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*HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLES
TO THE CORINTHIANS.*¹

XXX. EATING IN AN IDOL TEMPLE (VIII. 10).

IN § XXVIII. we described some of the difficulties which were caused to all the early Christians by the question whether meats sacrificed to false gods had become polluted thereby and so rendered unfit for Christian use. Before completing the subject, however, it was necessary to examine whether the widely accepted view that no officials had as yet been appointed in the Corinthian Church was correct; and we found reason to think (1) that there were officials at Corinth corresponding to the *Presbyteroi* in the Galatian Churches (*Acts* xiv. 20), but not called by that name; ² (2) that some of those officials had been guilty of practices which Paul disapproved of, and that therefore he refrained from recommending the congregation to be obedient to them in 1 *Corinthians* xvi. Our view is that the *Hegoumenoi* (to use the descriptive participle, "leading [men]," which was probably the nearest approach to a title yet in use for the Corinthian officials) had taken a

261, 575; ii., Appendix, p. 92, col. 2. Holtzmann, in *Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament*, "Apostelgeschichte," *ad loc.*, and Meyer-Wendt, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (8te Aufl., 1899), pp. 162-63, would have done well to consult at least Wellhausen and Nowack, as well as Böhl, *Alttestamentliche Citate im Neuen Testament* (1878), pp. 133-38, and especially Prof. Toy's *Quotations in the New Testament* (1884), pp. 112-114, where they would have found much useful information. Eugen Huhn, *Die Alttestamentlichen Citate und Reminiscenzen im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen, Mohr, 1900), pp. 104-5, is even more meagre than Meyer-Wendt.

¹ At Dr. Knowling's request I mention that, in the quotation made from his *Acts* in the last instalment of this article, p. 374 f., the words "eager to lead . . . the principle" should be marked as quoted from Dr. Hort. They were inadvertently not so indicated in his Edition of *Acts*; but the reference to Dr. Hort is given at the end of the note. This does not detract from the use made of the passage in our review, p. 321.

² In a note on § XXIX. p. 377, a reference should be added to Ziebarth, *das griech. Vereinswesen*, p. 181.

course which Paul strongly disapproved of by continuing to be members of Pagan clubs or societies in Corinth.

We may take it for granted that the letter of the Corinthians to Paul had been drawn up by a small number of persons, and not by the whole congregation. It may have been—and we think that it was—submitted to the whole body of the congregation after it was composed; but a letter could hardly be composed except by one or a few persons. Doubtless the composers were the leading officials, for the writing of letters on behalf of the congregation, which was probably entrusted at an early date to the bishop,¹ was an important duty in the early times of the Church (since the unity and solidarity of the parts scattered over different lands and cities could be maintained only through visits and correspondence), and such an important part of the Church's life would naturally be put in the hands of the officials selected by the Church.

The *Hegoumenoi*, in drawing up the letter, had included under the general title of "eating meats offered to idols" certain connected practices; and while they defended their right to eat such meats, they evidently intended that their defence should be taken as carrying with it the right to another far more serious kind of action.² We do not mean that the *Hegoumenoi* consciously smuggled in the more serious action under the guise of mere eating of sacrificial meat. But they were evidently in the letter defending their own action, and they did so on the ground that the essential fact in it was merely the eating of meat which had been sacrificed, and, if they proved the latter to be permissible, they established their right in the more serious matter. Paul finds it necessary to distinguish mere eating of sacrificial meats from that more serious action, pronouncing the one to be allowable (except in so far as sympathy

¹ *The Church in the Roman Empire before 170*, chap. xvi. § 3.

² *Viz.*, taking part in societies united by common rites and meals, see § XXXI.

for the feelings of other Christians made it right to abstain), while showing that the other is actual idolatry.

The real nature of the Corinthians' action first appears in viii. 10: "If a man see thee which hast knowledge sitting at meat in a place of an idol" (*εἰδῶλιον*). These words of v. 10 arrest our attention: some of the Christians were to be seen sitting at meat in an idol place, that is, taking part in a feast or banquet in some place, a temple or other building, consecrated to a Pagan deity. What is the precise meaning of this?

The form of statement in viii. 10 is remarkable: "thee which hast knowledge sitting in an idol place." The way in which one person is apostrophized suggests that some one of those who had written to him is singled out as the guilty party, or rather that several such persons are appealed to one by one. That implies that one or more of the *Hegoumenoi* had been seen in an idol's temple and been talked about in the congregation.

The feast must necessarily have had the form of a ceremony connected with the worship of the deity to whom the locality was consecrated. On this there can be no question. A feast in such a locality could not be a purely secular and non-religious function. Yet it seems hardly possible that a professing Christian could take part in a Pagan ceremony, ostensibly religious, publicly and before the eyes of the world, while still remaining a professed member of the Church. Even if he desired to remain so, it is inconceivable that he should have been permitted by the brethren to remain among them unquestioned.

We cannot accept the suggestion that the action of those who sat in an idol's temple was due to bravado, as "a thing done to show their 'knowledge' and freedom from superstition about the idol." We have been led to form a different conception of the character of the Corinthians (see especially § XXVII.), which makes it clear to us that the nature of

the ceremony must have been such that the religious aspect could easily be regarded by them as secondary and comparatively unimportant. The nature of ancient Greek religion and its relation to ordinary social institutions and associations explains the difficulty.

XXXI. THE CORINTHIAN CLUBS OR ASSOCIATIONS.

Associations or clubs of private individuals were very common in the Greek cities. They often were constituted for some non-religious purpose. They were sometimes benefit societies or burial societies. They might be intended for some useful municipal end: for example, the body of 150 firemen, which, as Pliny reports to Trajan in *Ep.* 33, it was proposed to form at Nicomedia in Bithynia, would certainly have taken the form of an association bound together by the common worship of a divinity; and they would have held their meetings in a place consecrated to that divinity, and feasts in the form of ceremonies of their cult would have been celebrated. Hence Trajan refused to permit the formation of the body of firemen. He knew that they must be a society, and he knew how liable such societies were in Greek cities to be turned into political clubs, or to be diverted to the purpose of vieing with, and ultimately quarrelling with, other clubs; and as Bithynian cities had suffered much from such internal quarrels, he was afraid that even a body of firemen would turn into a cause of disorder.

The attitude which an emperor of such fair and practical mind and lofty views as Trajan, who governed his action on general principles, took up towards a proposed association of firemen is eminently instructive in view of the Corinthian situation. Pliny, who knew well what Trajan's general principle was, pleaded for an exception in this case: only real workmen should be admitted, and the number should

be limited to 150. But Trajan replied that the body of workmen would soon turn into a *Hetairia*, a body of *Hetairoi* or pledged comrades, who would feel their bond to one another stronger than their obedience to the law.

Again, in Corinth there were many strangers, resident for purposes of business. The strangers who belonged by origin to any one country or large city would form a society for purposes of mutual help and intercourse and enjoyment; and this society would be constituted as a religious association for worshipping some deity, generally the patron of their country or city. So at Puteoli the Syrians from Berytus met in the worship of a god whom they called in Latin Jupiter, but who was undoubtedly a Syrian god, called in a Latin inscription by a Latin name.¹ There must have been many such societies at Corinth; and they would greatly conduce to the pleasure and comfort of their members.

A work by Dr. E. Ziebarth² may be consulted by those who desire to gain some clearer conception of the extent and variety of such associations in Greek cities. The descendants of some ancient family might form themselves into a society with a common cult. Companies for trading purposes or for farming taxes, groups of traders engaged in the same line of business, groups of persons occupied in the pursuit of knowledge, companies of artists and actors or men of letters, political clubs, and a host of other associations can be traced in the cities of the eastern provinces. Many of these can be proved to have met in the performance of a common worship; many others are too obscure to admit of positive assertion; but probably all relied on a similar religious bond. It is highly probable that many societies, which Dr. Ziebarth classes as formed purely for religious ends, served also some purpose of ordinary

¹ He is called Jupiter Heliopolitanus, *i.e.* the Baal of Heliopolis (Baalbec).

² *Das griechische Vereinswesen*, Leipzig, 1896.

life,¹ though we have no evidence² of that side of their character. In the names of some societies, whose main purpose was non-religious, the religious character was so strongly expressed that their real character might easily escape notice.

Owing, doubtless, to the want of epigraphic memorials of Corinth, Dr. Ziebarth has found no reference to any club in that city, except in a passage of Suidas, which seems to describe a Corinthian Society of Kotys, of the worst character. It was apparently a purely religious society, and was called by the characteristic title *θιασος*.

But there can be no doubt that Corinth was a favourable soil for the growth of associations and clubs of every kind. Where the population was homogeneous and simple in character, such societies were less numerous and flourishing. It was in great centres of international life and commercial intercourse, such as the harbours of Piræus and Rhodes, that societies flourished most:³ and Corinth, after its restoration by Julius Cæsar, was the greatest international centre of Greece. Incidentally we observe in this characteristic a proof that the societies were an influence hostile to the unity of the state, and therefore to patriotism and national order; and we understand why patriots and lawgivers disliked and condemned them. The more united the state, the weaker the societies in it; the more mixed the state, the stronger the clubs.

The more we study Greek city life the more obvious becomes the extreme importance of the question, whether Christians might join in the common meals which constituted a leading feature in the ceremonial binding each of those clubs into a unity. If they joined in those meals, they must eat meat which they had seen sacrificed to idols.

¹ For my own part I regard this as practically certain; and Dr. Ziebarth, *op. cit.*, p. 211, points out that many of them became of a character not unlike "clubs" in modern English life.

² The evidence about most of them is confined to one or two references in each case. In many cases we know nothing except the name.

³ See Ziebarth, *op. cit.*, p. 196,

But, as society was constituted in the cities of the Græco-Roman world, they must either join in those meals or leave the societies, excellent and useful as many of them were. Doubtless some, and even many, of the Christians had belonged in their Pagan days to such societies. Doubtless some of the *Hegoumenoi* were active members and even leading spirits in them. They had paid the subscriptions (which were a regular feature of such associations): were they to lose all benefit therefrom? Worse than that, were they to retire from those in which the objects were really praiseworthy and beneficial? If so, then, as they said in their letter to Paul, they could find no place for themselves in the world and must go out of it.¹

There can be no doubt what view the Corinthian officials were, as a body, disposed to take on this subject. They would remain in the ordinary associations which had mainly a non-religious purpose. They would partake of the common meals made on the flesh of victims sacrificed to the god in whose worship the association met, and served in his holy place; and they justified this on the ground that the idol was naught. They, doubtless, reminded Paul that he himself had often declared to them that an idol was naught, a mere stock or stone, devoid of all life and power, having no real existence; and they drew the conclusion that meat offered to naught could not derive any pollution therefrom. The meat intended to be eaten remained after the sacrifice exactly the same as before.

This was probably the most serious matter in the present situation of the Corinthians, and Paul's method of dealing

¹ Prof. Findlay in his reconstruction of their letter puts it thus (EXPOSITOR, June, 1900, p. 403): "We must depart from Corinth: nay, we doubt whether in the whole world we should find any spot where men dwell that is clear of defilement." One would only wish that he had not restricted this by his context to the one department of personal chastity. Probably the Corinthians either meant it in a much wider sense, or used a similar expression more than once, explaining that they could hardly avoid intercourse with idolaters unless they were to "go out of the world." See v. 10.

with it is instructive and beautiful. The right to be members of Pagan clubs had not been directly submitted to him; and he does not treat it as if it had. He refrains from imposing any absolute prohibition, or stating any dogmatic rule, which might be like a law constraining the free action of the individual Christian. Especially, in dealing with the Corinthian philosophers, it would be worse than useless to impose a prohibition on them. It was necessary to lead them to place on themselves a prohibitory law.

This was not a case like the crime alluded to in chap. v., in regard to which an absolute law must be stated. It was a case where something—and even a good deal—must be left to the individual conscience. And so Paul tries to lead up his correspondents to a higher plane of thought, on which they can see more clearly all that was involved in the question, and may judge for themselves. That higher plane of thought, on which alone they could see clearly and judge rightly, required among them a far better appreciation of the common bond that united the brethren. Hence he diverges from the topic for a time, while he tries to work up his readers to appreciate some sides of the situation which were as yet hid from them, and then returns to it in chap. x.

XXXII. THE COMMON MEAL (x. 14-21).

The central point in the ceremonial that bound together the members of those Greek associations or clubs was the common meal, and especially the common cup. "I have eaten out of the holy dish, I have drunk from the sacred cup" was the sacred formula pronounced by each participator in the Mysteries,¹ which may be taken as typical of the whole class of associations.

¹ ἐκ τυμπάνου βέβρωκα, ἐκ κυμβάλου πέπωκα: Firmicus Mat. and Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 2: literally, the holy drum and cymbal of the goddess. The authorities differ a little as to the words. Firmicus finishes γέγονα μύστης Ἀττεύς.

It is important to notice the analogy between the great Mysteries and the associations. The religious associations were simply private societies of *Mystai*, celebrating the rites and mysteries of a special deity. Even the associations for a non-religious purpose also tended towards a similar close fellowship—to become bodies of *Hetairoi*, as Trajan said—and modelled their religious ritual (so far as evidence goes) after the Mysteries, so that the members became *Symmystai*, *i.e.* persons initiated in the same mystic ritual. In one case, in a club at Smyrna, the members are styled both *Symbiotai* (*i.e.* associates)¹ and *Symmystai*.²

It is hardly possible to use too strong language in describing the strength and closeness of the tie which bound together those Pagan societies; it was a power often stronger than the tie of country or of blood, and was considered by the wiser Pagans to be a real danger to the healthy and free life of society. (See also p. 441.)

Prudent lawgivers recognised in the common meal of the societies the special bond of union which might make them dangerous to the state by leading the members to regard their unity and fellowship in the society as more binding than their unity and patriotism in the nation; and it is a well-known fact that it was the common meal (the Agape) of the early Christians which most of all roused the suspicion of the imperial Roman governor, and that this was probably the reason why the Agape was soon generally given up by the Church.

All those persons, then, who participated in the common meal of the Pagan society are initiated into the mystic bond of union, and enter into communion with one another through the power, not divine but dæmonic, which consti-

¹ The term *Symbiosis* described the club on its non-religious side, but was also applicable to a religious association. The religious and non-religious sides of the clubs melted into one another, and cannot be distinguished sharply.

² Ziebarth, *op cit.*, pp. 52, 206; *οι συμβιωται και συμμυσται*, under the common article.

tutes and gives strength to that mystic bond. Behind the idol to which the Pagan society sacrifices is a certain dæmonic power; and those who participate in the sacrificial feast become united in a mystic union with that power and with one another.

In this opinion as to the importance of the sacrificial meal Paul was stating what was at that time generally accepted. The meal was regarded not merely as the eating of food in common, but as an act involving real conveyance of power. To take an illustrative example, the belief has always been widespread and strong in the East that the stranger who succeeds in entering (even by craft and stealth) within the circle of the family religion and partaking of the family meal, becomes to such a degree part of the family that his person is sacred to all its members. He must not be injured by them; and though he may have slain one of their number previously, yet revenge must give way to the bond which now unites him to the family.

Evidently Paul's view is that membership in those Pagan societies, beneficial and excellent as some of them were, was irreconcilable with the Christian spirit, and the reason lay in the common meal and the power it exerted on the mind and nature of the participants, making them all into brothers (Ziebarth, p. 211).

But, while the sacrificial meal becomes a force in the mind of those who share in it, it is also clear that the force arises through the surrounding circumstances and ceases when it is divorced from them. The power behind the idol is not a self-existent devil, as Justin and Tertullian and the early Church in general crudely imagined. It is a power relative to the human mind, and conditioned by the whole series of facts that play upon the mind. If the same meat is carried to another place, a butcher's shop or a private house, and eaten in different surroundings, apart from the company which uses that rite to cement its fellowship,

then it is no longer affected by the dæmonic power ; it has suffered naught, but remains clean.

Must we not conclude, then, that the danger which Paul dreads in the Pagan societies was the formation of a tie of brotherhood inconsistent with and opposed to the tie of Christian union? Intercourse with Pagans is not forbidden ; one may mix in ordinary society, even though one knows that the Pagan does not obey those principles of pure life which the Christians must comply with. One may do business with Pagans, accept their invitations, eat and drink with them ; but one should not bind oneself to them by the tie of a common solemn ritual, which exercises a strong constraining force on the will and nature of man, and prevents him from real devotion to Christ.

XXXIII.—THE PAGAN CLUBS AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

If we are to estimate the importance attached to a topic in Paul's mind, as he was writing, by the comparative frequency with which the words connected with it occur in his letter, then it is beyond question that "idolatry" was a topic that occupied much of his thought as he wrote this letter to the Corinthians.

The words "idol," "idolatry," etc. (*εἰδωλον* and its connexions, *εἰδώλιον*, *εἰδωλόθυτος*, *εἰδωλολάτρης*, *-λατρεία*), occur 15 times in 1 *Corinthians*, 6 times in the remaining letters, and 11 times in the rest of the New Testament. Contrast this with the word *πόρνη* and its connexions ; these occur 12 times in 1 *Corinthians*, 7 times in the remaining letters, and 35 times in the rest of the New Testament. Now we have pointed out that the common view of commentators—who describe impurity as the great enemy and danger in Corinth—is mistaken,¹ and that the danger on that side

¹ See § XX.

was common to all ancient society and rose from the low ideas prevalent on the subject among even the most enlightened and orderly class of society. The danger that bulked most largely in Paul's mind as he wrote to the Corinthians was not impurity (though of course that was everywhere a danger in the Pagan world), but idolatry.

They were still a very young congregation; the prime need was to raise them quite out of their idolatrous upbringing and surroundings; and the most serious danger was lest they should unwittingly and unconsciously fall back into the practices connected with idolatry. But observe: the danger was not that they should directly return to the worship of the gods whom they had abandoned; in that case they would have been hopeless, and their "last state would be worse than the first." The danger was lest, while they thought they were still leading the Christian life, they should be attempting to combine with it practices and acts which were irreconcilable with it and must destroy their Christian spirit.

Now Paul tends to connect together the thought of idolatry and the thought of the Holy Sacrament. They must be related to one another as the evil and the antidote: between them there could be no other connexion. If we glance at the sequence of thought in x. 14-21, the close connexion of the two ideas in the Apostle's mind is unmistakable: "the cup of the Lord and the cup of *Daimonia*," "the table of the Lord and the table of *Daimonia*," are side by side in his mind and words. When he begins the paragraph, "My beloved, flee from idols," he continues at once, "I speak as to men who can understand: judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion and fellowship in the blood of Christ?" And throughout the paragraph he balances the one idea against the other, and passes back and forward between the two.

It is impossible to read that paragraph without being impressed by Paul's obvious intention to set these two facts, the Eucharistic Meal and the Common Meal of the Pagan societies, before the minds of the Corinthians as two hostile ideas, two irreconcilable and mutually destructive forces: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of Dæmonic Powers: ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of Dæmonic Powers."

The word "communion" or "fellowship," *κοινωνία*, determines the sense of this passage. It does not simply indicate that the celebrants of the sacrificial feast each eat some of the food that has been consecrated by sacrifice. Its fundamental force is to express "fellowship" and "close union with each other": the fellowship is cemented in virtue of the common meal, not through the dividing of the food among the participants, but through the common enjoyment by them of the same meal with all that is implicated in the meal, viz., the dæmonic power communicated by its having been offered in sacrifice amid certain impressive surroundings.

The word *κοινωνία* is often applied to the close mystic union between husband and wife, and the first formation of that union was guaranteed and sanctioned by the common partaking of the mystic cup, as has been shown elsewhere; and the ceremony was in various respects adopted from the ritual of the Mysteries.¹ The uniting bond in the religiously constituted Pagan societies was conceived as similar in strength and character.

The force of Paul's assertion here is not fully realized until one takes it in conjunction with what he is denying. As we have seen, the Corinthian philosophers argued that the sacrifice, being offered to a thing of naught, could not suffer any pollution or come under any influence from that naught; and that they who possessed insight might as

¹ *Hist. Comm. on Galatians*, p. 89 f.

freely partake of sacrificial meat as of similar meat which had not been sacrificed. Paul accepts part, and denies part of their assertion. Such meat of a sacrifice may be freely eaten, when it has been bought as exposed for sale in a butcher's shop (x. 25). The meat in itself suffers nothing from the thing of naught, the idol. But the evil lies in the fellowship and communion with others in virtue of the common meal forming the climax of the common performance of the idolatrous ritual; for in those surroundings the participator binds and pledges himself to his fellows in association with Dæmonic Powers.

Further, even the eating of that sacrificial meat is harmless when it is offered to a guest in a private house (even the house of the sacrificer¹ is evidently included). The meat in itself is not unclean or polluted; and the circumstances are no longer such as to give any ritual force to the participating in it. In fact, the eater now simply takes his part of the meat; and in the act of eating he does not enter into communion with the other participators.

Still, even in such a situation the sympathy and love of the guest will lead him to refrain, if another of the brethren, less robust in conscience and penetrating in insight, points out to him—in horror and deprecation (as is implied)—that the meat before him has been part of a sacrifice. But in this case, it is only sympathy for his brother, and not the nature of the case in itself that leads him to refrain.

XXXIV. THE EUCHARIST IN ST. PAUL'S GOSPEL.

We cannot fail to observe the extreme importance attached to the Sacrament in this letter. It is the leading thought rising to the writer's lips and pen time after time

¹ Understanding that he sacrificed at a temple, and brought away the meat to his own house.

in the most diverse surroundings (v. 7 f., vi. 17,¹ x. 16-21, xi. 20-34).

It is sometimes said that the unusual number of these references is due to the fact that the Epistle was written at the time of the Passover; and an argument for dating the composition has been sought from this. We cannot, however, accept this explanation. We are unable to admit that the process and evolution of thought in the letter was determined by such an accidental coincidence. In the Sacrament Paul saw the antidote which the Corinthians needed to the great evil; and the greatness of the danger leads him to dwell on the antidote.

Moreover, this argument as to the date has no force unless the Christian Sacrament was in that age confined to the time of Passover, which we cannot admit, and which very few are likely now to maintain. The Sacrament might be suggested to Paul at any season of the year, for it clearly was frequently celebrated. In v. 7 f. the Passover is mentioned (though not in such a way as to imply that it was occurring when Paul wrote): in the other places only the Sacrament, not the Passover, is referred to.

Must we not infer from the Epistle that special importance was attached by Paul to that rite in the building up of a Church in a Pagan city and in the Pagan world? It was to him not merely a symbolic action. The Sacrament was a real force, exerting a strong influence over the will and nature of those who shared in it: it was the one power which might counteract the constraining force of the Pagan fellowships, which, as he saw, were a dangerous allurements to the leading men in the Corinthian congregation.

It was more difficult to rouse in the mind of the Pagans a strong feeling of Christian brotherhood and unity than

¹ That the Communion of the Sacrament is in Paul's mind in vi. 17 is clear from what has been said in § XXXII. f.

among the Jews. In the latter the feeling already existed in virtue of their own religion, which united them together and separated them from the rest of the world by its character and by its common Passover. Among the Jews all that was needed was to modify the direction of that strong feeling which they already had. But among the Pagans there was no such feeling. It was strange to them, except in regard to their clubs; and therefore the Christians would find the religious unity of the club a dangerous antagonist to the proper realizing of the Church unity and brotherhood.

From v. 7 f. it seems an unavoidable inference that St. Paul conceived the death of Christ to be the Paschal sacrifice: "Our Passover also hath been sacrificed, Christ." The common cup and bread constitute the pledging of the participating brotherhood to their fellowship in virtue of their common relation to the sacrifice of Christ. The power of the Saviour is imparted to them in the Sacrament; and they become a brotherhood and a fellowship in virtue of their common relation to Him: "The cup of Christ's blessing over which we bless God, does it not constitute a fellowship of the blood of Christ?"

It lies entirely outside of our purpose and province to seek to investigate the philosophic and theological ideas involved in St. Paul's conception, or to touch on later theories as to the meaning of the rite. We are satisfied to recognise that he considered that a certain force and power to move the minds and nature of the participators was communicated in the Sacrament. But it is part of our task to investigate the historical origin of St. Paul's conception. That, however, must be left for a new section.

W. M. RAMSAY.