

*GALATIANS THE EARLIEST OF THE PAULINE
EPISTLES.*

THIS article is only meant for those who accept the "South Galatian" theory, and believe that "the Churches of Galatia" to whom St. Paul wrote were the Churches of Antioch, Iconium, etc., founded on his first missionary journey. The arguments in support of this view are best found in Sir W. Ramsay's well-known books, and need not be repeated here. Those who are still unconvinced, if they think it worth while to read what follows, will presumably do so only in order to amuse themselves with yet another of the extravagancies to which that theory leads its adherents.

Further, our argument will rest on the view that the visit to Jerusalem of Galatians ii. is *not* that for the council in Acts xv. A few words must be said in support of this position. If the identification is insisted on, the account either of St. Paul or of St. Luke must be abandoned as unhistorical. With all due respect for the ingenious pleading of Lightfoot and others, there is no escape from this conclusion; and presumably it is Luke's credit that must suffer, since he cannot in this connexion be considered an eye-witness. This means that the whole of Acts xv. must be thrown to the wolves as a comparatively late fiction intended to reconcile the two sections of the Church. It is hardly necessary to labour the point that such a view seriously discredits the credibility of the rest of the Acts, a result which will hardly be readily acquiesced in at a time when the current of critical opinion, under Harnack's influence, is setting so strongly in its favour. But the conclusion can only be disputed with success, if the premiss is abandoned. Let us then look at the premiss a little

more closely. There are two cogent reasons why Galatians ii. and Acts xv. should not be regarded as referring to the same event. (1) If they are identified, St. Paul ignores the visit of Acts xi. As we shall see, this visit was probably by no means so unimportant as is sometimes maintained. Even if it were, it was surely impossible for 'Paul to ignore it, and so quite gratuitously give an occasion to his opponents of which they would readily avail themselves. If it *was* of no consequence for his argument, it only needed a parenthesis of a few words to avoid all possibility of misunderstanding—and Paul is not afraid of parentheses. (2) The accounts in the two chapters simply do not tally. To talk about the private personal view as opposed to the public official account is not to the point. No one could imagine for a moment that Galatians ii. referred to a formal council of the Church at which the very point for which Paul was contending had been definitely and deliberately conceded. If this was the case, why in the world did he not say so clearly? Of this more later on; for the argument carries us further than the mere refusal to identify Galatians ii. and Acts xv. But at least as against that identification, it is surely sufficient and decisive.

Critics have, of course, suggested various solutions of these difficulties, such as the rejection of the visit of Acts xi. as unhistorical, or the elaborate reconstruction of the whole chronology of St. Paul's life which is associated with the name of Clemen. We need not stop to discuss these views; they are destructive of the credit of Acts, and become superfluous, if we can adopt the obvious solution, which is to identify the visits of Galatians ii. and Acts xi. It will probably be generally admitted that Ramsay has disposed of the chronological objection to this view. A glance at the varying tables of dates drawn up by scholars for the life of St. Paul shows at once how uncertain they

are. But at any rate there is no great difficulty in finding room for the "fourteen years" which our theory requires between the conversion of the Apostle and his second visit to Jerusalem. It will hardly be denied that the theory itself is natural enough. As we read the Epistle our first impression is that the writer is in fact describing his *second* visit to Jerusalem. A study of the context deepens the impression that if he has omitted any visit, however unimportant, he has been guilty of a most unfortunate error of judgment, if of nothing worse. When, however, we turn to Acts xi. we find good grounds for maintaining that the visit there related was by no means "unimportant" in its bearing on the future work of the Apostle of the Gentiles. The circumstances which led up to it were these. Unofficial missionaries had begun to convert "Greeks" ¹ at Antioch (Acts xi. 20). Barnabas is at once despatched by the Jerusalem Church as a man of tact and sympathy to deal with a delicate situation, and presumably in due course to report to the Mother Church on this very question of the relations between Jews and Gentiles. During his stay at Antioch, he fetches Saul, and on the occasion of the famine the two return to Jerusalem ("by revelation," Gal. ii. 2, in consequence of the prophecy of Agabus, Acts xi. 27).² It was inevitable that the representatives of the Apostles (it is of course a pure hypothesis

¹ There is of course the important variant 'Ελληνιστάς ("Grecians"), which is adopted by W.H. and R.V.m. Ramsay (*St. Paul*, p. 24) mentions this as one of the two cases in Acts where it is impossible to follow W.H.; and curiously enough Mr. Valentine-Richards, in *Camb. Biblical Essays*, p. 532, also instances it as one of their mistakes. 'Ελληνας is adopted by Tisch., Treg., Blass, Harnack, etc., and is absolutely required by the context. After Acts vi., to say nothing of other passages, it is impossible that preaching to *Hellenists* could have been mentioned as a new and significant departure.

² Titus is not mentioned either in Acts xi. or xv., or indeed anywhere in the book; therefore the omission of his name in Acts xi., as compared with Gal. ii., raises no *special* difficulty.

of the harmonizers of Acts xv. and Galatians ii. that there were none at Jerusalem at this time) should seize the opportunity of discussing the new departure at Antioch. Barnabas was their commissioner, and they were awaiting his report ; Paul is now associated with him in his work. It is quite in Luke's manner to leave it to his reader to assume that such a report was made, and we turn to Galatians for the details of the interview. The question of the admission of Gentiles is, as we have seen, already to the fore ; the Apostles admit the principle, though no conditions are laid down, except the continuance of assistance to the poor of the mother Church, "which very thing," says Paul, "I was also zealous to do" ; it was of course one main reason of this very visit to Jerusalem. Returning to the narrative of Acts, we understand at once on this view the events of xii. 25 and xiii., which follow immediately after the parenthesis of chapter xii. The first missionary journey may be regarded from one point of view as due to a revelation vouchsafed to the Church at Antioch ; from another, it is the direct result of a policy already sanctioned by the Apostles.

It is surely one of the curiosities of Biblical exegesis that orthodox scholars should have created an entirely unnecessary difficulty by continuing to reject this identification. Even before the reign of the "South Galatian theory" it was open to them to make it, as e.g. Calvin made it. But the purpose of this article is to suggest that while this view solves some of the difficulties connected with the Epistle, it does not go far enough. It does not explain why the Council is not referred to in Galatians, assuming that the letter was written after it had taken place. It is quite true that no mention of it may have been necessary for the purposes of the autobiographical sketch with which the Epistle opens, but some reference to its decisions was

absolutely called for by the argument of the remaining chapters. On what grounds can it possibly have been passed over? It has been suggested that its conclusions were of the nature of a compromise and uncongenial to Paul. Even if this may have been true of the prohibitions, it was not true of the main conclusions. And if it had been, it did not in the least relieve him of the necessity of dealing with them. For if *ex hypothesi* Paul could not quote them on his side, his opponents must have been quoting them on their's (they could not have been ignored by *both* parties), and he was bound to reply to their arguments unless he was prepared to throw over the authority of the Jerusalem Church. If, on the other hand, as is far more probable, the decisions were in St. Paul's favour, why should he neglect so strong a support? To say that they were local and temporary is only partially true and completely irrelevant. They were *local*—intended [for the very places in which the trouble had recently arisen; and *temporary*—applying to the very period at which Paul was writing. The suggestion may explain why they are not applicable to England in the twentieth century; it does not in the least explain why they should not have been applicable to Galatia in the middle of the first; Acts xvi. 4 is decisive on the point. And after all the main outcome of the Council lay in the recognition of the fact that circumcision was no longer necessary. This was neither local nor temporary, but a principle of permanent importance, and what is more, the very principle for which Paul was contending in the Epistle.

Let us realise the situation. Galatians is not like Romans, a more or less academic treatise, justifying an already existing state of affairs, and working out its implications; it is a religious pamphlet, issued red-hot in the midst of a burning controversy, and in view of a pressing danger.

The Judaisers are active with their pestilential teaching ; the infection is spreading rapidly in the newly-founded Churches, and must be checked by every possible means. Paul would intervene in person if he could, but he cannot, and has to content himself with a letter. He is bound under the circumstances to use every legitimate argument he can think of. Is it conceivable that if he can point to a formal decision of the Church conceding that circumcision is unnecessary for Gentiles he should refrain from doing so ? We need not further labour the point that his account of the private arrangement between himself and the Apostles is not an adequate representation of such a formal decision.

We may easily suppose a parallel case. Let us assume that the use of the Athanasian Creed in the services of the Anglican Church has at length been abolished. A Bishop writes to an Incumbent urging its discontinuance. He brings forward the familiar arguments against the creed, and forgets to remind his correspondent that Parliament and Convocation have now sanctioned its disuse, and that the law of the Church is now on his side. He would be omitting what for practical purposes is the crux of the matter.

The usual solution of the difficulty is to say that after the Council the Jewish party still held that circumcision was necessary to a *perfect* Christianity. An uncircumcised man might be a Christian "in a sense," but he only became a full Christian when he had submitted to circumcision, much as in later times the monk or religious was supposed to follow Christ in a higher sense than the Christian who remained in the world. The position after the Council may or may not have taken this form ; the unfortunate thing is that there is not a hint of it in Galatians. If the argument of the Judaisers had been " We admit circumcision

is not necessary, but it makes a man a better Christian," this must have come out clearly in St. Paul's reply. What he in fact deals with is the necessity of circumcision *per se*, and he never once refers to the perfectly clear official pronouncement on the subject, which is supposed to have been made in his presence at his own instigation a year or two before. In such a case, the "argument from silence" is valid and conclusive. No such pronouncement can yet have been made.

Accordingly we maintain that the Epistle to the Galatians must have been written before the events of Acts xv. 3. There is no difficulty in finding a place for it. It obviously belongs to the period covered by Acts xv. 1, 2. Judaisers claiming the sanction of James (v. 24, Gal. ii. 12) have visited Antioch; it is more probable than not that they should have extended their propaganda to the recently founded Churches of S. Galatia.¹ Remembering the strong Jewish element in Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, we see at once that the soil would be congenial. Paul hears of this at Antioch, but he cannot revisit the Churches, since he is needed where he is, and must soon go to Jerusalem. He writes the letter, bringing forward the arguments which he is using in person at Antioch, and will shortly use at Jerusalem. Peter's defection (Gal. ii. 11 ff.) belongs to the same time. Paul in dealing with it is not raking up a matter of ancient history; he is bound to discuss it since it is an element in the situation, which is no doubt being worked by the Jewish party for all it is worth. And we may note that Peter's change of attitude is at once far more intelligible and less discreditable, if it follows the merely informal interchange of views which took place at Paul's second visit, than if it has to be placed after the formal settlement of the question at the Council.

¹ Cf. the "so quickly" of Gal. i. 6.

How far, it may be asked, does this view harmonise with the rest of the *data* of Acts xv. ? At first sight there is a difficulty in the fact that the letter embodying the Council's decision is addressed to the Churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia ; why not Galatia too, if the trouble had already broken out there ? But the omission is equally strange on any view. The Churches of South Galatia are obviously the centre of Paul's narrative in verse 12 ; the Council unquestionably had them in mind, and whether they had been already "troubled" or not, the settlement was undoubtedly meant to apply to them, at least in its dispensing with the necessity for circumcision (cf. xvi. 4). Presumably the controversy is regarded as primarily one between Jerusalem and Antioch ; the Churches named are those which looked to Antioch as their centre. In any case the omission cannot be regarded as fatal to the early date of Galatians ; it is only part of the difficulty that Luke entirely ignores the Galatian defection, a difficulty which is not peculiar to any particular theory of the place of the Epistle. When we pass to the events which followed the Council, we at once have an explanation of the second missionary journey. When the news of the Galatian defection first reached St. Paul, the pressure of circumstances prevented an immediate visit, as we have already seen ; now the way is clear. It is quite true that xv. 33-36 seems at first sight to imply a delay which would be a little inconsistent with this view ; surely St. Paul would have paid his visit at the earliest possible moment ? Well, perhaps he did ; a certain stay at the important centre of Antioch (v. 33) was probably quite inevitable, and the expressions used in verses 35, 36¹ do not imply any long delay, but are intentionally vague, after Luke's manner. We must remember, too, that we do not know the results

¹ On these, see Harnack, *Apostelgeschichte*, pp. 37-41.

of the Epistle ; Paul may have heard that the plague had been already stayed. The words of xvi. 4 are at any rate significant ; the position he had taken up in his letter has been triumphantly vindicated, and the settlement of the controversy makes for the strengthening of the Churches.

And may we not on our view find a certain significance in other features of the second journey ? We know both from Acts and 1 Thessalonians that St. Paul was eager to return to Thessalonica after his enforced departure. He was learning from the experience of his first journey. Then he had been eager to open up fresh territory as quickly as possible, but he realises now that he must not leave a newly-founded Church to its own devices too soon ; there must not be a repetition in Macedonia of the sort of thing that has happened in Galatia. It is true that circumstances are too strong for him, and in the letters to Thessalonica we see the unspeakable relief in the mind of the Apostle that his converts had in fact remained steadfast, and the exhortations to continue firm recur again and again. Of course these features are perfectly explicable on the ordinary view, but it will not be denied that they are doubly significant if the memory of the Galatian defection lies behind them.

The view then that Galatians is the earliest of the Pauline Epistles harmonises so completely with many of the data both of the Epistles themselves and of Acts that it can only be rejected for serious and weighty reasons. It should be noticed that it stood first in Marcion's list, a point which may prove to be of the greatest importance, though I must leave it to others to develop its significance. But, as we know, the early date has not been widely adopted,¹

¹ It has been taken by Weber, Bartlet, and others, but I have preferred in this paper to work out the arguments afresh from the facts themselves.

and we shall naturally expect to find the objections to it strong and almost invincible. The curious thing is that they are apparently very weak, and it is really a mystery why critics who have taken the comparatively difficult steps involved in the South Galatian theory, and the identification of the visits in Galatians ii. and Acts xi., should have refused the far easier step of assigning an early date to the Epistle.

1. Perhaps the main reason is to be found in the apparent connexion between Galatians and Romans. The current division of the Pauline Epistles into four groups is fascinating and convenient, and gives an intelligible picture of the development of the Apostle's thought. We are naturally disinclined to upset this arrangement by placing Galatians before the Thessalonian Epistles. However, for certain purposes the grouping will survive the transposition, and in any case such a theory must follow the facts. It is quite true that there is a fairly close connexion in thought and language between Galatians and Romans, but this is explained by the similarity of subject matter, and does not in the least imply that they were written at the same time. There is no reason why they should not be separated by the five or six years which is all our theory requires. The one is the sketch hastily drawn up in view of the urgent requirements of the moment; the other is the more considered philosophical development of the same theme. It is "the ripened fruit of the thoughts and struggles of the eventful years by which it had been preceded," and "belongs to the later reflective stage of the controversy."¹ It deals with the intellectual difficulties involved in the apparent rejection of the Jews, rather than with the practical question of whether Christians ought in fact to be circumcised. And to maintain that St. Paul's thought could not

¹ Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, p. xxiii.

have been sufficiently developed by the close of the first journey to write the Epistle to the Galatians is quite unreasonable. There had been, let us say, nineteen years of meditation and practical work since his conversion, and the relation between Jew and Gentile must have often come before him. He did not deal with the point in the Thessalonian Epistles because there was no need to do so. On any view the controversies of the Council had already been raised before they were written, and the fact that they do not refer to them does not in the least imply that the writer may not have already done so in another letter to another Church.

2. A further difficulty is found in the two visits, implied in the *τὸ πρότερον* of Galatians iv. 13. To this it may be replied that we have the high authority of Blass for the view that *τὸ πρότερον* here means "formerly." Or if this solution is rejected, and we prefer to retain the ordinary translation ("the first time"), we can easily find the two visits in the journeys out and back of Acts xiv. The second visit lasted long enough to organise the Churches, and, especially in the case of Antioch and Iconium, could easily be distinguished from the first visit. There unquestionably were two visits on the first journey, and nothing more need be said.

A few words must be added in conclusion on a closely related point. How far is our position affected by the view we take of the text of the Decree in Acts xv. ? Harnack¹ has lately declared his adherence to the "Western" reading, which omits "and from things strangled." These words are omitted in Dd., Iren., Tert., Cypr., etc., and there are converging lines of evidence which tend to prove they were not in the original text. Their omission carries with it weighty consequences; the Decree no longer deals with

¹ *Apostelgeschichte*, pp. 188-198.

ceremonial questions, as is usually supposed, but with moral questions, idolatry, murder, and fornication, the three offences mentioned together in Revelation xxii. 15. It would take us too far afield to state the arguments in support of this view; they are convincingly stated in Harnack's pages. If we accept it, as we probably should, several serious difficulties of New Testament criticism vanish at once. We understand, for example, why the Decree is not directly referred to in the Epistles, and particularly in 1 Corinthians, where the eating of things offered to idols is discussed; it was not *ad rem*, since it dealt with the moral offence of idolatry, not with the ceremonial point which troubled the Corinthians. But it does not in the least, as Harnack seems to suggest, solve the difficulties associated with the ordinary view of Galatians. It rather accentuates them. For, as we have seen, the problem is not to explain why St. Paul does not discuss the prohibitions of the Decree, whether moral or ceremonial, but why he does not emphasise the great concession, the dispensing with circumcision. If, in fact, the whole Decree was concerned with moral questions and contained no concessions made to Jewish prejudices, as is commonly supposed, it becomes a sweeping victory for the Pauline and Gentile party. The silence about it in Galatians becomes more inexplicable than ever; the revised form of the Decree demands the early date for the Epistle, since the mere quotation of it must have been sufficient to silence the Judaisers.

I am glad, however, to have been able to refer to this corrected version of the Decree, since, although it does not solve the particular difficulty we are considering, it is most valuable in other respects. The problems which centre round Galatians and Acts xv. have long been a crux of New Testament criticism. Their complete solution requires four hypotheses, (1) the "South Galatian" theory,

(2) the identification of the visits of Galatians ii. and Acts xi., (3) the placing of Galatians before the "Council," (4) the "Western" version of the Decree. Of these the fourth stands on a somewhat different footing to the rest. The first three are not the desperate resort of "harmonisers," twisting or ignoring facts in order to force an agreement which is not there. They are the *prima facie* natural interpretation of the facts; the *onus probandi* surely lies on those who reject them. Accept them, and each piece of the puzzle falls into its place easily and satisfactorily. The resultant picture does no discredit either to the Apostle or to the historian of Acts.

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ST. PAUL'S BELIEFS: SOME RECONCILIATIONS.

WE are familiar with comments on differences, sometimes amounting to oppositions, between the views of St. Paul and those of other teachers. St. Paul's championship of faith—to quote the primary example of such criticisms—has been contrasted with St. James's championship of works. But I wonder that it has not been thought simpler to exhibit St. Paul as contradicting himself.

When a serious teacher is found making assertions which verbally contradict each other, we are warned to look for some conviction which may perhaps express itself naturally, according to circumstances, in both the contradictory statements. It is a not uncommon habit of those who think most deeply to speak paradoxically, and to express themselves in judgments or precepts which need to be interpreted and applied with respectful intelligence. This is eminently true of our Lord's words; and similar thoughtful treatment is demanded by the writings of St. Paul. I propose to consider in this spirit the Apostle's doctrine