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## *THE FIRST GALATIAN MINISTRY.*

THE successful ministry of Paul and Barnabas in southern Galatia was the next material step after the foundation of the Church of Antioch towards the conversion of the Greeks. Besides adding three sister churches, consisting mainly of Greek converts, in the heart of Asia Minor to the kingdom of Christ, it drove a wedge deep into the centre of an idolatrous population and established a valuable outpost for further advance into European and Asiatic Greece. I propose to exhibit the importance of this Galatian ministry by tracing the slow progress of Gentile Christianity during previous years, and glancing, on the other hand, at the favourable prospects open to the gospel in Asiatic Greece; and then to call in the aid of the Epistle to dissipate some obscurity that hangs over the circumstances of its opening in consequence of the brevity with which it is recorded in the Acts.

1. The earliest home of Greek Christianity was the Syrian borderland between Jew and Greek: Cæsarea was its birth-place, Antioch the cradle of its infancy. The hereditary animosity of the two races set up a formidable barrier against their union in a single church, and the inveterate prejudices of religious Jews would have rendered the admission of the uncircumcised to full membership of Christ by baptism impossible without Divine intervention. The futile attempts of Greek monarchs to impose their own religion on their Jewish subjects had provoked the Maccabean revolt, and so bequeathed to subsequent generations a permanent legacy of bigoted intolerance. God, however, manifested His will so distinctly by a threefold revelation,

first to Cornelius, bidding him make enquiry of a Christian Apostle; secondly to Peter, warning him to accept without scruple those whom God had cleansed; and thirdly, by pouring out His Spirit on Cornelius and his friends, that conviction was reluctantly forced on Peter. He dared not refuse to baptize those on whom God had already bestowed His Spirit: and the assembled Church, on appeal being made to their decision, solemnly ratified the validity of his act. Thenceforward the right of believing Gentiles to Christian baptism became a fundamental law of the Church, sealed to them in perpetuity by a Divine charter which none could question. Abundant opening was left indeed for future controversy about the consequent position and obligations of these uncircumcised members of the Church, but the principle was decisively settled for all time that the doors of the Church should be as freely open to them as to their Jewish brethren. The comprehensive change in Christian doctrine, by which a Jewish sect was eventually transformed into a world-wide religion, was established in theory, when the baptism of Cornelius was ratified by the unanimous decision of the assembled Church.

Circumstances, however, for some time obscured the importance of this revolution. No sudden influx of Gentile converts flooded the existing churches: they only grew insensibly by the continual adhesion of individual Gentiles or groups of Gentiles to older congregations of Jewish Christians. The process of conversion was too silent and gradual to exercise material influence over the prevailing spirit of the community, or to remodel its ministry and organization. In spite of fundamental differences in regard to the person of Jesus, Christian teachers in those early years retained the stamp of its Jewish origin, partly because the Hebrew Scriptures continued to be its only written canon of faith and practice, though it had learned to interpret them in a new spirit, but still more because the

Apostles and all the older disciples had grown up to manhood before they had known Jesus, had accepted the Law for their rule of life, and drew their inspiration from the writings of Hebrew prophets; they prided themselves on their descent from Abraham and the patriarchs, and rested on God's ancient covenants with Israel; above all they fixed their hopes on the glorious advent of the national Messiah; and the promise of His coming had a deeper significance for them than for other Jews because their faith was concentrated on the person of a living Lord, who had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. Again, the outward environment of the Church was no less Jewish than the spirit of its teaching, for the synagogue was still the only centre of public ministry open to Christian teachers. Thither the brethren resorted regularly for reading of the Scriptures, for united prayer and praise, as well as religious instruction: there they delivered addresses to mixed congregations of Jews and Christians, basing their doctrine on the Hebrew Scriptures. They claimed, in fact, to be a reformed branch of the ancient national Church, and were long regarded by the Greek world as a purely Jewish sect.

Under these circumstances the conversion of the Gentiles made of necessity slow progress: few but those who had already become regular attendants on the worship of the synagogue came within touch of the Christian ministry. These devout Gentiles seem to have clustered freely round Jewish colonies in Greek cities; they were not proselytes, for they shrank from circumcision with all the ceremonial bondage and social exclusiveness which it entailed, but they had learned from Jewish teachers the value of their Scriptures, their theology, and their moral law, and in consequence of these antecedents were in general predisposed to listen gladly to a gospel which taught the brotherhood of all mankind and placed the love of God and man above ritual and legal observance. But these Greeks had no

rights whatever in the Jewish congregation. Though their attendance was tolerated, if not encouraged, they were only admitted on sufferance; and after having occupied so subordinate a position in the synagogue they were at first content to fill a like secondary place in the Church, and acquiesced willingly in the leadership of Jewish Christians.

These considerations account for the tardy growth of Gentile Christianity. For several years it lingered along the eastern coast of the Levant without an attempt to raise its voice in Asiatic or European Greece.<sup>1</sup> Antioch continued for a long time to be its only important centre, and even there Greek Christians were slow to vindicate their independence of Judaism. The prompt response, however, of that Church to the call of the Spirit for special labourers in the Lord's vineyard, by which it gained the proud distinction of becoming the mother city of Greek Christianity, attested the growing strength of their spiritual life and their hopeful confidence in the future of the Kingdom. It was Greek enthusiasm for the conversion of their fellow-countrymen that stirred this newborn zeal for church extension. Hitherto the diffusion of the faith had been due more to the force of circumstances than to spontaneous effort. Refugees, driven from their homes by persecution, had carried their faith with them in their flight to distant cities. But the mission of Barnabas and Saul was a purely missionary enterprise conceived for the express purpose of extending the gospel to the islands and coasts of the Mediterranean. The two Apostles were necessarily invested with wide discretion as to the further scope of their mission. It was hardly possible to determine their route in advance,

<sup>1</sup> More than thirteen years elapsed between the conversion of Saul and the apostolic council at Jerusalem. The baptism of Cornelius belongs to the beginning of this period before Christian refugees from Jerusalem had settled in Cæsarea, or Philip had taken up his abode there. The mission of Paul and Barnabas belongs, on the contrary, to its closing years; for the special object of the apostolic council was to allay the heartburnings aroused among Jewish Christians by their success, and to restore the peace of the Church.

since it depended on the future openings that might present themselves. It was therefore left in large measure to their judgment. But the direction in which it was originally launched clearly intimates the desires and hopes by which its authors were animated: it turned its back on Palestine and the East, and set its face towards Asiatic Greece and the famous centres of Greek civilization in the West.

2. The condition of Asiatic Greece at that time offered an exceptional promise of success to Christian Apostles. Thanks to the universal peace and settled order which the Cæsars had established throughout the empire, that province had attained a high pitch of industrial activity and commercial prosperity; and in spite of the social corruption and luxurious vices which riches brought in their train, the consequent exuberance of life, social, intellectual and religious, afforded a favourable opening for religious reform. The region had been in former centuries a frequent battle-field between Greek and Asiatic races, and still formed a borderland between eastern and western thought. But the religion which the people had inherited from ancient times was more Oriental than Greek, and its degraded type of sensuous worship could hardly satisfy the conscience even of a heathen community to which the influences of western civilization had penetrated. Greek philosophy and Roman morality combined to create a nobler ideal of human duty and Divine government than could be reconciled with the popular religion, so that all the better feelings of educated men and women were stirred into revolt against the debasing superstition of the masses.

The religious ferment produced by this collision was specially aggravated in Asia Minor by the multiplication of Jewish colonies in the principal cities, systematically planted and fostered long ago through the wise policy of Syrian kings for the encouragement of trade and promotion of intercourse between these two races of their subjects. These

settlements were particularly thriving in southern Galatia, along the direct line of communication between Antioch and Ephesus, which was in Greek as well as Roman times the only safe route by land between those two capitals. Nowhere else could be found such conspicuous traces of their religious influence over the surrounding population. They formed, of course, distinct communities of their own, divided from the Greeks by unsociable habits as well as ritual obligations and religious scruples. Yet their scriptural teaching proved so attractive to seekers after God that a considerable number of citizens frequented their weekly services in the Pisidian Antioch and in Iconium, and were thus, like the devout Gentiles everywhere, predisposed to give a cordial welcome to the preaching of Christ. Accordingly it was in those cities that His Apostles gained their first conspicuous success: there Asia Minor first awoke to the call of the gospel, and the firstfruits were reaped of an abundant harvest. It was perhaps inevitable that this hearty reception of the new doctrine by Greeks should provoke intense jealousy on the part of the Jews, and arouse bitter opposition from them. The vehement appeal of Paul to his Gentile hearers at Antioch brought that opposition to a head, and stirred the passions of both parties to fever heat. The Jews heard the impotence of their law for salvation denounced in their own synagogue, the Gentiles heard the offer of a new way of salvation by repentance and faith in Christ alone.

3. From that hour both alike recognised in that Apostle the foremost champion of Gentile rights, and the most formidable adversary of Judaism. It is time, therefore, to turn to his personal history and review the chain of circumstances which landed him with his colleague in the interior of Asia Minor. The record of the joint mission during its first few months was uneventful: they traversed Cyprus from end to end, preaching in all the synagogues by the

way without achieving any success worthy of record. Barnabas, himself a native of the island, naturally took the lead in virtue of his older standing in the Church and of his superior position in the church of Antioch as the chosen representative of the Twelve, but failed apparently to elicit any enthusiastic response. It was not till they reached Paphos, the western port and the seat of the Roman Government, that the spirit of Paul was stirred within him to carry his appeal to Gentile hearers. He procured by some means an audience of the proconsul, successfully encountered Elymas, who had hitherto exercised a pernicious influence at his court by the aid of mystic arts, and, after dooming him to temporary blindness by a signal manifestation of his spiritual power, finally converted the proconsul himself. This success was fruitful in results; it established Paul's virtual leadership in the mission; and Barnabas, though he retained the nominal dignity of head, was content to submit the guidance of its policy to the more determined counsels of his energetic colleague.<sup>1</sup> A new spirit of enterprise speedily manifested itself in their proceedings. *Paul and his company* (as they are designated), after crossing to the mainland, struck at once across Pamphylia and the Pisidian highlands into the interior. Meanwhile John Mark, of Jerusalem, though warmly attached to his cousin Barnabas, refused to accompany them any farther in his capacity of minister, and on reaching the coast at once returned home alone.<sup>2</sup> We are not told how far he was

<sup>1</sup> It appears from the historian's adoption at this point of the Greek name *Paul*, instead of the Hebrew *Saul*, that he dates from that time his entrance on the apostleship to the Gentiles. The narrative of the voyage from Paphos ignores Barnabas altogether, and the subsequent history assigns him a secondary part. His position is aptly illustrated by the language of the Lycaonian populace, who evinced their sense of his superior dignity by identifying him with Jupiter, but called Paul Mercury because he was the chief speaker.

<sup>2</sup> The actual separation of Mark from the party did not take place before their arrival in Pamphylia, but the future policy of the mission was obviously settled at Paphos before their departure, and the Apostles proceeded to carry

daunted by prospects of fatigue or danger, or how far his secession was due to lack of sympathy with their enthusiasm for the conversion of the Greeks; but it is certain that Paul for a long time continued to condemn his fainthearted desertion of the party at a critical moment as disloyal conduct. So the Apostles pursued their way alone to the Pisidian Antioch.

4. There, however, a mysterious change came over their plans. Instead of pushing on, as they had done hitherto, with all speed, they settle down for months in the three cities Antioch Iconium and Lystra successively, with such determination that imminent danger or threats of actual violence alone availed to put them to flight. Even then they do but take refuge in the neighbouring city Derbe for a while, and thence retrace their steps to the coast, revisiting by the way the three churches they had planted. The character and history of Paul forbids any suspicion that this outward inaction can have been due to caprice or irresolution on his part: still it presents a strange contrast to the determined energy of onward movement that preceded it, and the suddenness of the change excites a reasonable curiosity as to its occasion. Their motive for lingering in the neighbourhood after their expulsion from Antioch creates indeed no difficulty in the mind of the reader. Having formed the nucleus of a considerable church in one city, they were naturally reluctant to forsake it in its infancy, and were encouraged by the success of their first ministry to attempt the formation of sister churches in the same region. But the real problem is to reconcile the sudden arrest of their onward journey at Antioch with the resolute spirit which had induced them to undertake a tedious if not dangerous journey thither across the mountain passes of

it out immediately on their landing. It was therefore presumably at Paphos that Mark decided on withdrawal: he only crossed with them to Perga in order to secure a passage eastwards along the coast, which was his readiest means of returning, and there took leave of the Apostles.

Pisidia. Why did they plunge so eagerly into the interior of Asia Minor, if they proposed merely to fix their residence in a second-rate city? and what did Mark find so alarming in the prospect as to deter him from continuing his ministry? They were certainly not tempted to linger there by the immediate success of their first efforts; for however fruitful proved the Apostle's final appeal to his Greek hearers in that city, the whole tenor of his address betrays his disappointment with the result of his previous ministry to the Jews. Besides bitterly denouncing the Jewish rulers and people for the murder of Jesus, and solemnly warning unbelievers of their deadly peril, it proclaims the utter inadequacy of the Law to justify, and makes a final appeal from Jewish prejudice to the universal conscience of mankind on the basis of repentance and faith in Christ alone. Now we know how steadfastly the Apostle adhered everywhere to the principle of offering the gospel *to the Jew first* in spite of the constant persecutions he endured at their hands. It is morally certain, therefore, that he had on this occasion made prolonged but fruitless efforts to touch the consciences and win the hearts of his fellow-countrymen before he turned away from them in despair to a wider circle of conscience-stricken hearers. His address seriously tested the capacity of the gospel to satisfy Greek aspirations after God, and its cordial reception opened a new prospect of unlimited expansion before the Christian Church. For the first time an Apostle had ventured in a synagogue to throw himself avowedly on Greek support in defiance of a majority of unbelieving Jews. He put before Greeks a new reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, passing over circumcision as an unessential ordinance of temporary value, while he enlarged on God's provision of a Saviour better fitted than the Law to meet the needs of sinful man, and taught them to seek salvation through Him only. The Greeks to whom he appealed, being already instructed in the Scriptures, gathered round

him and Barnabas, beseeching them to repeat this doctrine of the grace of God in Christ, and crowded to hear their next address. The result was seen in the rapid formation of a congregation in which, owing to Jewish opposition, Greek converts had from the beginning an overwhelming preponderance over Jews and proselytes. The effect of this success on the career of Paul was decisive: he had found the right key to the hearts of Greeks, and was emboldened to carry the same message with confident hope throughout the Greek world. No less remarkable was its effect on the Church in general: Jewish Christians in Syria and Palestine soon realized that a new power had arisen within the Church, and began to challenge the orthodoxy of Paul and Barnabas. But the success reacted on those churches also by imparting to their Greek members a new weight in the counsels of the Church. In the crisis which ensued Paul and Barnabas pleaded the cause of Gentile liberty before the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem, and found no argument so effective as the manifest blessing of God on their Galatian ministry.

5. To return to the history of their mission. We have seen how strongly the tenor of Paul's address suggests the failure of his preceding ministry to convert or conciliate the Jewish majority. The enthusiastic adhesion of the Greeks, however, on that occasion, and even of many Jews and proselytes, proves that he had not spent his previous labour in vain. Beyond these hints the narrative throws no light on the preceding period; its silence leaves an entire blank.

Can we then find in the Epistle to the Galatians any means of bridging this gap? I believe that we can, and that the two accounts, absolutely independent as they are without any apparent connexion, do nevertheless dovetail into each other with so nice a harmony that their combination supplies all the material for a lucid and consistent

account of the apostolic policy and proceedings. In Galatians iv. 13 the Apostle writes: "*Ye know that because of infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you the first time.*"<sup>1</sup> Taking these words by themselves, they admit of two different interpretations, either that Paul repaired to Galatia in consequence of previous illness elsewhere, or that he was detained in that country by illness in spite of his own desire to proceed without delay to some ulterior destination. The context presents insuperable objections to the former. If he had made up his mind before his attack not to preach the gospel in Galatia, how came he then to approach its immediate neighbourhood at all? And how came the Galatian Christians as a body to be familiar with plans which he had altogether abandoned before his arrival? Even supposing that illness induced him to prefer their climate or their country to some other, what possible cause could his Galatian converts find in this for offence? The Apostle distinctly alleges that they had good reason at the time of their first intercourse to feel aggrieved at some apparent slight that he had put upon them: is it reasonable to fix the occasion of the personal slight at a time when neither party had met or thought of meeting the other? If, however, we adopt the other interpretation and conceive the Apostle to have been involuntarily detained by illness on his way through Galatia, all difficulties disappear at once. If he merely rested there in the first place like any other casual visitor to recover from the fatigue of his previous journey before resuming his onward pilgrimage, without the least thought of undertaking a Christian

<sup>1</sup> The rendering of the Revised Version here adopted, "*because of infirmity,*" rightly lays stress on the causal force which belongs to the Greek preposition according to the usage of the Greek Testament as well as classical authors. The English phrase "*first time*" is less explicit than the corresponding Greek, which specifies the *former* of the two visits which the Apostle had paid to Galatia; but as that was also his first visit, the difference is immaterial for our present purpose.

ministry in that place, his converts could not fail in after times to remember the eventful circumstances which had issued in their conversion: they would not be likely to forget either his first introduction to them as a passing stranger, or the sudden illness which had incapacitated him for further travel, and, by throwing him on their hospitable care, had so endeared them to each other and issued in a lifelong union of affection and faith. He too on his side was sure to feel some qualms of self-reproach when he recalled the indifference which he had originally manifested towards his Galatian hosts, and to cherish intense gratitude for the devoted kindness with which they had nevertheless ministered to his sufferings. It is obvious that the malady ran the whole of its subsequent course under the eyes of his Galatian converts; for he assumes their familiarity with its repulsive symptoms, and expresses grateful recollection of their tender sympathy. It further appears that it lasted a considerable time: for whereas he broke down before he had attempted to make a single convert, he found himself before its close surrounded by a devoted band of friends who were zealous to make any sacrifice for his relief. How many of the devout Gentiles, who eventually formed the bulk of the first Galatian Church, owed their conversion to their attendance on his sick-bed, is not recorded; but it is certain, from the pathetic reference here made to the intimate affection that grew up between the Apostle and his attendants, that at least the foundation of a Church was laid before his recovery; and we can perceive how impossible it had become for him at that stage to tear himself away from the infant Church, whatever he had before meditated.

6. This view cannot possibly be reconciled with the theory of a northern site for the Galatian churches. Northern Galatia lay quite away from the recorded track of the Apostle, and even those who still cling to their belief in that site in spite of Prof. Ramsay's researches in Asia Minor

can hardly imagine that he intended to travel beyond it to some still more distant field. Southern Galatia, on the contrary, was traversed from end to end by a great highway on which he is known to have travelled four times ; and on this were situated his three churches, the Pisidian Antioch Iconium and Lystra. *Primâ facie* their position satisfies the essential conditions of an interrupted journey. It is well, therefore, to place the historical record of their foundation side by side with the state of facts described independently in the Epistle, and compare the two accounts in order to ascertain their mutual harmony or divergence. The first result of this comparison is distinctly to identify the scene of the illness with the Pisidian Antioch. It lay just within the southern border of the province, and was therefore the first Galatian city reached by Paul and Barnabas on their northward journey from the coast, and the first in which they took up their abode. The narrative of their journey terminates abruptly with their arrival at Antioch : and the history, without assigning any reason for its sudden termination or noticing the commencement of their ministry, passes over an indefinite period in silence, recording only the final stage of their ministry. The Epistle completely explains this sudden halt, and fills up the mysterious gap, by incidental reference to a serious illness which attacked Paul immediately after his arrival and evidently lasted for a considerable time. According to the Epistle he won the hearts of many Galatians, whom he numbered either then or afterwards among his converts, and became permanently bound to them in heart and spirit. The historian maintains his habitual silence about these personal details, which belong more properly to a biography than to a history of the apostolic Church. Again, the comparison reflects a needed ray of light on the original policy of the mission : for whereas it is difficult in the Acts to reconcile the prolonged sojourn in Galatia with the determined energy of their

start, which alarmed the less courageous Mark and carried the party as far as Antioch without a break, the Epistle supplies the information that Galatia was not the original goal of the expedition, and that the Galatian ministry was really due to a subsequent attack of illness. This chain of minute coincidences in minor details, which could only be known to contemporary writers, establishes the close connexion of the events recorded and strongly attests the veracity of the two narratives: their combination results in a graphic picture of the Apostle's early ministry in Galatia, and it is interesting to notice how decisively, in spite of his far-sighted policy and his energetic resolution, his career was shaped on this, as on many other occasions, beyond his own control, by the providence of God.

7. Finally, since the two narratives agree in suggesting that Antioch was not the real goal for which the Apostles started, and that the journey thither was only the first stage of their proposed expedition, it is worth while to enquire whither they were really bound. The position of Antioch goes far to determine the answer to this question. It was a Roman colony planted by Augustus Cæsar on the main road which ran from Syria to the western coast of Asia, and linked the eastern provinces of the empire with Greece and Rome by way of Ephesus. For the security of that imperial highway, and the pacification of the Pisidian highlands adjoining it, he constructed a system of military roads converging on Antioch from the south, and connecting it with a kindred group of Roman colonies generally known as the Pisidian. By this means safe communication was established with Pamphylia and Cyprus, and the safety of the road itself was effectually secured, so that the Apostles were able to reckon on reaching Antioch by that route.

Once at Antioch, they had the option of proceeding along the main road either eastwards to Iconium and Lystra, or westwards to Ephesus: for an expedition northwards by local

roads into the heart of Phrygia was clearly out of the question. And since the Epistle distinctly states that Paul had no intention before his illness of preaching to any of the Galatians, they had no alternative but to follow the westward road into the province of Asia. The insight thus afforded us into the mind of the Apostle is full of interest. It appears that at this early stage of his career he was already bent on adding Ephesus and some of the famous cities on the Asiatic seaboard to the kingdom of Christ. The project might well seem to Mark at that time a chimerical dream ; but it was at last accomplished, though many years passed before he was permitted to achieve this crowning triumph. Throughout those intervening years his Christian ambition pointed steadily in that direction. The very next time that he found himself in a position to resume his missionary labours he formed once more the design of proceeding along this same road to the province of Asia after revisiting his Galatian churches, but his design was a second time overruled by the intervention of a higher Power ; the Spirit warned him to turn aside into the road to Troas, and from thence he was summoned over to Macedonia. Yet in spite of these two successive disappointments in Galatia he did not abandon his fixed purpose : no sooner did he complete his ministry in Corinth than he hastened to prepare the way for the new campaign at Ephesus to which the seven Churches of Asia owed their birth.

It may perhaps be urged against this view of the apostolic policy that if Paul and Barnabas desired to proceed from Paphos to Ephesus, their most direct course was by sea : there is, however, good reason for dismissing this objection as futile. Since the Levant was closed to navigation all the winter, it may be taken for granted that the expedition originally started from Syria in the spring that they might have the summer season before them.

They probably spent all the summer months in traversing Cyprus, preaching everywhere, and did not reach Paphos before the autumn. It was by that time impossible for them to reach the Ægean by a sea voyage on account of the persistency and frequent violence of the Etesian winds which blew from a north-west quarter out of the Ægean sea all the autumn. It was difficult and dangerous for even well-found vessels like the Alexandrian ship which conveyed Paul from Myra to attempt to round the promontory of Cnidus at that season. The coasting craft which frequented Paphos, though sufficient to carry the Apostles across to the mainland, would certainly not have ventured to face the risk of encountering those adverse winds and stormy seas. There were in all probability only three courses open to them, to turn their faces homewards, to linger along the coast of the Levant, or to strike across by way of Perga and Antioch into the great land route which led to the western coast. They chose the last and boldest course; and though their enterprise was cut short half-way by the illness of one Apostle, their courage was rewarded by the addition of three Galatian churches to the kingdom of Christ, and they were enabled to plant the banner of the cross firmly in the centre of Asia Minor.

F. RENDALL.

### FEW THINGS NEEDFUL.

“ And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”—*Luke x. 41, 42.*

THE Lord Jesus was on His last fatal journey to Jerusalem. Many forcible and beautiful sayings are connected by St. Luke with this period. Often it is not easy to be sure that the connexion is historical; but we may assume that even in the Evangelist's time a strictly historical arrangement