

*A HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE
TO THE GALATIANS.*

XVIII. FOOLISH GALATIANS.

Now that we have fixed the precise sense of the word Galatians as "men of the Roman Province Galatia," and therefore pointedly distinguished from "men of the Lycaonian, or of the Phrygian nation," the question is as to the meaning and innuendo of the address "foolish Galatians."

First, perhaps, one must notice the objection, that one ought not to lay too much stress on a mere name in an apostrophe of this kind. That is the objection of one who sits in a study and comments on the text, not of one who recognises what use the orator or the preacher can make of a name. The very rarity and unusualness of the word "Galatians" in the Pauline sense, the very fact that only Romans or persons speaking decidedly and pointedly from the Roman point of view employed the name in that sense, made it a word that arrested the attention of the audience, conveyed a wealth of meaning to them, and placed them at a certain point of view.

Let those who do not feel the force of the word "Galatae" in Paul's mouth, imagine what difference it would make to an audience in this country whether a speaker used the word "English" or "British" as an apostrophe: it might make all the difference with some audiences between the success or failure of the speech.

The force of the name that Paul uses depends on the state of society and feeling in South Galatia at the time; the contest that was in progress has been

described elsewhere.¹ On the one side was the native and national spirit, allied with the power of the priesthood and the great temples, the spirit of orientalism, of stagnation, of contented and happy ignorance of deep-rooted superstition. On the other side was the desire for education, the perception that Greece and Rome stood on a higher intellectual platform than the native religion and customs, the revolt from the ignorant and enslaving native superstition. It has been pointed out that the influence of the new religion was, necessarily and inevitably, on the side of Græco-Roman education and order, and that it proved far more powerful than either Greek or Roman government in spreading the use of the Greek language (which was the chief agent in Græco-Roman culture). The "men of the Province Galatia" are, therefore, those who desire education, who have shaken off the benumbing and degrading influence of the native magic and superstition, who judge for themselves as to the real value of the facts of life, who lay claim to insight and *Noesis*. There is a telling innuendo in the juxtaposition *ἀνόητοι Γαλάται*, "you who are showing yourselves devoid of *Noesis*," "Galatæ who fail in the first characteristic of Galatæ."

The apostrophe is, in short, a concentration into two words of the sting that lies in the whole paragraph, iii. 1-5. Your present conduct is irrational, you are sinking back to the old level of superstition and ignorance when you think to attain perfection by the flesh, by the physical acts and works of man, after you had for a time been on the higher level of the spiritual life.

¹ *St. Paul the Trav.*, chapter VI.

XIX. THE TWO STAGES, III. 3.

Are you so devoid of rational perception of the real value of things, so wanting in insight and Noesis? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?

It is clearly implied that the Galatian Christians had been led astray by a theory of lower and higher stages in Christianity. They were, of course, familiar from their pagan days with this idea of progress through an intermediate to a higher stage of religious life, reaching the perfect knowledge through an imperfect knowledge. They had, in perfect honesty but in utter want of true insight, been led to the idea that their former stage of Paulinism and spiritual religion was a preliminary. Those who were strong enough should proceed to the hard but ennobling stage of works, of troublesome and difficult service with their body and their flesh.

This idea had evidently been communicated to the Galatian Churches by the Judaizing emissaries. That shows that these emissaries accepted the Apostolic Decree, *Acts xv.*, quite as much as Paul himself did, but read it in a different sense. They did not contend, as many Jews previous to the Council and the Decree had contended, that in order to be a Christian the pagan convert must accept the whole Mosaic Law, they did not say "except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (*Acts xvi.*) It had been decided, formally and finally, that that contention was wrong and wicked, "subverting the souls" of the pagan converts (*Acts xv. 24*), and that such converts could be received into the Church without accepting more than the four necessary conditions (*Acts xv. 29*).

But the Decree readily lends itself to a quite plausible interpretation that the four conditions are a minimum, a mere concession to the weakness of those who were unfit to bear a "greater burden"; and that those who had strength to bear more should voluntarily go on to the perfect stage of bearing the whole burden.

The Galatian Churches were honestly convinced that such was the meaning of the Decree that Paul himself had brought them. They had, in the next place, easily been brought to regard him as the mere subordinate and messenger of the Apostles, and especially of the leaders among them. After these misconceptions had taken root, it was easy to lead on the Galatians to the last error—that Paul from jealousy was keeping most of them on the lower stage, that he was their "Enemy" when he told them to neglect ceremonial and stand fast in the spiritual stage,¹ while he carried on only some special favourites like Timothy to the perfect stage (*Gal.* v. 11).

XX. THE MARVELLOUS POWERS, III. 25.

The ultimate test and the indubitable proof that the Divine power had been working through Paul among the Galatians from the beginning, and that the Spirit had been given them, lay in the marvellous powers which had been imparted to them, and which they had exhibited in action.

It is beyond question that Paul believed not merely in the superhuman powers which he himself occasionally exerted, but also in the communication of similar powers to many of his converts. He appeals to the memory of

¹ It is clear that the word "enemy" in *Gal.* iv. 16 ought to be printed in inverted commas, if one follows the modern punctuation, as being the very word which was being used in Galatia about him. See the remarks in *EXPOSITOR*, July, p. 23, carrying out Professor Locke's idea.

the Galatians. They know that such powers have been exercised among them.

Tell me then (he says), you who received the Spirit, does He that liberally equips you with the Spirit and plants in you marvellous and extraordinary powers—does He, I say, do so because of the deeds of the Law or because you have been the listeners and disciples to the preaching of Faith? I do not need to supply the answer. You yourselves know the facts (which the historian has not failed to record), and you can answer the question. You remember the lame man at Lystra, who had the faith of salvation (as the historian says, *Acts* xiv. 9); you remember the disciples at Antioch filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (xiii. 52); you remember the signs and wonders that were done at Iconium (xiv. 3),¹ and among the Gentiles in general (xv. 12), and you know that Barnabas and I could do such works only where there was in you "the faith of being saved"²; you have learned in your own case that "God has borne you witness, giving you the Holy Spirit even as He did unto us Jews, and has made no distinction between us and you, cleansing your hearts by faith" (xv. 8, 9). All this you remember; and further, you know that these mighty gifts were granted you before you had heard of this new Gospel of works of the Law, and when you knew only and believed only in the Gospel of Faith which alone had been preached to you during my earlier visit.

Are you, then, so void of insight into the truth of actual facts that, after having received such powers through the faith in which you began, you now seek to attain a more perfect stage of Christian life through physical ceremonies and acts? Has it done nothing for you that the Spirit acted so powerfully on you and in you? Nothing, do I

¹ Assuming that this verse is Lukan: see *St. Paul the Trav.* p. 108. The differences of text in the Iconian episode are very great.

² See note, p. 200.

say? Perchance it has really been the worse for you that you have received and then fallen away from the Spirit.

XXI. THE TEACHING OF PAUL.

In the following sections it is necessary to study a number of sayings and arguments in the Epistle involving the whole theology of Paul. Our purpose must be properly understood, lest it be thought that the attempt is too bold and presumptuous. The aim of these sections is not to discuss from the theological or the philosophic point of view the real meaning and nature of Paul's doctrines. My purpose is much humbler. It is simply to try to determine what thoughts and feelings and memories Paul's words roused in the Galatians, what meaning his teaching had had for them. Our purpose is historical; and we are treating a small part, yet one of the most important and most difficult parts, of the general problem, What did Christianity accomplish in the Roman world during the first century?

The materials for forming a judgment are (1) what we know about the religious ideas of the peoples of Asia Minor, especially in the districts which had been least affected by Greek influence and were most purely native¹; (2) the information given by Luke in *Acts*, which, however, is very slight, as it lay quite outside of his purpose to record for future generations a picture of the character and mind of Paul's converts; (3) the information given by Paul himself in his Epistle to the Galatians. In *Colossians* and *Ephesians* we find teaching of a more advanced

¹ The evidence bearing on this point is or will be collected in the *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* (see especially I. 51 f., 89 f., 134 f., 262 f., 292 f.; II. 356 f., 414 f., 625 f., 630 f.). Many details may also be found in various other works, especially Buresch's *Aus Lydien*, 1898. Some papers in the *Expository Times*, October, etc., 1898, will discuss the analogy between many of the forms and words of the pagan ritual and the language of the early Church.

character; but in *Galatians* the intention is to rouse afresh the emotions and sentiments which characterized the Galatian Churches in their first years, to appeal from their later selves to their earlier selves. Hence Paul's arguments here have to a certain extent the character of reminiscences, for they are designed to rouse memories among his readers.

XXII. THE MESSAGE TO THE GALATIANS.

Paul had set before the Galatians from the first that the spiritual life was the true and final and perfect Christianity; and the way by which they entered this spiritual life was explained by "setting forth openly before their eyes Jesus Christ crucified." This brief phrase recalled to them many memories. We, on our part, cannot fail to ask what were these memories. How was this remarkable expression made intelligible to the pagan audiences to whom Paul had appealed? Let us try to imagine to ourselves the mind of such pagans, when such an absolutely novel form of words was first presented to them; in what way was it made to convey a distinct idea to them? We are so familiar with such phrases from childhood, that we accept them as full of meaning and power, often perhaps taking them on credit rather than really understanding what they mean. But Paul was not merely expressing this idea to pagans who had never heard it, he was expressing it for the first time in the world's history; he had stepped on to a new plane in the development of thought, beyond what any of the other Apostles had reached previously.

It was certainly not by skilful philosophic exposition of an abstruse doctrine that Paul expounded his idea of life gained through the death of Christ. Nowhere else does he allude so plainly and pointedly to his method as in the

sentences that form the transition from the autobiographical retrospect that occupies most of chapter ii. to the doctrinal exposition of chapter iii.

Observe, too, with what art, and yet how naturally, this reminiscence of his method is introduced. The public address to Peter before the whole Antiochian Church, ii. 14, passes by imperceptible stages into a recital of his own experience in his conversion and the beginning of his new life. The reader begins the recital, ii. 15, with the idea that Paul is relating what he said among the Antiochians. He ends it, ii. 21, feeling that Paul has drifted away from a mere narrative of the Antiochian crisis into the memory of that crisis in his own life, which was ever present to his mind. The Galatians recognised in the recital the exact form of his message and gospel to them; they saw at the same time that it was the message spoken in Antioch; and they had the assurance given at the outset of the letter that the whole Antiochian Church joined with Paul in writing to them, and endorsed this recital as a statement of the gospel which they also had heard.

Much of the effect of this paragraph, ii. 14-21, depends on the place whence the letter was written. The Church in Syrian Antioch is relating to the Churches in Galatia what Paul always had preached to it and had said briefly to Peter. Thus it was impressed on the Galatians that Paul's Gospel was everywhere exactly the same, always sufficient in itself for all occasions, powerful even in face of Peter, absolutely simple and perfectly complete.

No one can really understand that idea except him in whom it has been made part of his life; and Paul explained it to the Galatians by looking back into his own life and speaking out of his own heart. As usual, we come again to what was stated above,¹ "you understand nothing in Paul unless you take it in its relation to his conversion"; "on

¹ EXPOSITÏON, July, p. 28.

our conception of that one event depends our whole view of Paul's life." It would be out of place here to study fully the historical and biographical aspect of the problems connected with the conversion; but the terms in which Paul refers to it here, ii. 19, 20, compel us to try to realize the manner in which he had set it before the Galatians if we want to get any clear conception of the effect that this and the following paragraphs produced on them.

The idea had come to Paul through revelation, *i.e.* through direct intercourse of man with the Divine nature. In such intercourse there is involved not merely the willingness of the Divine nature to manifest itself (for that condition always exists), but also willingness and fitness of the man to become sensitive to the manifestation—a certain state of the mind and of the body is needed. The required conditions existed in Paul on several occasions; and it is in every case interesting to observe them so far as we can.

It is evident in these words of v. 19, "I through law died to law," that Paul had been originally a man profoundly convinced of sin, and eager to escape from it by zealous obedience to the Law. With that strong consciousness ever present in his mind, he was travelling to Damascus, bent on annihilating the effect produced by that Impostor, who had outraged the Law, and rightly had suffered death as the due penalty, but had left behind Him some misguided followers, who continued to outrage the Law. As he came along "the way of the sea," and reached the crest of the very gentle elevation which bounds the plain of Damascus on the south,¹ the view of the scene

¹ I follow the old tradition as to the locality—a tradition which commended itself to the judgment of Sir Charles Wilson, and which seems to me to have every appearance of truth and unbroken continuance. The situation, however, at Kaukab, near 10 or 12 miles from Damascus, was found to be very inconvenient for pilgrims; and the Latins therefore moved the site in modern times to a spot close to the city, and on the East side of it, not on the South!

of his coming work produced naturally a strong effect on his peculiar and susceptible temperament. The long journey, day after day, with nothing to do except to count the miles that still divided him from his goal and to think of the work that lay before him, inevitably produced an intense concentration of purpose, which gave the mind supreme sovereignty over the body. This effect was accentuated by the spare diet, inevitable in Eastern travel—diet sufficient to keep the mind alert and the body in health, but not sufficient to enable “this muddy vesture of decay” to “grossly close in” the soul and screen it more effectually from perceiving the spiritual world by which we are always, but generally unconsciously, surrounded—just sufficient to produce an exaltation and stimulation of the faculties, which is as far removed from the unhealthy and morbid excitation induced by extreme over-fatigue, or by unnatural starvation and fasting, as it is from the dulled and contented state that results from a full and generous diet.

Few, if any, persons can have much experience of travel in such circumstances, with the sun watching them day after day in pitiless and unvarying calmness from its rising to its setting, without having their nature deeply affected, and even passing permanently into a new life and temper. But in a nature which was already so sensitive to the Divine world around it as Paul's, all the conditions were fulfilled which raised him above the ordinary limitations of humanity. It was a supreme crisis in his life, like that in the hall of the proconsul at Paphos, like that when he perceived the “faith of being saved”¹ which looked through the eyes of the lame man at Lystra. In the bright light that shone about him, he saw and heard what none of his

¹ πιστιν τοῦ σωθῆναι, an untranslatable expression. It indicates that state of the will and temperament which made a person capable of being cured or saved, able to respond to the word of Paul.

travelling companions could see or hear. He saw as a living, Divine reality Him whom he had believed to be a dead Impostor. Paul's whole theory of life had been founded on the belief that Jesus was dead; but when he recognised that Jesus was living, the theory crumbled into dust. If He was not dead, He was not an Impostor. He had suffered the last penalty of the Law, He had submitted to the curse pronounced on "every one that hangeth on a tree" (*Gal.* iii. 13); but yet He was not accursed, but living and glorified. The Law, by being satisfied, had no longer any effect upon Him: it had ceased to exist for Him when He through its operation died to it.

Vividly and deeply conscious that he was a sinner before the Law, Paul accepted the full penalty of his sin: through the operation of the Law, he died to it: he received the curse upon him, taking to him the crucifixion of Christ. By so doing he ceased to exist for the Law, and the Law no longer existed for him: he entered on a new life. But this new life became his only through his belief in Jesus as the living God: the rest of his life was given him through his faith in the Son of God, whose voluntary death had opened to Paul this new life free from the terrors of the Law and the ever-present fear of death. Had it been possible to attain through the Law this new life, this life free from the curse pronounced by the Law against every one who failed to walk in it (*Gal.* iii. 10), Christ's death would have been useless. Paul had found for himself that the new life could not be attained by striving to obey the Law; he knew that nothing could give it except the perfect and soul-possessing recognition that Christ had died voluntarily on his behalf and yet was still living.

The power which Paul's Gospel had over the Galatians lay in its origin out of his own experience. He was the living proof that it was true. It had given him his new life. What it did for him it could do for all.

Therein lay the sufficient answer to any mere abstract philosophical objection: how can the death of one man gain pardon for the sins of another? In reply Paul narrated the facts. That shame and curse of the Crucifixion he had embraced as his own; he had grasped it and taken it into his own soul; he had made it the deepest part of his own nature; he had founded his entire consciousness and his entire mind upon it. It remade the universe for him; it recreated his life and thought and soul and energy; the simple fact that he stood and spoke before them was the unanswerable proof that his message was true.

But Paul had preached in Syrian Antioch, and it was involved in the truth of his message, that the Law ceased to have any power over him, when he accepted the penalty and the shame, and died to the Law. If, therefore, he should "build up again those things which he had destroyed" (*Gal.* ii. 18), if he should begin once more to recognise the Law as existing for him, he would "prove himself a transgressor," he would sacrifice the justifying effect of his belief in Jesus, he would be bringing himself back into the former condition of vivid, intense consciousness of sin and inability to escape from the penalty; he would "make void the grace of God" (ii. 21), he would be experiencing in vain the Divine power (iii. 4). If he made the Law a power over him, Christ would profit him nothing (v. 2).

The Law had produced in him that intense and overpowering consciousness of guilt and sin, which was a necessary stage in the way of salvation. But by satisfying it, he annihilated it as a power over himself.

Those who would be saved must go through the same process: first the intense consciousness of sin; then the actual experience how belief in Christ enabled them to die with Him to the Law, and enter on the new life, which

thus was opened to them. How irrational it was thereafter to restore for themselves the power which the Law exerted over those who were under it and suffering the hopeless consciousness of guilt which it produced, and worse than irrational! Their experience of the Spirit would be vain and useless to them, and would perhaps be a positive disadvantage to them, if they now began to build up again what they had destroyed (*Gal.* ii. 4). "If ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing" (v. 2), "Christ died for naught" (i. 21).

XXIII. SONS OF ABRAHAM, III. 6-9.

As Abraham's faith in God was counted to him for righteousness, so your faith in Jesus was counted to you. You know, then, that they who cleave to the rule of Faith, inherit Abraham's Faith, and are his sons (for he that inherits is a son).

The idea that they who follow the principle of Faith are sons of Abraham, whatever family they belonged to by nature, would certainly be understood by the Galatians as referring to the legal process called *νόθεσία*. In cities like Pisidian Antioch the Greek law on this subject certainly existed previous to the Roman period.¹ When Antioch became a Roman colony, the Roman law was introduced, but it is well established that in the East the Roman law was much affected by native customs.² The essential

¹ Antioch was a Greek foundation; but similarly every true *polis* in Asia Minor older than the Roman conquest probably used Greek law; for the *polis* was a purely Greek institution, and not of native growth.

² On this subject see Mitteis, *Reichsrecht und Volksrecht*. The excellent paper by Dr. W. E. Ball in the *Contemporary Review*, Aug., 1891, p. 278 ff., suffers from his assumption that Paul must be referring purely to Roman law. In the Latin-speaking Provinces of the West, it would be safe to make that assumption; but in the Greek-speaking Eastern Provinces, where the Romans came in contact with an old-standing civilization and law, they were too good administrators to try to overturn the entire native system and set their own in its place. Mitteis has shown how much *Volksrecht* affected *Reichsrecht* in the Eastern Provinces.

legal characteristics of the Greek process *νόθευσις* do not materially differ from the original Roman theory of Adoption; but the language here and in other parts of chapters iii. and iv. suits better the Greek than the Roman idea as they actually existed at this period.

Mitteis, *l. c.*, p. 339 f., *apropos* of a passage in the fifth-century Syrian-Roman Lawbook, has discussed the same question which meets us here, and has decided it on grounds which are perfectly applicable here, though, naturally, he does not notice the parallel case in Paul's letter. In several places his argument might almost be taken as a reply to Dr. W. E. Ball's paper (quoted above in a footnote); though in all probability he never saw that paper. Applying his reasoning, we observe that Paul and the Galatians would neither use nor understand arguments founded on the original character of Roman Adoption: they could know Roman law only as it was in their time, when Roman heirship had become quite dissociated from the idea of sonship. But the forms of language in Asiatic states continued long after Paul's time to follow the ancient Greek expression that the heir is the son, that the family of the deceased lives on in the heirs, that heir and son are interchangeable terms, that "to make a will" means "to adopt a son." In the Greek view it was a calamity both to the individual and to the State, if a citizen died without leaving an heir to carry on the family and continue the family religion: the State, which was an association of families, lost one of its members, the gods of the family lost their worship, and the dead citizen lost the rights and gifts which he was entitled to receive from the surviving family. The State, therefore, looked after the continuance of the family, if the individual citizen had neglected his duty. The only way in which a childless individual could acquire an heir was by adopting him: hence to adopt, *εἰσποιεῖσθαι*, and to bequeath, *διατίθεσθαι*,

are used as equivalent terms: childless, *ἄπαις*, and intestate are practically the same idea.¹ In Roman law adoption imitated nature, and the adopted son was assimilated as much as possible to the son by birth. In Athens, in order to keep the property in the family, the adopted son was permitted and encouraged to marry the daughter of the deceased, thus saving the dowry which she would otherwise require. In Asiatic countries where some traces of succession in the female line persisted, it is highly probable that the same marriage custom prevailed, on the theory that the adopted son acquired the right of the daughter to inherit by marrying her.²

The adopted heir, then, succeeds to all the religious obligations and position of the deceased. Conversely, he who succeeds to the religious position of any man is his son: there was no other form under which succession could be made, except through adoption. He who succeeds to the faith of Abraham is the son of Abraham. He could not acquire possession of Abraham's faith in any other way than as his son. "Ye know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham."

Among the Jews adoption had no importance, and hardly any existence. The perpetuity of the family, when a man died childless, was secured in another way, viz., the *levirate*. Only sons by blood were esteemed in the Hebrew view: only such sons could carry on the true succession, and be in a true sense heirs. From every point of view the

¹ See Daremberg et Saglio, *Dict. des Antiq.*, art. *Adoption*.

² In the Asiatic countries this was not felt to make any difference between the position of the son by nature and the son by adoption, for apparently both kinds of sons according to the primitive religious law acquired right of inheritance by marrying the heiress, their sister by nature or by adoption. The spread of Greek customs tended to discourage marriage between natural brother and sister, except in cases where something peculiarly sacred, such as the right to the throne, was concerned. How far the Athenian custom of marrying the adopted son to the heiress was a survival of an ancient social custom we need not here enquire.

thought in iii. 7 is abhorrent to Hebrew feeling. It is one of the passages which show how far removed Paul was from the mere Jewish way of thinking; he differed in the theory of life, and not merely in the religious view. Quite apart from the fact that the Jews naturally abhorred the idea that the Gentiles could become sons of Abraham, the very thought that the possessing of a man's property implied sonship was unnatural to them. Paul had grown up amid the surroundings and law of Græco-Roman society; otherwise the expression of iii. 7 could not come so lightly and easily from him.

Such passages as this have led some very learned Jewish scholars of my acquaintance, whose names I may not quote, to declare in conversation their conviction that the letters attributed to Paul were all forgeries, because no Jew of that age could write like that, whether he were Christian or no. So far as I may judge, they undervalue the cosmopolitan effect, produced on the Jewish-Roman and Greek citizens living for generations in Greek and Roman cities, just as much as many distinguished European scholars do, when they fancy that Paul is a pure Jew, unaffected except in the most superficial way by Greek thought.

Further, a distinct and well-marked stage in the development of law is implied as existing among the audience to which Paul addresses himself. In what part of Asia Minor may we expect to find such ideas of legal usage current during the first century after Christ? That question now demands consideration.

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