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

XXXVIII. THE ARGUMENT FROM LAW AND CUSTOM.

IN several of the preceding sections, xxiii.-xxxiv., an argument is drawn out, which, unless it can be overthrown, is in its single self conclusive against the North-Galatian theory. It has been shown, in case after case, that Paul appeals to a condition of law and society of well-marked character; that this condition is not Roman, but emphatically Greek in type; and more particularly that it presents the form which Greek law and manners assumed in the countries governed by the Seleucid kings. We have shown that in North Galatia such a state of law could not have existed, both on the general ground that there was no opportunity for it to establish itself, and on the definite evidence quoted from Strabo, Gaius, etc., that a totally different and inconsistent state of manners existed. The latter side of the proof might be strengthened by evidence still unquoted; but I refrain from wearying the reader with too much detail. The opinion of Mitteis has been quoted (see note on p. 441) that North Galatia is marked off from the surrounding countries by its distinct and peculiar body of customs and law, western in type, not Greek or Anatolian. Mitteis is the highest authority on such a point: he has made it his special study. He is confirmed by Mommsen, wherever Mommsen has expressed his views. Their opinion constitutes an argument that must be refuted before the North-Galatian theory becomes admissible. Further, Mitteis is wholly unprejudiced as regards this question. As has been pointed out, although several passages in the letter strikingly illustrate and are illustrated by the arguments in his great work, he never refers to it as an authority.

It may perhaps be said in reply that Paul is speaking from his own experience in Cilicia and Syria, those centres of the Seleucid kingdom, and draws his illustrations and examples, not from the society and law familiar to his readers in their own land, but from those of the country which he knew best. They that urge such a reason are not likely to be convinced by any argument. Paul's power over his Churches lay in his sympathy with those whom he addressed, and he projected himself into their circumstances and their minds; he did not expect that they should disconnect themselves from all that was familiar to them, and should understand illustrations drawn from a society that was strange to them. Even as he writes, the words are forced from him. "I could wish to be present with you now, and to speak in a tone of praise and thankfulness, instead of reproof" (iv. 20). But the intense wish to be with them enabled him to write as if he were among them; and he would never have used the language of a law and society that was alien to them.

#### XXXIX. WAS THERE A LETTER FROM THE GALATIANS?

The occasion which produced the Apostle's letter to the Galatians was, beyond all doubt, the arrival of a messenger, who reported the state of things in the Galatian Churches. According to the theory already stated, the messenger was probably Timothy, who either had been sent direct from Corinth on a mission to his native land, or had come along with Paul from Corinth (*Acts* xviii. 18) and had landed at Ephesus, and thence gone up to Pisidian Antioch and his own home at Lystra. In either case he rejoined Paul at Syrian Antioch, and brought with him grave intelligence.

But, whoever the messenger was, there can be little doubt that he brought with him a letter, or a series of letters, from the Galatian Churches. Possibly, each Church separately wrote to its founder. It is not probable

that any of Paul's Churches ever allowed a messenger to go from them to him without a letter.

Yet the first three and a half chapters do not appear to be couched in the form of a reply to a letter. These chapters refer as a whole to subjects which one can hardly fancy any of the Galatian Churches venturing to discuss with their spiritual father in the controversial way that is implied, for they are represented as dissenting from him and almost as resisting him.

Moreover, the usual forms of a letter, after the address which occupies the first five verses, are conspicuously absent (see § iii.).<sup>1</sup> Paul plunges at once into a matter which we cannot imagine that any of the Galatians would venture to state directly to him, viz., the charge that he had been inconsistent with himself in the teaching imparted on his two visits, and that he was a time-server. From this he is led into a historical retrospect, which gradually changes into a series of vehement appeals designed to revivify among his readers the feelings with which they had received his first preaching to them.

But, in the last two and a half chapters, after Paul has given vent to the strong and irrepressible emotions which demanded instant expression, and which made him in this one instance write the whole letter with his own hand,<sup>2</sup> his writing assumes a tone more like that of an ordinary letter, and he uses various expressions which seem to take up and reply to words or explanations or questions addressed to him directly (*i.e.* in the form of a letter) by the Galatians. After observing these traces of a letter from the Galatians, we shall see that probably some expressions, even in the earlier chapters, may take their form from that letter.

<sup>1</sup> On these forms see Prof. Rendel Harris's suggestive article in the September number of this magazine.

<sup>2</sup> See vi. 11, where I must agree with Zöckler and dissent from Lightfoot. That is one of the test passages for the right understanding of the Epistle.

The attempt to trace the character of that letter is peculiarly liable to lead one into subjective and even fanciful speculation. It is not given to every one to judge with the sure intuition of Prof. Rendel Harris. One runs the risk of fancying one sees in the Epistle what is only the creation of one's own imagination.

#### XL. TRACES OF THE GALATIAN LETTER.

The letter or letters of the Churches, as we might say *a priori* with perfect confidence, must have taken an apologetic and explanatory tone. They would say that they felt the need of some help and guide and assistance as they struggled along the difficult road towards Christian perfection (iii. 3, compare § xix.); and they found it in the Law. To this Paul refers in the words v. 21, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the Law."

Besides the argument in chapter iii. 2 ff., designed to show the unreasonableness and absurdity of looking to the Law for help in perfecting what had been begun by faith, Paul proceeds in chapter v. 13 ff. to show how, in practice, the effect of faith was gradually perfected in the character. He fully sympathized with the difficulty which the Galatians felt, and their need of some help and guide in the hard upward path; and he points out that love must be their guide and helper. The "lusts of the flesh" were strong and dangerous; and the Galatians looked to the Law to be their guide and tell them what to avoid and what to do. In answer to their statement that they need a guide, Paul points to the power which will eradicate these lusts, by substituting for them stronger motives of action.

Perhaps also the Galatians had explained that, while they found some of the ceremonial of the Law helpful, they did not think that everything in the Law was necessary for them. They wished to cut themselves off from the heathen

society around them by a marked and irrevocable step; they considered it advisable to have some outward sign and symbol of their new profession; and they found such a sign in the Jewish rite of circumcision. To adopt that rite would profit them in their Christian life; but they would not feel bound to adopt everything in the Judaic Law. Now consider the emphasis with which Paul urges in v. 2 f., that "if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing. I testify again to every man that receiveth circumcision that he is a debtor to do the whole Law. Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the Law"; and again how he insists, iii. 10, on the curse pronounced against those who do not continue in all things that are written in the Law. These expressions may probably be designed to cut at the root of the explanatory apology of the Galatians. No one can make the Law his guide and standard of life only in part: he must follow it all in all, or look to some totally different guide.

Again, it is pretty certain that the apparently awkward and disjointed character of iv. 12, 13, springs from the fact that Paul is catching up the phrases used by the Galatians in their letter. "I beseech you, brethren, set yourselves free as I am from the slavery of ritual, for I made myself as a Gentile like you in order to preach to you.<sup>1</sup> You say truly in your letter that you 'do not wrong' me,<sup>2</sup> but are fully conscious of your duty towards me, although you are making some changes in your attitude towards the doctrine which I preached. I bear you witness that you did not in the past 'wrong me' or act unkindly to me. On the contrary, as you know well, you treated me more like a

<sup>1</sup> On the thought in Paul's mind as he says this, see footnote on the following page.

<sup>2</sup> Lightfoot says about these words: "Possibly the true explanation is hidden under some unknown circumstances to which St. Paul alludes." In our view the circumstances lie in the use of the words as an explanation and justification of their changed view by the Galatians.

messenger of God,<sup>1</sup> when your inherited ways of thought would naturally have made you regard as an accursed person one who was afflicted like me; and you would have put at my service whatever was dearest to you, had it been possible to benefit me thereby. But I do not admit your explanation that you 'are not wronging' me now; you are so. What is the reason? Evidently you now regard me as an enemy, that you are treating me so. Is it because I spoke the truth to you during my last visit, and warned you of some faults which existed among you, that you now look on me as an enemy?"

Again, it is highly probable that the Galatians mentioned the extreme zeal and interest that the Judaistic missionaries had shown in their welfare, and used the word *ζηλοῦσιν*. That suggested the play on that word, iv. 17 ff.: "They 'take a lively interest in' you (*ζηλοῦσιν*), as you say, but they do not do this in a right way. In reality, they desire to make you think that you are outside the pale of Jewish pride and birth and privilege, in order that you may admire and envy (*ζηλοῦσιν*) them who are within the pale. It is not true zeal for your interest that prompts their action. It is their deep-seated Jewish pride, which refuses to regard you as really their brethren,<sup>2</sup> which will not put you on an equality with them, which desires to mislead you into thinking the Jews a superior caste by virtue of birth.<sup>3</sup> Now I regret my absence from you, and my inability to show you my zealous interest in you; and I should think

<sup>1</sup> It is quite possible that one or all of the Churches had actually referred in their letter to their deep respect for Paul as a messenger of truth to them in their errors.

<sup>2</sup> Paul is leading up to this when he begins the paragraph by calling them "brethren," and telling how he had made himself on a perfect equality with them, iv. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Moreover that was really the case under the old Diatheke: the Jews then did occupy a specially favoured and superior position; and this privilege they desired to maintain under the new Diatheke (cf. v. 2, 4), whereas Paul would now place Jew and Gentile on an equality.

it a good thing that there were always some one present with you to take such interest in you (provided it were done in a good way), and that you should not be dependent on my presence for a true friend. My own children, I would I were present with you now, and were speaking to you in the old tone of affection on both sides, and not in the tone you have forced on me; for I am troubled about you."

When the last words are regarded in the proper light, it is plain that Paul is not prompted to them by any special impossibility, which prevents him from hurrying off on the moment to see them, and that he is not explaining that he cannot go to see them at present. He merely says: "I would that I could have been present now with you, using a very different tone towards you from what I have to employ in this letter."

W. M. RAMSAY.

*LITURGICAL ECHOES IN POLYCARP'S PRAYER.*

FEW among the records of the early Christian Church have exercised a greater fascination than the letter in which the Church of Smyrna recounts to the Church of Philomelium the story of the arrest and martyrdom of St. Polycarp. Thousands who have never read the letter itself are familiar with the martyr's answer when, as the price of his release, he was bidden by the magistrate to curse Christ: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath done me no wrong; how then shall I blaspheme my King who hath saved me?"

As to the precise date of the martyrdom, and of the letter which describes it, there has been much controversy. The Chronicle of Eusebius makes a reference to this martyrdom, and also to those which took place at Vienne and Lyons, in a note appended to the year 167 A.D. But critics are