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The Province Asia in the First Century.

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WE are familiar with the illustration of the New Testament from the remains of classical antiquity; an attempt is made in the present article to reverse the process, and to show how the New Testament throws light upon the political, commercial, social, and religious life of a Roman province in the first century of our era.

The evidence will be drawn mainly from the Acts of the Apostles and the Apocalypse; nor, in the light of the conclusions of such scholars as the late Dr. Blass and Dr. Harnack in Germany, and Sir William Ramsay in our own country, is any apology needed for the assumption that these are documents of the first century.

The word "provincia" was not primarily a local term, but denoted the sphere of duty of an official, and so in some cases boundaries were elastic—*e.g.*, Cicero, as Governor of Cilicia, being prevented by pirates from approaching his province by the sea route, travelled overland, and held his first assize ("conventus") at Iconium, far beyond the natural and geographical boundary of Cilicia. The convenience of the arrangement brought Iconium within his "provincia" or sphere of duty; but the tendency was setting strongly towards definite local boundaries to the provinces, which, under the early Empire, became such definite units that they began to supersede the old distinctions of race and language. The Acts and St. Paul's letters bear witness to this. Such phrases "the Phrygo-Galatic region" (Acts xvi. 6), and the "Galatic region" (*i.e.*, of Lycaonia and Phrygia), and "Phrygia" (*i.e.*, within the province Asia, Acts xviii. 23), show how essential the provincial name was along with the older district name; and the fact that St. Paul could address the Lycaonians of Iconium, Derbe, and

Lystra, and the Phrygians of Antioch, in common as Galatians, without fear of offence, is further evidence.

This quiescence of national spirit is perhaps most strikingly exemplified in the case of the province with which we are dealing. Remember the variety of races included within its borders, some of them with memories of ancient greatness—Mysians, Lydians, Phrygians, Carians. Of these races all but the Lydians still preserved their native speech in the remoter districts, and even Lydian was spoken in Cibyra, a Lydian colony in South-West Phrygia. Not only were there these earlier races, but all along the coast were the older Greek colonies, and on the main lines of the interior the more recent Macedonian foundations—the Antiochs, and Laodiceas, and Seleuceias—and yet Strabo chooses as the Greek equivalent of "provincia" the word ἔθνος (nation), ἡ Ἀσία τὸ ἔθνος being the equivalent of Asia provincia.

The tendency to denationalize received a check at the close of our period, and the recrudescence of the national spirit received growing recognition in the later provincial rearrangements from the time of Hadrian onward; but during the first century feelings of gratitude towards the power that had given peace prevailed over national sentiment.

The power which had imposed this peace was foreign: in the language of the Apocalypse (xiii. 1), it was "a beast rising out of the sea"; and this power was backed by military force, for it "was like to a leopard, with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion." But the province had also a local origin and a local organization; roughly it represented the dominion of the Attalid Kings of Pergamum. It was organized with a κοινὸν, or commune representative of its various cities. The Pergamene origin of the κοινὸν is suggested by the formula of resolution, "It was resolved by the Hellenes of Asia." And in this aspect the province is represented as "another beast coming up out of the earth"—*i.e.*, autochthonous—"with two horns like a lamb"; for there was no military garrison in the province, as it was not a frontier State. It exercised "all the authority of the first

beast," and "made the earth and all that dwell in it to worship the first beast." This brings us face to face with the main function of the κοινὸν τῆς Ἀσίας, the fostering and promotion of that religious cult which gave unity to the whole—the worship of Rome and the Emperor.

The worship of Rome began at Smyrna in 195 B.C., but the unifying influence of this central cult dates from its adoption by Augustus, and the foundation of the first temple of Rome and Augustus at Pergamum (probably in 29 B.C.). Smyrna established her claim to a similar foundation under Tiberius in A.D. 26. Ephesus also received the honour of such a temple under Claudius or Nero. The only reference to the Emperor cult in the Acts is in the account of the riot at Ephesus, in which some of the Asiarchs—*i.e.*, representative members of the κοινὸν—are depicted, rather unexpectedly at the first sight, as friends of Paul, anxious to preserve him from bodily harm; but in the forty years which elapsed between that event and the publication of the Apocalypse at the close of Domitian's reign, the situation was completely changed, and the writer of the latter looks upon the Emperor cult as the bitterest foe of the new faith. At the same time he gives us more information as to the means used to extend the cult and increase its influence than any other author.

We have already seen that the commune "maketh the earth, and all that dwell therein to worship the first beast"; it regulated the imperial worship, arranged the ritual, ordered the building of temples, fixed festivals and holidays, and the like; it ordered statues to the Emperor, "saying to them that dwell upon the earth that they should make an image to the beast." This was certainly the case with regard to the statue of Augustus at Pergamum, and is most probable in other instances. But the writer goes farther, and charges the commune with spreading the cult among the vulgar by the use of trickery. It "doeth great signs, that it should even make fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the sight of men." "And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image

of the beast should speak" (xiii. 13, 15). And these proceedings are connected later with a definite individual—"the false prophet that did the signs before the beast, wherewith he deceived them that received the mark of the beast, and that worshipped his image" (xix. 20).

Such allusions as these are not to be hastily dismissed as the hostile imaginings of a heated controversialist; and when we remember the part played by magic generally in the life of Ephesus, the gain made by the owners of a girl with ventriloquial powers at Philippi (Acts xvi. 16 *ff.*), the presence of a magus, Elymas Barjesus, in the train of Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus, and the part played at this very period by that arch-charlatan, Apollonius of Tyana, we shall be ready to admit that we have valuable light thrown on the methods of the commune.

Along with something closely akin to fraud went force. There is little or no reference to mob violence in the Apocalypse, but there is much to organized persecution; the ventriloquial utterances of the image of the beast ordered "that whosoever should not worship the image of the beast should be slain" (xiii. 15). But apart from the comparatively small number of those who were put to death for non-compliance with the commune's orders, considerable pressure was brought to bear by a systematic boycott of the recusants. "He maketh all, small and great, rich and poor, freemen and slaves, that there be given them a stamp upon their right hand and upon their foreheads, and that none be able to buy or sell save he that hath the stamp, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (xiii. 16, 17). The stamp or mark (χάραγμα) of the beast is clearly something which was a plain and obvious proof of loyalty. Professor Deissmann, arguing from the evidence of the papyrus business-documents discovered in the Fayyum, all of which were stamped in red ink with the name and year of the reigning Cæsar as a certificate of registration, suggests that the figure in the Apocalypse is prompted by this practice, the official stamp being known as χάραγμα, and that a test of loyalty, such as burning incense to the Emperor, was exacted from all

who required such registration of their business transactions; but far-reaching as would be the effects of such an ordinance, many would still escape it, and it seems more likely that men were liable to be called upon to produce some such certificate of sacrifice as those (technically known as "libelli") which have come down to us from the Decian persecution of the third century. Be that as it may, the commune was able to establish a boycott of all who refused to join in the State religion of Emperor-worship.

It is interesting to watch this strong centralizing force at work among the heterogeneous elements which the province presented. The true helper of the Roman against the Oriental was the Hellene; but the Hellene was an ally whose love of independence and intrigue made him a singularly difficult person to work with; his skill in making his governor's life a burden is as painfully felt by the Turkish governor of the present day as it was by Cicero when he wrote ("Ad Fam.," iii. 1, 4) complaining of the "perversitas" of the Greeks under his rule. True, the comparison between a modern Turkish governor and a Roman proconsul must not leave out of sight the great difference between their respective equipment for their post. We could scarcely apply to the Turkish system of the present day, degenerate descendant of the effete Byzantine organization, the language which M. Waddington applies to the Roman officials — that among them we can find examples occasionally of cruelty, occasionally of rapacity, but never of incompetence; but, at the same time, the task of the proconsul of the first century was made more difficult by the comparative independence and thorough organization of Greek city life.

That the independence of the Greek free cities should be an object of suspicion to the Roman Government is only to be expected. A State which deprived its own citizens of the right of free association, save under the narrowest limits, would naturally fear the independence of the Greek, and try to check it at every turn. And so we find a very watchful eye kept upon the city governments, and a steady repression of their more

democratic manifestations. This aspect of Roman administration is brought before us in that vivid account of the riot instigated by Demetrius and his fellow-guildsmen at Ephesus. The very position of the γραμματεύς, or Secretary of State, is testimony to the waning power of the more democratic element in the constitution. The ἐκκλησία had practically lost its power of initiative, "though still in name at least the supreme and final authority in the city"; but, as Canon Hicks says in his edition of the "Ephesian Inscriptions in the British Museum," "it was more and more left to the Secretary to arrange the business of the Assembly. Together with the Strategoi, he drafted the decrees to be proposed. He had the decrees engraved. He took charge of the money left to the people of Ephesus." "Further, it is clear that he acted as a channel of communication between the Roman provincial administration and the municipality" ("H.D.B.," i., col. 7236, Ramsay). But the pressure of Rome's strong hand is felt even more in his speech, which we have in a highly condensed form. After gaining the hearing of the crowds by his assertion of the city's devotion to the worship of Artemis, he reminds his audience that any case of law might be brought before the regular assizes (ἀγοραῖοι = "conventus") under the presidency of the proconsul for the time being; and then, recalling to them the right of the lawful assembly (ἔννομος ἐκκλησία) to decide on other matters (ἐπιλύειν), he brings the mob to their senses by warning them of the possibility of serious consequences from their hasty and tumultuous action. What were these possible consequences, the fear of which exercised so pacifying an influence? Now the technical Ephesian term for "ordinary" meetings of the assembly was νόμιμος (= Athenian κυρία; we do not know the Ephesian equivalent of συγκλητός, the Athenian term for extraordinary meetings), but the word used in the speech is ἔννομος (lawful). Professor Ramsay has suggested that, as may be inferred from other sources, the extraordinary assemblies were practically abolished by the Roman administration. Certainly they could not be held without the express

sanction of the Roman authorities. At Prusa, early in the second century, Dio Chrysostom thanks the governor, Verenus Rufus, in the most fulsome terms for having permitted such an assembly to be held; and the Secretary at Ephesus is warning his excited hearers that they run the risk, as the result of their irregular meeting (*συστροφή*), of having the right to the regular and, by this time, only lawful Assemblies suspended; for the Roman authorities would not be slow to seize the opportunity afforded them, by what might be called a riot (*στάσεως ἐγκαλεῖσθαι*), still further to curtail the rights of the popular body.

If the freedom of the Greek cities was a hindrance to the unification of the province, another feature of their life went far to neutralize that difficulty, and that was their insensate rivalry one with another, which laid them open to control by the empty flattery of high-sounding titles. There is an amusing instance of this in the Acts; the description of Philippi (xvi. 12) as "the first city of its division of Macedonia" has been a standing difficulty, for by other writers Amphipolis is said to have held that position. But could any doctor who has practised for six years in Liverpool admit for one moment that Manchester held the superior position in South Lancashire? No more could St. Luke, who had practised for six years at Philippi, allow the superiority of its neighbouring rival.

Four cities in Asia claimed the title of *πρωτὴ τῆς Ἀσίας*: Smyrna was "first in size and beauty"; Ephesus, first as landing-place of the proconsul and seat of much of the provincial government; Pergamum, as the official capital; while Sardis claimed the proud title of "first metropolis of Asia, Lydia, and Hellas"—and so the rivalry went on among the other cities of the province, as elsewhere. Small wonder that Dio Chrysostom warned the citizens of Nicæa and Nicomedia, as they squabbled over similar empty honours, that their Greek follies (*Ἑλληνικὰ ἁμαρτήματα*) were the laughing-stock of their Roman masters.

We must now turn to trade and commercial life. A glance at

the map will show that the peninsula of Asia Minor stretches like a bridge between the mass of the Asiatic continent and Southern Europe. It must always have been traversed by the main lines of land traffic between East and West, and its western extremity must have been the terminus of such routes, not only because it lay nearest to the shores of Europe, and offered excellent harbourage, but also because the river valleys of the Hermus and the Mæander offered the readiest means of access to the coast from the plateau of the interior. In early times the main trade route entered the peninsula from the east, across the passes of Anti-Taurus, was deflected northward by the attraction of the great Hittite capital, Pteria, in North Cappadocia, and then passed in a south-west direction till it entered the Hermus Valley. While the Royal Road, as it was termed, was the chief line of communication, Sardis flourished as the capital of Lydia, with control of the traffic that passed along the valley at its feet; and Phocæa formed the natural terminus of the road seawards, Smyrna having been crushed by Alyattes and the Lydians in the seventh century B.C. But when, during the fifth century, the energy of the Tarsians made the Cilician gates available for wheeled traffic across the Taurus, the southern route, descending from the plateau by the valleys of Lycus and the Mæander, grew in importance, and Iconium, Apamæa, and Laodicea ad Lycum commanded the road which found its ports in Miletus and Ephesus. The Royal Road lost much of its traffic, Sardis became a city which lived upon its past—"having a name to live when it was dead," as the writer of the Apocalypse says—and such traffic as passed along it was commanded at the very descent from the plateau by the Pergamene foundation of Philadelphia, and passed under the crumbling cliffs of the Sardian acropolis, fit symbol of the city's decay, to the great port of Smyrna.

In modern times the process has been reversed; the English-owned line which runs from Smyrna up the Mæander and Lycus valleys to Dineir (Apamea) has had its field of supply cut off by the first section of the Baghdad Railway running

from Constantinople through Iconium to the Taurus—a line in which is connected with the west coast by the Smyrna-Cassaba Prolongement, running up the Hermus Valley, climbing the plateau near Ala Sheher (Philadelphia), and joining the main line at Afium Kara Hissar.

The importance of the cities of the province was practically regulated by their relations to trade. Pergamum might be the official capital, but it lay away from the main lines, and Ephesus largely fulfilled the functions of the chief city. Sardis might have a long and eventful history, but Smyrna far outshone her ancient oppressor; and of all the cities of the province that felt the shattering effects of the various earthquake shocks during this period, it was Laodicea alone that "had need of nothing," and proudly declined the imperial help offered towards restoration.

It was not only land-borne traffic that swelled the wealth of Asia; the harbours of the coast, Smyrna, Ephesus, Miletus, and Halicarnassus, to say nothing of the lesser ports, were filled with merchantmen. Three centuries before this time, according to Canon Hicks, there was daily communication between Cos and Alexandria; and when once Pompey had cleared the Levant of the Cilician pirates, the sea-borne trade increased by leaps and bounds. The story of Paul in the Acts is full of references. He sails from Troas, and runs before the wind to Samothrace and Neapolis; he could take passage in a pilgrim ship from Corinth, which would call at Ephesus to pick up more passengers for the Jewish feasts, much as the steamers chartered by Cook and Sons to carry pilgrims from Bombay to Jeddah for the Mecca Hajj might call at the ports of the Persian Gulf to complete their living freight *en route*; we have the elaborate description of the coasting voyage down the eastern shore of the Ægean on his last journey to Jerusalem; and it was in a ship of Adramyttium that he sailed a prisoner from Cæsarea on his voyage to Rome.

But this traffic, whether by land or sea, passed for the most part in one direction—westwards; the attraction of Rome was felt in every corner of her dominion. The nearest town to the

marble quarries of Eastern Phrygia was Docimeion, eight miles to the north-east, but the headquarters of the trade, and the town from which the marble took its name, was Synnada, twenty miles away, but on the road to Rome. And the trade that poured Romewards through such a port as Ephesus is reflected in the description by the Ephesian writer of the Apocalypse in the lament of the merchants over the fall of Rome, "because no man any longer buyeth their cargo, cargo of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls, and linen and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all citrus wood, and every ivory vessel, and every vessel of very precious wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men."

It seems strange that, with this frequency of communication, the organizing genius of the Roman Government never instituted a public post. Augustus established a service of imperial couriers, one of whom, according to Mommsen, meets us in the Acts, Julius, the centurion of the Augustan cohort, *i.e.*, of the corps of special Imperial messengers, who took charge of Paul on his way to Rome; and the "tabellarii" of the tax-farmers and great business houses of the Empire recall the great epistolary activity of the early Church, which has given us more than one-third of the New Testament. But a public post was not yet conceived.

Within the cities the various trades were organized into guilds; even unskilled labour, as we should term it, was so treated, for inscriptions speak of the guild of street porters at Smyrna. We have already had a specimen of boycotting. An inscription of Magnesia ad Mæandrum shows us the bakers of the city on strike, and repressed by the Roman governor's stern edict: "I forbid them either to meet together in a union (ἑταιρεύειν) or to show audacity in thrusting themselves forward (does this refer to picketing?); they must obey in all ways the regulation made for the common good, and provide

the necessary supply of bread to the city without fail." It seems most probable that in some of the smaller trading cities, like Thyatira, the political organization coincided with the commercial, and a man held his citizenship, not as a member of a tribe, but of a trade guild. But the clearest instance that we have of the influence of these guilds is in that episode to which we have already referred—the riot at Ephesus. The first trouble for the new faith (apart from Jewish opposition) arose when it touched the most sensitive spot in civilized man, his pocket. It had been so earlier at Philippi; it was when the masters of the hysterical slave-girl with ventriloquial powers "saw that the hope of their gains was gone" through Paul's intervention that they dragged the missionaries before the magistrates on a charge of "majestas." It was so later in Bithynia, where Pliny complains that among the effects of the new religion it had sent down the demand for hay and fodder, and so spoiled the market. In Ephesus, when Paul's teaching began to affect the sale of the silver votive shrines, Demetrius, a silversmith, and probably master of the guild, called his fellow-craftsmen together into the guildhall, and inflamed them by a speech in which he lightly touched upon the real cause of offence, and then appealed to their religious zeal and their civic pride in the great goddess Artemis. Roused by this shrewdly conceived oration, the craftsmen poured out into the street (εἰς τὸ ἄμφοδον, Cod. D.), and, gathering the crowds of loafers as they went along, rushed into the theatre, "the greater part of them," as St. Luke sarcastically remarks, "not knowing for what cause they had come together." And from this trade grievance there arose a disturbance which threatened to rouse the suspicions of the Roman Government, and to issue for the city in the loss of the much-prized remnants of its independence.

Turning to the general life of the province, we can see reflected in the pages of the Apocalypse the rumours which then, as now, ran through the bazaars of Levantine cities: rumours of trouble upon the eastern frontier—of Parthian invasions, the king upon the white horse, the Parthian monarch, followed by

massacre, famine, and death, the natural companions of the invading force (vi. 1-8); the loosing of the four angels at the River Euphrates, followed by the invasion of the demonic horsemen (ix. 14-19); the drying up of the Euphrates, "that the way might be ready for the kings that come from the sunrising" (xvi. 12); rumours of a "Nero redivivus" (Tac. "Hist.," II. 8; Suet., "Nero," 57; and the Sibylline Oracles, originating in Asia at this period), "one of the heads as though it had been smitten unto death, and his death-stroke was healed" (xiii. 3); "the beast that was, and is not, and is himself the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition" (xvii. 10).

And in the Acts we have the life of St. Paul as the peripatetic philosopher, working at tent-making for his livelihood during the morning, and so lifting himself above the reproach of being a mere κάπηλος (huckster of knowledge) and then discussing with all comers in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus "from the fifth hour to the tenth" (as Cod. D. has it)—*i.e.*, when the hours of work were over. This last detail receives interesting confirmation from the epigram upon a sundial found at Herculaneum:

> Ἐξ ὧραι μοχθοῖς ἱκανώταται αἱ δὲ μετ' αὐτὰς
> Γράμμασι δεικνύμεναι ΖΗΘΙ λέγουσι βρότοις—

a sentiment which throws much light upon ancient ideas as to life and labour.

Such are some impressions which may be gained from the New Testament of the life of an age and country in which the East and the West were assimilated one to the other as closely as has ever been the case—a condition of affairs which made the Province Asia the readiest to receive that faith which, Eastern in origin, was to sway the Western world; and modern Europe still feels the impress which Asia laid, both in doctrine and organization, upon the religious system which found there its first true home.