

*HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE
TO THE GALATIANS.*

XLVII. FREEDOM.

VERSE 13 resumes the subject of verse 1.¹ "Now, as I was saying, *you* have been called to be free, but do not misunderstand the word! Do not misuse the freedom as an opening for sensual enjoyment! Rather serve one another through love. You desire to be slaves of the Law. Let this service to others be your slavery, and remember that for you the Law is completely fulfilled in the observance of the one principle, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. Whereas, if you show malignity in word or deed to your neighbour, the issue will be mutual destruction."

Very characteristic here is the recurrence to the word Freedom; the most remarkable feature in the whole Epistle is the prominence given to the idea of Freedom. An arithmetical statement will make this plain. The words *ἐλεύθερος*, *ἐλευθερία*, *ἐλευθερώω*, occur in this Epistle eleven times; but in *Romans* they occur only seven times, in the two *Corinthians* eight times, and in all the rest of Paul's Epistles twice.

It is not a sufficient explanation to say that the idea was forced into prominence by the subject on which Paul has to write. The same subject is treated at far greater length in *Romans*, and the words occur much less frequently. The idea of freedom is not the only form under which the struggle against Judaism can be expressed; one might also look at it from other points of view. The prominence of the idea is something special to this Epistle.

¹ The particle *γάρ*, in 13, is not to be treated as giving a reason for something said in the last verse. It indicates that the proper subject is taken up again after a digression.

It may be said that Paul here appeals to a specially strong feeling in the minds of his readers: that it is because they were free in heart and in aspiration that he tries to rouse this strong characteristic of theirs against the Judaistic propaganda.

That argument does injustice to Paul. From that point of view one will always misjudge him. If he simply desired to win a victory over Judaism, he might appeal to them in that way; but he had a far wider view and aim. He does not simply select such arguments as will weigh most at the moment with his Galatian readers. He is content with no victory that does not strengthen the whole mind and character of the Galatians. As has been already pointed out, his purpose in the Epistle is not to frame an argument against Judaism: he tries to elevate and ennoble the minds of the Galatians, so that they may look at the question from a higher and truer point of view.

Therefore he does not seize on the more powerful emotions and passions of his readers, and try to harness these against Judaism. He tries to strengthen their weakness, and to make their minds harmonious and well-balanced, so that they may judge truly and wisely. If Paul calls the Galatians to freedom, and repeats the call, and presses home the idea to them, it is not because they were already specially free in mind and thought. It is because they were a people that needed to be roused to freedom—a people in whom the aspiration after freedom was dormant, and must be carefully fostered and fanned into flame.

It is obvious how appropriate and necessary this topic was in addressing a people like the Phrygians and Lycaonians of the South-Galatian Province, "just beginning to rise from the torpor of Oriental peasant life, and to appreciate the beauty of Greek thought and the splendour

of Roman power.”¹ Lack of the sense of individuality and freedom characterizes the Oriental mind as distinguished from the Western. That sense was peculiarly lacking in the Phrygians, who were reckoned by the ancients as pre-eminently the nation born and intended for slaves; but what is called the Phrygian character by the ancients was really the character of the Anatolian plateau as a whole (apart from the mountaineers of the coastward rim), simple, easy-minded, contented, good-humoured, submissive, yet capable of being roused to extreme religious enthusiasm; a people possessing many of the fundamental virtues, but needing intermixture with a more sprightly people in order to develop into a really strong and good race. Mixture and intercourse and education had planted the seeds of higher individual development among them, but the young growth needed careful tending. All that is said in chapter vi. of *St. Paul the Traveller* on the situation in Antioch, Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra at the time of Paul’s first visit, and on the spirit of his work there, bears on this subject. The Epistle is a continuation of the work of the first journey.

So he leads them up towards freedom. But there is a danger. Freedom may easily be misconstrued and abused, and he points out the safeguard. It lies in Love; and he quotes the Saviour’s epitome of the whole law of human conduct.

A single enunciation of this so important warning, about the danger and the safeguard, was not enough. Therefore a special paragraph repeats and enlarges it.

XLVIII. THE SPIRITUAL LIFE, v. 16-26.

“What I mean is this: if you make the Spirit your guide, you will not live the sensual life. For, in the Divine

¹ *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 149.

plan, the spirit and the flesh are ever in opposition within your minds; and in so far as you walk by the Spirit you are freed from Law. You can see for yourselves what are the results of the two opposing principles. Around you in the Galatian cities you see¹ the vices that are the works of the flesh; and they who are guilty of those vices shall never be the heirs of God. I warned you against those evils, when I was last among you,² and I warn you now again.

“The life of the Spirit matures in love and the kindred virtues: where they rule, Law ceases. If you are of Jesus Christ, you have nailed on the cross the flesh with its passions and lust, and died to the life of sensuality. Therefore, if you make the Spirit your guide, this must be seen in your daily life. To take a special example of the general rule, if you are jealous and censorious of your neighbours, you are not living the spiritual life.”

The prominent faults of South-Galatian society are set before the readers in *vv.* 19–21. These are the faults that they saw everywhere round them, and these are the faults to which they were themselves liable. Paul had seen this on his second journey, and had already cautioned them. His first journey was the period of conversion, followed by organization: on his second journey the dangers that beset the young Churches were brought painfully home to him, and he warned them against reproducing under a disguise of Christianity the faults of their age and surroundings. Now once more he strives against them. He must strengthen their whole nature and character, and then the Judaistic evil will be corrected with their growing strength.

¹ *Φανερά* is in an emphatic position as first word of the sentence, and must be pressed in translation.

² See the last paragraph of this section.

XLIX. THE FAULTS OF THE SOUTH-GALATIC CITIES.

In the list of fifteen faults, there are three groups, corresponding to three different kinds of influence that were likely to affect strongly recent converts from paganism. Such converts were liable to be led astray by habits and ways of thought to which they had been brought up, owing to (1) the national religion, (2) their position in a municipality, (3) the customs of society in Hellenistic cities.¹ We take each group separately.

1. Faults fostered by the old Anatolian religion. These are five: fornication, impurity, wantonness, idolatry, sorcery or magic. The first three are usually regarded by commentators as springing from the character of the individuals addressed, in whom sensual passion is assumed to have been peculiarly strong. But more probably and more naturally, Paul thinks here of the influence exerted by their old religion in patronizing vice, and treating it as part of the Divine life.² The subject is too unpleasant to enter on. Yet to understand properly the position of the new religion in Asia Minor, one must take into consideration that the old religion had remained as a relic of a very primitive state of society; that it consecrated as the Divine life the freedom of the beasts of the field; that it exhibited to the celebrants in the holiest Mysteries the relations of the Divine personages, who are the emblems and representatives and guarantees of that primitive social system amid which the religion had taken form; and that it regarded all moral restraint and rules as interference

¹ The list 1 *Corinthians* vi. 9 ff. is not exactly parallel, but near enough to be called by Steck the model after which this whole list of fifteen faults in *Galatians* has been forged. The contrast between them is remarkable. The Galatian list is narrowly defined: the Corinthian list ranges over the various crimes of human nature.

Not so in *Col.* iii. 5 ff., where he is expressly speaking of the evil tendencies that lie in human nature and character.

with the Divine freedom. The religion of the country was actually on a lower level than the tone of ordinary pagan society. Vice was not regarded as wrong in pagan society: it was regarded as necessary—the only evil lying in excess. But in the old religion it was inculcated as a duty; and service at the temple for a period in the practice of vice had once, apparently, been universally required, and was still imposed as a duty on individuals through special revelation of the Divine will. This extreme was looked down upon with contempt, but without serious moral condemnation, as mere superstition by the more educated society of the cities. Yet even in the cities it certainly was far from having lost its hold; and to obey the Divine command and live the Divine life at the temple for a period caused no stigma on the individual, and was actually recorded publicly in votive offerings with inscriptions.

From this point of view the third fault—*ἀσέλγεια*—is illustrated. Lightfoot explains that it implies something openly insolent, shocking public decency. The act which was most characteristic of Phrygian religion in the eyes of the world was the public self-mutilation practised sometimes by its votaries in religious frenzy. The word *ἀσέλγεια* is the strongest term of its kind in Pauline usage; and acts like that public mutilation, or those alluded to in the last words of the preceding paragraph, merit it.

It is unnecessary to say a word about the faults of idolatry and magic. The latter stood in close relation to the native religion; and it is difficult to draw the line between religion and magic in the numerous class of inscriptions in which curses and imprecations of evil or death are invoked on personal foes and on wrong-doers.

We shall not rightly conceive the Asia Minor character, unless we remember that the excesses of which it is capable

spring from religious enthusiasm. It is peculiarly subject to religious excitement. A passage of Socrates, that careful and unprejudiced historian, is valuable here, as illustrating both the Anatolian character and the influence exerted on it by Christianity. He says, iv. 28, that Phrygians exercise stronger self-restraint than other races, being less prone to anger than Scythians and Thracians,¹ and less given to pleasure than the eastern peoples (not fond of circus and theatre, and hating fornication as a monstrous crime). Along with the Phrygians he includes the Paphlagonians, so that it is the typical Anatolian races that he describes.

These were the nations that eagerly followed Novatian in refusing the sacraments to those who had after baptism been guilty of serious sin. Like Paul's Galatians, the Phrygian Novatians were eager to go to the extreme in religious matters; and, like them, they tended towards Judaism,² and made Easter agree with the Passover. It is precisely the same tendency of mind that caused both movements: not fickleness and changeableness, but enthusiasm, intense religious feeling, the tendency to extreme severity, and the leaning towards the Oriental and the Jewish forms.³

2. Faults connected with the municipal life in the cities of Asia Minor. Every one who reads this enumeration—enmities, strife, rivalry (so Lightfoot), outbursts of wrath, caballings, factions, parties, jealousies—eight out of

¹ He evidently takes them as representatives of the northern barbarians, and would certainly have summed up the Gauls along with them.

² Novatian himself showed no tendency to Judaism.

³ One might trace the tendency of the Phrygians towards Judaistic practices through the intermediate period, and in other parts of Phrygia. At Colossæ Paul had to correct the inclination to "a feast-day, or a new moon or a sabbath day" (*Col.* ii. 16), and to point out wherein lay the true circumcision (*Col.* ii. 11). In an inscription of about A.D. 200, which is probably Jewish-Christian, the name *Azuma* is used to indicate Easter (see *Cities and Bish. of Phr.*, pt. ii., p. 545 ff.; and there is now more to say about this inscription from recent discovery). On the Judaic-Christian inscriptions of Phrygia, see *Cities and Bish. of Phr.*, pt. ii., pp. 566, 652 f., 674 f., 700.

fifteen—must be struck with the importance attached by Paul to one special tendency to error among the Galatians.

Partly, no doubt, the Judaizing tendency would lead to division and strife, for we can well imagine that it was not universal, and that there was at least a minority that continued faithful to Paul in the Galatian Churches. But it would be a mistake to suppose that Paul was thinking of that one fact only: that would not explain the striking prominence of the idea. He is here viewing their life as a whole, and is not thinking only of the Judaistic question.

Firstly, the rivalry of city against city was one of the most marked features of municipal life in Asia Minor. The great cities of a province wrangled for precedence, until even the Emperor had to be invoked to decide between their rival claims for the first place. They invented titles of honour for themselves so as to outshine their rivals, and appropriated the titles that their rivals had invented. So in the Province Asia, Smyrna and Pergamos vied with Ephesus; in Bithynia Nikomedia vied with Nicæa; in Cilicia Anazarbos vied with Tarsos; and in Galatia we may be sure that Iconium vied with Antioch.¹

As Mommsen says, "the spirit of faction here at once takes possession of every association"; and again, "the urban rivalries belong to the general character of Hellenic politics, but especially of the politics in Asia Minor."²

But, if that was true of the unregenerate citizens, had the converts changed their nature? Surely not! The same characteristics existed in them as before. They were still citizens of Antioch or of Iconium. Throughout Paul's Epistles we see that his converts had not changed their nature, but were still liable to fall into the errors of their

¹ In Macedonia Philippi vied in the same way with Amphipolis, of which a trace is perceivable in *Acts* xvi. 12: see *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 206.

² *Provinces of the Roman Empire*, ch. viii., vol. i., pp. 357, 329.

pre-Christian life. We may feel very certain that there were strife and wrangling and jealousy between the Antiochean Church and the Iconian Church about precedence and comparative dignity.

Second, even within the cities there was room for jealousy and strife. There was in Antioch and Lystra the great division between Roman or Latin citizens of the *Colonia* and the *incolæ* or native dwellers: the burning subject of inequality of rights was always close at hand. We may be sure that there were both Roman and non-Roman members of the Church. No list of Galatian Christians has come down to us; but the Colony Corinth, where Latin names form so considerable a proportion¹ of the known Christians, furnishes a pertinent illustration. In Iconium and Derbe, where no Roman element of any consequence existed, there was the other cause (not absent in the *Coloniæ*) of difference in race—the native element, the Greek element, the Jewish element. Of these the native element was probably the weaker in the Churches, because the natives who were familiar with the Greek language usually reckoned themselves Greek: in fact the Greek element consisted mainly not of settlers from Greece, but of those Phrygian and Lycaonian families that had adopted Greek manners and education and dress.²

It is noteworthy that at Lystra those who are said to have spoken in the Lycaonian tongue were not Christians, but pagans (*Acts* xiv.). It was among the more educated classes that Christianity spread most rapidly (*St. Paul the Trav.*, p. 133 f.).

With these causes at work, it is easily seen how caballing

¹ Achaicus, Crispus, Fortunatus, Gaius, Lucius, Quartus, Tertius, Titius Justus. See art. "Corinth" in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, i. p. 480.

² That is the regular sense of "Ἕλληνες in the imperial inscriptions of Asia Minor; e.g., in such Provincial Associations as the Hellenes in (the Province) Asia (*οἱ ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀσίας Ἕλληνες*), or the Society of Hellenes in Galatia, the Hellenized natives of the Province are meant.

and jealousy should be a serious danger in the young Churches.

As Mommsen says again of Asia Minor: "Rivalries exist, as between town and town, so in every town between the several circles and the several houses." There were no great political or patriotic interests to absorb the passions and powers of man, and so they frittered away their energies in petty jealousies and rivalries and factions.

Paul's words seem, beyond any question, written with an eye to the ordinary Græco-Asiatic city: "Let us not be vainglorious, challenging one another, envying one another, v. 26." Vainglory and pride in petty distinctions was the leading motive in municipal life; the challenging of one another to competition in this foolish strife was almost the largest part of their history amid the peace and prosperity of the Roman rule.

But that is not the type of the North-Galatian tribes; the Gaulish element was an aristocratic one, and such are not the faults of an aristocracy.

If the Churches were thus liable to import the old urban rivalries into their mutual relations, what was Paul's part likely to be? Would he not impress on them the excellence of unity, the criminality of faction and jealousy? Would he not, even in small things, avoid anything and any word likely to rouse their mutual rivalry? Would he not class them as one body of Churches, the Churches of the Province, and appeal to them as "members of the Province Galatia." There was no other unity except that of Christian by which he could designate them. They lived in different countries, they sprang from different races. The one thing in which they were united was as members of the Empire, and their status in the Empire was as members of the Province, *i.e.* *Galatae*.

But when I pointed out that this term *Galatae* was the only common name by which Paul could address the four

Churches, some North-Galatian critics replied that there was no reason why Paul should sum up the four Churches in a common name. Surely that argument misses the character of the situation; it was urgently needful to sum them up as one body by one common name, recognised equally by all the four Churches.

The word *φόντοι*, introduced in most MSS. after *φθόντοι*, has been rightly rejected by many modern editors relying on its omission in the Vatican and Sinaitic and some less important MSS. It spoils the picture, and is merely a scribe's reminiscence of *Romans* i. 29.

3. Faults connected with the society and manners of the Græco-Asiatic cities. These are two—drinkings, revellings.

No comment is needed. The remains of the later Greek comedy, and the paintings on Greek vases, show how characteristic and universal such revels were in the Greek cities. *Komos*, the Revel, was made a god, and his rites were carried on quite systematically, and yet with all the ingenuity and inventiveness of the Greek mind, which lent perpetual novelty and variety to the revellings. The *Komos* was the most striking feature in Greek social life. Though we are too absolutely ignorant of the Græco-Phrygian society to be able to assert that this Greek custom flourished there, yet it is highly probable that those who adopted Greek manners and civilization adopted that characteristic feature, the *Komos*. It is too often the case that the vices of civilization are the first elements in it to affect the less civilized races when brought into contact with it.

Thus the second and third classes of faults belong specially to the Hellenizing section of Phrygian society, springing from the too rapid and indiscriminate assimilation of Greek ideas and Greek freedom. The first class of faults was most characteristic of the less progressive section

of society, the old native party. Both sections, doubtless, were represented in the young Churches; at any rate the faults were always blazoned before their eyes (*φανερά*), and the customs of society are apt to exercise a strong influence on all persons unless they are on their guard.

L. VI. 1-5.

The opening paragraph of chapter vi. is occupied still with the same subject as the last two. Paul is looking quite away from the Judaic controversy. He is absorbed in the development of his own Churches and the special faults that they have to face. He saw one serious danger in that Anatolian people, easy-tempered and orderly in most things, but capable of going to any extreme in religious madness. Just as in later time, "that unpitying Phrygian sect" was apt to cry—

Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave
Who sins, once washed by the baptismal wave—

so already Paul saw their tendency to unforgiving condemnation of him who had sinned, and warned them, "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness." To continue the quotation—

She sighed,
The infant Church! Of love she felt the tide
Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave.

And so Paul's Epistle to the Galatians is an outline of Phrygian Christian history: he saw what was the one safeguard for his young Churches, and he urges it on them, in paragraph after paragraph—Love.

And what have the North-Galatian theorists to say in illustration of this most characteristically Phrygian passage? Why, they are struck with the fact that a man in Corinth had committed a grave offence; Paul's appeal to

the Corinthian brethren to punish the offender "had been promptly and zealously responded to"; and "he had even to interpose for the pardon of the guilty one." And therefore "the remembrance of this incident still fresh on his mind, may be supposed to have dictated the injunction" to the Galatians here. Because the Corinthians had been severe, therefore the Gauls must be warned not to be severe!

But that is not Paul's method. When he warns the Galatians against a fault, it is not because the Corinthians had committed it, but because the Galatians were prone to it. If in any of his Epistles Paul is wholly absorbed in the needs of his first audience, it is in this to the Galatians. But so it was in all, more or less, with the exception of *Romans*; he speaks to the Church in Rome, not from personal knowledge, nor from report of their special circumstances (as to the Colossians), but in preparation for his own visit and from his experience in the Eastern Churches.

In the first four and a half chapters Paul is occupied specially in revivifying in the Galatians the impressions and the teaching of the first journey; from v. 13 onwards he is repeating the warnings that we can imagine formed the burden of his preaching on the second journey. But everywhere he feels himself on Anatolian soil, and is speaking to a typically Anatolian, and in particular a Phrygian, people; and the best preparation for studying the adaptation of his words to his readers is to study the typical peasant of the present day, as he presents him to the travellers that have observed himself with sympathy and affection. He is called an Osmanli now—he does not call himself a Turk, and rather resents the name—but he has much of the old Phrygian character.

ADDITION TO § XLII.

I HAVE insisted, both in *St. Paul the Traveller* (p. 97 f.) and in the *EXPOSITOR*, July, 1899 (p. 23), on the remarkable analogy between the expression used by Paul himself to describe one specially prominent accompaniment of his disease—"a stake in the flesh"—and the words which rise to the lips of several persons known to me, all innocent of Pauline prepossession, in describing their own experience of the headache that accompanies each recurrence of chronic malaria fever—"a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead." In corroboration of this, I may quote the description of "a bad attack of malarial neuralgia," given by the South African author, A. Werner, on p. 236 of his collection of stories, entitled *The Captain of the Locusts*, 1899. He speaks of "the grinding, boring pain in one temple, like the dentist's drill—the phantom wedge driven in between the jaws," and describes the acuteness of the suffering, in which every minute the patient seems to have "reached the extreme point of human endurance."

Is it possible to have more convincing analogies than this? A similar metaphor rises to the lips of quite independent persons to describe the sensation. There are perhaps some who may think it wrong procedure to imagine that Paul was really describing with what they might brand as morbid anatomical detail the exact species of pain that he suffered. I think Paul was not so different from the ordinary human being that he must describe his enemy in the flesh only by some general and vague expression. Every one who has to contend often with any special enemy of this kind, if he speaks of it at all, tends to use some phrase about it that reveals his own personal experience. Commonly he is silent about it; but if he is deeply moved, and alludes to it while he is showing his inmost

soul under the stimulus of emotion, his expression lights up by a flash the physical fact.

That is the case in 2 *Corinthians* xii. 7. There is no passage in all Paul's writings in which he is more deeply moved. There is no other passage in which he shows so much of his inner mind, or speaks so freely of his private personal experiences. He alludes, among these experiences, to his secret communing with the Divine nature; and he describes the counter-balancing evil at once an extremely painful, almost unendurable, suffering, and a serious impediment to his work. These are the two features about this enemy in the flesh, on which the human being is sure to insist. It is "a stake in the flesh,—a messenger of Satan," the enemy of the truth.

When we take this striking realistic detail in conjunction with the strong and very old tradition that Paul was in this expression describing the pain of headache, it seems to me that there is an exceedingly strong case, such as one could hardly have expected about such a matter. And this is clinched by the well-attested superstition current in Asia Minor that this affliction was the special weapon hurled by the gods of the underworld against criminals.

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