposition which he brings out in the verses before us is not between the Christ as an individual and the multitudes of the Jewish people, but between the *spiritual seed* of faith, which alone is heir to the promises, and other lines of Abraham's descendants, of an altogether different character, especially that to which his adversaries referred, the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, *i.e.* the Jewish people

as such. God, in making His promise to Abraham, had not contemplated for one moment two seeds different, but both equally legitimate, the one by faith the other by the flesh, two hostile families of justified and saved ones. He had ever contemplated but one seed, the characteristic of which is the ever fresh reproduction of the faith of Abraham, and which is all virtually contained in Christ, who is the Head of which it is the body (Chap. iii. 15-18). This interpretation is brought out very clearly in Rom. ix. 6-8.

But what end, then, was to be served by the law, if its fulfilment was not a condition of salvation? By making those who were subject to it conscious of the contradiction between their feelings and actions and the Divine holiness, it prepared them to accept, when the fulness of the time was come, the only true way of salvation—Christ, by faith in whom they become children of God, and whether Jews or Gentiles, compose that one spiritual family, that true seed to whom the promises belong, and which is all one in Christ Jesus (ver. 28). In the argument in Chap. iii. 19-29, which we have thus summed up, there occurs a passage which is thought to be one of the most difficult in the New Testament, and of which Dr. Jowett asserts that there are already four hundred and thirty different explanations. After saying in verse 19 that the law was ordained through angels by the hand of a Mediator, namely, Moses, the Apostle adds in verse 20, "Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one." What does this mean? Taking the whole drift of the passage, the intention of the Apostle can be nothing else than to bring out the inferior part assigned to the law in relation to the promises made to the patriarchs.¹

¹ The promises made to the patriarchs, as we have just seen, hold out salvation to man on no other condition but that of faith, while the law does not deal directly with the gift of salvation, and is only a means of preparing man to receive it. Assuming this point of view, we may take the remark in ver. 20 in two leading senses, according as we attach to the word *mediator* the sense of

The conclusion to be derived from the preceding argument is given at the beginning of Chap. iv. 1-11. The law having been only a means of preparing the people to accept the salvation which should be one day wrought out for them in Christ, its use ceases with the manifestation of Christ and the offer of salvation. And it is as absurd for those who have once received Christ to place themselves again under the yoke of the law, as it would be for the heir of a great estate, having attained his majority and entered on the legal possession of his property, to place himself again under the tutelage of his guardians.

The application thus becomes more direct. The Apostle speaks to the heart of these Galatians. Why should they be afraid to shake off the yoke of the law under which they are voluntarily placing themselves, when they see how Paul, who was by birth under the yoke, had shaken it off for their sake? Was he seeking their hurt in giving them this counsel? Had they done him some ill which might tempt him to lead them into error? On the contrary, had they not shown him the tenderest love? Had he made

intermediary between two contracting parties, or that of representative of one of the contracting parties, including a number of individuals. As to the application of this term of mediator to Moses, not to Christ, this seems beyond question. In the first sense, there is only need of a mediator where there are two contracting parties; hence there is none where God has given the promise. God acted directly in person with Abraham. Now as God is one (with Himself) and cannot fail of His word, the promise is thus perfectly assured. The law, on the contrary, which is given by means of a mediator between God and the people, supposes two contracting parties; and since it is possible that the second party (the people) may fail to fulfil their engagements, it follows that the contract may possibly be annulled. In the second sense: A plurality of persons can only act through one representative, who acts on their behalf; it must then be the angels who gave the law, not God, since God is one and hence would need no intermediary. This second sense seems to me incomparably the more simple. On the former explanation we must take the word *one* first in the numerical sense (one alone), and then in the following proposition in the moral sense (always one with Himself), which is very forced. Then again, we are compelled to admit that the law and the promise are compared with each other as two real means of salvation, which is contrary to the whole of St. Paul's arguments.

himself their enemy by frankly telling them the truth when he was among them? No! but he has jealous rivals, who have thrust themselves between him and them, and he travails again in birth for them till he sees them delivered from this delusion and settled in the truth of Christ (Chap. iv. 12-19).

Finally, as if by a sudden inspiration, he tries another argument. He says, "You who desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?" and he reminds them of the hatred of Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, to Isaac, the son of the free wife, and the casting out of the slave's son, which soon followed. Such in these days, he says, are the relations between the slaves of the law who have come to trouble you, and the free children who receive the adoption of sons by faith. And the day will come when the slaves will be cast out of the house of God by the Divine judgment. This application of the story in Genesis has often been regarded as a sort of rabbinical allegory, because men have failed to see that at the basis of the two facts thus correlated by the Apostle, lies one and the same permanent law of the kingdom of God—the law of natural enmity between the flesh and the spirit, the hostility which breaks out whenever and wherever, under any form, these two principles encounter each other in the progress of the Divine work. This is no arbitrary and artificial allegory, in which two facts are linked together simply by reason of some outward and accidental analogies.

It is then demonstrated from the Old Testament itself—that Divine document in the name of which Paul was accused of falsifying the Gospel—that the law counts for nothing in the moral act by which man is justified before God, any more than it had any part in the act by which Abraham received the promise. But here another question arises: Will not man, if thus set free from all external law, become the prey of his carnal instincts? And will not this

absolute liberty as regards the law degenerate into licence? Quite the contrary, replies the Apostle; and he proves it in the third part of his letter (Chap. v. 1-6, 10), "With freedom did Christ set us free; stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage," by those who seek to persuade you, and who slander me, as though I preached to others another Gospel than that I have declared to you. . . . They are false teachers, and will receive their punishment whoever they be (Chap. v. 5-12).

Only be careful to render always as the complement of your spiritual liberty, that which is equivalent to the fulfilling of the whole law—the voluntary submission of yourselves by love, which the Holy Spirit will work in you. From this will spring the spontaneous fulfilment of all the obligations imposed by the law. Thus, placed under the energising influence of the Spirit, you will keep the flesh under without the restraint of any law. The fruits of the Spirit will take the place of the works of the flesh, as "the old man becomes crucified with Christ" (Chap. v. 13-26).

A series of exhortations follows, such as was doubtless demanded by the state of these Churches after the painful crisis and fierce struggles through which they had been passing (Chap. vi. 1-10).

In conclusion the Apostle expresses the deep concern for the welfare of the Galatians, which had prompted him to write this long letter with his own hand. He complains of the bad faith of his adversaries who, while trying to enforce circumcision, do not themselves keep the law, and contrasts their conduct with his own utter devotion to the cross of Christ. Lastly he reminds them by one pathetic allusion, that the man whom they are grieving by their defection is one who bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

If we take a general view of this very powerful letter, we find it groups itself around three leading ideas:—

The Apostle of liberty; called and qualified, no less than the Twelve, by Christ Himself.

The Doctrine of liberty; proclaimed by the Old Testament no less than by the Gospel.

The Life of liberty; the holiness of which is even more effectually secured by the law of love proceeding from the Holy Spirit than by the law of Moses.

This Epistle may then be fairly called the Act of Emancipation of the slaves of the law in all ages. In our day this is no startling idea. We have become familiar with it through the writings of the Apostle. In order to estimate its extent and significance, we must go back in thought to the times in which this religious and moral conception sprang like a new creation from the mind of the Apostle, which was opened by the Holy Spirit to receive the knowledge of Christ and His work. This short Epistle to the Galatians was, then, like a lever powerful enough to lift the world from its old foundations and place it upon a new basis.

One is ready to ask somewhat curiously, whether this letter, begun in indignation (Chap. i. 6), continued in a strain of wondering pity (Chap. iii. 1), and closing with expressions of tenderest love (Chap. iv. 19), fulfilled its purpose, or whether after all it failed. M. Renan tells us that the Apostle, having dictated it in one breath, sent it off instantly without re-reading; and he thinks that if Paul had taken one hour to reflect, he would not have let it go in this form. M. Renan suggests many things which, if they were true, would make us hopeless of any good effects from this letter of the Apostle. Happily there are other considerations to reassure us. Two years later, the Apostle, when arranging for a collection to be made in Greece on behalf of the Church at Jerusalem, writes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xvi. 1), "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the Churches of Galatia, so also

do ye." We are certified, then, that the Christians of Galatia had placed themselves again under the guidance of the Apostle, and had recognised both the validity of his apostleship and the truth of his teaching. The letter had then done its work.

It remains for us to enquire into one special point which is not without importance if we would come to a right understanding of the Epistle to the Galatians, and indeed of Paul's ministry generally.

Who were these adversaries of the Apostle, who, after troubling the Churches of Antioch and Cilicia, now threatened to frustrate his work in Galatia?

In Acts xv. 1 they are described as certain men who came down from Judæa (to Antioch) and in ver. 5 they are introduced in these terms: "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying; It is needful to circumcise the Gentiles, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses."

From the sequel of the narrative in the Acts, it is evident that this proposal was rejected by the apostles and the elders and Church at Jerusalem. Baur and the Tübingen school maintain that this narrative in the Acts is incorrect, and ought to be rectified by that of St. Paul himself (Gal. ii.). They hold that the apostles themselves shared in the wish to make circumcision and the Mosaic law binding upon the Gentiles. It was they themselves who tried to compel Paul to have Titus the Gentile, whom he had brought with him to Jerusalem, circumcised before being admitted into the Church there. This is the special argument of Hilgenfeld, who has treated the subject with much ability.

It is said in Gal. iv. 2 that Paul absolutely refused to have Titus circumcised because of the *false brethren privily brought in* who tried to bring him into this bondage. St. Paul refused *because of them* says Hilgenfeld; it follows then

that the refusal was not addressed to them directly. And if not, to whom then was it addressed but to the apostles?

This seems a fair argument, but it proves the very opposite of what is intended. If, indeed, the *false brethren* privily brought in, had demanded the circumcision of Titus in concert with the apostles, and on grounds on which they were all agreed, why should Paul have refused, because of the false brethren, not because of the apostles?

But even supposing the apostles had really desired Paul to have Titus circumcised—which is nowhere said and cannot be proved—they would in any case have asked it in quite another spirit and for quite other reasons than those urged by the *false brethren*; and it was because the reasons advanced by these false brethren, and by them alone, were incompatible with the Apostle's principles, that he absolutely refused to accede to their demand. There was then an essential difference between the motives of the false brethren and those of the apostles. What was this difference? This is not hard to understand. The false brethren said "Circumcision is essential, without it there is no salvation for the Gentiles" (Acts xv. 1-5), while the apostles, supposing they had urged the same thing upon Paul, would have said, "Doubtless you are free in this matter; but if you can yield the point, do so for the sake of the Church's peace and out of consideration for those among us whose consciences would otherwise be wounded." If the request had been made to Paul in this way, as a free concession, he might have yielded out of Christian deference to others, for circumcision was to him a matter of indifference from a moral point of view (Chap. vi. 15). He could practise it or set it aside as seemed best for the kingdom of God (1 Cor. ix. 19-22). But here were false brethren, who would have abused any concession, and would, without fail, have construed it into an obligation to which he had been compelled to submit; and this would have been made a precedent

which would ever after have crippled him in carrying the Gospel of liberty to the Gentiles. Hence the Apostle's inflexible refusal, This is the explanation of ver. 3, 4. The Gentiles generally at Jerusalem were not required to be circumcised, so that even (*οὐ δέ*, ver. 3) the Gentile Titus, who was there present in the midst of that assembly of Jewish Christians, was not compelled to submit to the rite, and that (*διὰ δέ*, ver. 4), precisely because of certain false brethren who would have exalted its observance.

The position then is perfectly clear. At the two extremes were, the false brethren on the one hand, and St. Paul on the other. The former insisted on the acceptance of the law by the Gentiles, and their incorporation with the Jewish people, as a condition of salvation. The Apostle, on the contrary, considered not the Gentiles only but the believing Jews themselves as freed from the law of Moses, the law being abolished for them by the Cross of Christ (Chap. ii. 19). Between these two extremes there were various shades of opinion, as was the case at the time of the Reformation and in all such great revolutions of thought. First, there were the Twelve, who, like the great mass of the Judæo-Christians, continued to observe the law, but who were not desirous, as the false brethren were, to make it incumbent upon the Gentiles. This is sufficient proof that they did not regard these legal observances as necessary to salvation, but simply as an act of piety becoming a Jew, and from the fulfilment of which only God Himself could release them. This they expected Him to do on the return of Messiah. Of the Twelve, Peter, when he was among the Gentiles, even went so far as to hold himself free from the Levitical law concerning clean and unclean meats, preferring to [it the higher law of Christian brotherhood. Had he not been taught this lesson by his vision at Joppa? (Acts x. 10-16, 28, 29.)

James, on the other hand, seems to have held the

Christians of Jewish origin bound to a rigorous observance of the Mosaic law, even when mixing with Gentiles. This comes out clearly from Gal. ii. 12, where we are told of certain who were sent from James, and who, coming to Antioch, recalled Peter to order. It must be admitted that James had on his side at least the tacit consent of the conference at Jerusalem (Acts xv.). If he carried too far, and interpreted too strictly, the conclusions there arrived at, it must be borne in mind that he was not an apostle, and that the Lord had had reasons for not calling him to this service.

But why does St. Paul give to the ultra-legalists the name of false brethren, and speak of them as *privily thrust in*? What right can he have to call in question their sincerity and their discretion? It is not difficult to find in the Epistle the answer to these questions. We see, from what he says (Chap. v. 11), "But I brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? then hath the stumbling-block of the cross been done away," that the adversaries of Paul did not persecute him really for the preaching of the cross, but simply because he would not, in preaching among the Gentiles, add to it the obligation to be circumcised. These false brethren had only accepted the Gospel as a means of extending over the whole world the reign of the law, and they would but too gladly have welcomed the immense missionary influence of the Apostle, if they had been able to turn it to account as a means of spreading Mosaism among the Gentiles. It was solely because Paul would not lend himself to this manœuvre, that they pursued him with their hatred, and hindered his work in every way possible. Hence Paul calls them "false brethren." They looked at Christianity only as a means for bringing about the triumph of Judaism, and if they professed to believe in Jesus as Messiah it was only in order to advance the triumph of Moses and the kingdom of Israel

among the Gentiles. With them, the law was the end, and the cross the means. Could Paul consider such faith sincere?

If to the epithet "false brethren," Paul adds "privily thrust in," he does not refer to their having unwarrantably joined themselves to the Church, for this would be mere repetition, and St. Paul never repeats himself; but he refers to the fact that they had come to the Church at Antioch, not as brethren desirous of being instructed and edified with the rest, but as spies, bent on finding out what was passing in the young Church, and particularly desirous to see how Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jewish Christians comported themselves. This is what Paul intends when he says that they were come "to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage" (Chap. ii. 4). The Epistles to the Corinthians will give us yet further information as to these converts from Pharisaism, whose hearts had remained the same under the Gospel as under the law—indeed, had become worse. When the "old man" assumes the part of the Christian, he becomes two-fold more the son of Gehenna. It is not enough that the old serpent changes his skin, he must needs die.

F. GODET.

EXEGETICAL NOTES FROM SERMONS.¹

OUR FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST IN NATURE.

Heb. ii. 14.—Forasmuch then as the children *have in common* with one another the nature of *blood and flesh*, He also Himself *took of the same nature with them*. That is, in the incarnation He assumed our nature in its weakness of flesh that He might first by suffering hallow it and by

¹ Canon Evans has kindly allowed the Editor to select various exegetical notes from his sermons preached in Durham Cathedral.