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THE PAULINE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS.

THREE Epistles of St. Paul, viz., those to the Romans and Corinthians, besides the Acts of the Apostles, make mention of a collection for the saints, set on foot amidst the Pauline churches about the beginning of the year 57 A.D., and presented at Jerusalem by Pentecost in the following year. One particular aspect of this subject has been long familiar to English readers through the prominence given to it by Paley in his *Horæ Paulinæ*. He there pointed out the close coincidence between the narrative of the Acts and the original letters of St. Paul—a coincidence so evidently unstudied and undesigned by the authors themselves, and extending to such minute details and delicate shades of thought and feeling, that it could only exist in documents based on personal knowledge of the facts, or whose materials at least were compiled before the events had faded from the memory. This argument established to the satisfaction of most readers the circumstantial accuracy of the narrative, at the same time that it confirmed the authenticity of the letters; the substantial truth of his conclusions has never been invalidated, and modern criticism furnishes many additional particulars by which his case might, if necessary, be materially strengthened.

It is here proposed, in treating of the collection, to assume the truth of the facts, as gathered indifferently from these two sources, the Epistles and the Acts, to investigate the circumstances which occasioned it, and so connect it with the history of the Pauline churches, and with the apostolic policy in regard to them.

1. A glance at its origin establishes the fact that it was no

spontaneous impulse of Christian charity, but the direct result of an apostolic initiative in a wide circle of Christian communities. The language of St. Paul forbids our regarding it as a casual offspring of circumstances or an occasional incident in the life of the primitive Church, and suggests that he himself designed it as an act of policy in the interest of the Church. It appears, further, that it was not called forth by any exceptional distress in Palestine, which in his judgment demanded a supreme and united effort throughout the Christian world for its relief. The earlier contribution from the church of Antioch, conveyed to Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Paul, had been prompted by a distinct prophecy of impending famine. But in this case there was no famine imminent, nor any urgent cry of distress, so that the circumstances at once differentiate the two contributions.

Several causes probably combined to impoverish the church of Jerusalem: the religious prejudices of the Jews, amongst whom they lived, entailed upon them constant social persecution, even in times of comparative peace; the claims of Christian visitors on their hospitality were heavy; the maintenance of the apostles and of a disproportionate number of Christian teachers threw on them an undue share of Christian burdens. But whatever the causes of their poverty, it was certainly chronic, and not urgent. St. Paul makes no sensational appeal on their behalf; on the contrary, he studiously discourages spasmodic efforts of liberality, forbids hasty gatherings under pressure of time, and adopts on principle a system of continuous and systematic almsgiving by weekly offerings. A perusal of these instructions forces upon us the conclusion that the apostle was contemplating a deliberate act of policy rather than providing for a temporary need.

2. This conclusion is strengthened by calculating the actual length of time which elapsed between the first sug-

gestion of the fund and its consummation. The letter which instituted weekly gatherings at Corinth was written more than a year before the fund was presented at Jerusalem (compare 1 Cor. xvi. 1–8 with Acts xx. 16). But this is not all; the first proposal of the scheme to the Corinthian church is carried back some months earlier; for in a later letter of the same year it is mentioned that Achaia had been ready *last year*, and again that Achaia had been active and willing in the cause *last year* (2 Cor. viii. 10, ix. 2). It appears, too, from 1 Corinthians xvi. 1, that a similar correspondence had taken place previously with the Galatian churches; that they, too, had already returned a favourable answer to the proposal of the apostle, and had received the same instructions for weekly gatherings as those now sent to Corinth. In both cases, therefore, a delay of not less than a year and a half intervened between the original conception of the project and its completion; and the delay may fairly be described as premeditated, for it was the inevitable result of the instructions given to the churches.

3. The most fruitful cause of delay was not the system of gradual collection, but the combination of many separate churches in one common scheme. The apostle lays great stress on this common action of the churches; with a view to it, he expressly directs the Corinthians to await his coming before they appointed representatives to carry their bounty to Jerusalem, and indicates his intention, if a sufficient response should be made to his appeal, of accompanying their representatives himself to Jerusalem. The same instructions were of course given or sent to the other churches likewise, with the result, which he evidently anticipated from the first, that a considerable deputation travelled under his guidance from Troas to Jerusalem, were there introduced by him before a general meeting of the elders at which James presided, and formally presented their offerings to the church. This common action of independent

churches was apparently a novel feature in church organisation ; and, taken in connexion with the history of St. Paul, it marks an important step in advance towards a general alliance of all Gentile Christians.

4. We shall best appreciate its importance by reviewing the extent of the combination. Three churches are named in the Epistles as participating in the movement, the Corinthian, Galatian, and Macedonian, none of which were really single churches, but groups of churches. To these must be added the churches of Asia, though the name does not occur in his Epistles, presumably because he was at Ephesus in their midst when he started this movement, and had therefore no occasion to write to them. For the list of deputies given in Acts xx. 4 includes two sent by them. That important group comprehended probably the famous seven churches of the Revelation, besides Troas and others on the coast, as well as Colossæ and Hierapolis in the Lycus valley ; for we are told that *all* who dwelt in the great province of Asia had heard the word of the Lord, so fruitful had been his two years' labour at Ephesus. Not that he had visited all these in person—the Colossian and neighbouring churches, for instance, had never seen his face,—but they recognised his apostolic authority, for they had been founded by his disciples, spreading in different directions from the church centre which he had established at Ephesus. Corinth, in like manner, formed the centre of an Achaian group. When St. Paul wrote to Corinth, he addressed himself to all the saints in all Achaia, and Achaia joined in this movement no less readily than Corinth. In Macedonia three churches only had been founded during his first hurried visit, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berœa ; but zealous colleagues and ministers had followed up his work, and he had himself, on his second visit, pushed on to the border of Illyricum. The position of the Galatian churches, which formed the fourth group, is less obvious.

The visits of St. Paul to the Galatian district, recorded in Acts xvi. 6 and xviii. 23, have been a mystery to many students of his life, who found it difficult to understand why he turned aside from the main current of Jewish and Greek civilisation, which he had found so fruitful for the diffusion of the gospel, to visit an out-of-the-way region of Celtic settlements. A fuller knowledge of the internal geography and previous history of Asia Minor has solved the problem, and restored these churches to their true position.[1] The name Galatia was not limited, in the ordinary language of the first century, to the ancient settlements of the Galatians in the north of Phrygia. Their last king ruled over much of southern Phrygia, Lycaonia, and Pisidia besides; and when he died, in B.C. 25, bequeathing his kingdom to the Romans, the southern portion, though inhabited by a more mixed population than the northern, was equally known as Galatia; and the name of the new Roman province, Galatia, did but perpetuate a local name already acquired. Southern Galatia became important under the first Cæsars; for the land routes from Syria to the Ægean, which then formed the principal arteries of the empire from east to west, ran across it by way of the Cilician gates through Iconium or Lystra. For their protection, it was studded with colonies and intersected by military roads. The only common name for this region, belonging geographically in part to Phrygia, in part to Lycaonia, and in part to Pisidia, was Galatia; and these Roman and Græco-Roman cities would scarcely have accepted any other designation. The Galatian churches, therefore, were those of the Pisidian Antioch,

[1] I desire here fully to acknowledge my obligations to *The Church in the Roman Empire* in all that relates to the interior of Asia Minor. Before reading that work, I had bowed to the great authority of the late Bishop Lightfoot in regard to the position of the Galatian churches; but he would have been the first, if living, to acknowledge that the additional insight gained by Professor Ramsay into the topography and history of Asia Minor has superseded his own earlier theories, and that the conclusions he has formed as to the journeys of St. Paul are irresistible.

Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, which St. Paul founded, with the aid of Barnabas, on his first mission journey. There is, on the contrary, no evidence that he ever visited Celtic Galatia, which lay on each occasion at some distance from his natural route.

5. It further appears, from a rapid survey of the Apostle's ministry during the last five or six years, that ever since he had divided the mission field with Barnabas, and started under the guidance of the Spirit on an independent career to win a new kingdom for Christ in the Greek world, his energies had been wholly devoted to these four groups. For, after visiting some Syrian churches round Antioch, he proceeded by way of Tarsus and the Cilician gates or other passes of Mount Taurus direct to southern Galatia, first confirming the Cilician and then the Galatian churches in the faith, and connecting them firmly with their base at Antioch. His own design had been to press on thence to Ephesus; but the Spirit ordered otherwise, calling him first to establish the church at Philippi and Thessalonica, along the main road to Rome. He next fixed his headquarters for nearly two years at Corinth, making it the capital of a new Christian province. On leaving Corinth, he determined to plant himself at Ephesus, to which he at once paid a flying visit, and where he left Aquila and Priscilla to prepare a home for him and form a nucleus of converts, while he made a hurried journey to Jerusalem and Antioch. Returning to Ephesus by way of the Galatian churches, he spent more than two years there, planting those famous churches of Asia, which became, for at least sixty years, the chief glory of the Christian church. The only other city in the province besides Ephesus specially named as attracting his attention, and that on two occasions, was Troas (2 Cor. ii. 12, Acts xx. 6), doubtless because it was the port which connected the churches of Asia and Galatia with Philippi and Rome.

6. Admiration has been freely lavished on the indomitable energy which he displayed in this period of his career; but its solid success was not a little due to the far-reaching wisdom with which his operations were directed. His line of policy from the beginning was to extend the Christian church along the great lines of commerce and civilisation; and from this design, however hunted by enemies or tempted by favourable openings elsewhere, he never swerved. Now pushing forward with rapidity, now returning on his steps to ordain elders, organise and confirm the several churches which he had founded, he was ever advancing, yet never failed to retain his hold over former conquests, and make each in turn a step towards new victories. The Syrian Antioch was for all the eastern world the key to the West, and he clung firmly to it; Tarsus, Lystra, Iconium, the Pisidian Antioch, were the next stages on the way, and he secured them also. Compelled for a time, by a higher wisdom than his own, to break his line of communication and plant the gospel in European Greece, before attempting the conquest of Asiatic, he hastens back, the moment that work is done, to fill the gap between his European and Galatian churches. Perhaps a still more convincing proof of his statesmanlike policy may be discerned in his long stay at Corinth and Ephesus. Though his missionary zeal would naturally have tempted him to press forward eagerly to new adventures, he nevertheless sat down steadily for four years in those two cities; and the decision proved wise, for they were not only important stations on one route to Rome, but capitals of provinces and centres of administration. Accordingly, the Apostle resolved, with God's help, to turn them into Christian centres also; and he succeeded in forming round each a cluster of Christian churches. This was the first step towards such a federal union as might prevent local selfishness on the part of these communities, and teach them to care

each for their sister churches, as the individual Christian was taught to care for his brethren. For the Apostle to the Gentiles was no visionary enthusiast, but a statesman of no common order; he was not content with glorious visions of a universal church, but grasped firmly in his master mind the conditions of internal government and mutual alliance and support which were as indispensable for the permanence of the Church as faith and love were for its birth and growth.

7. And now the Apostle's long labours in these four great provinces of Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia, were drawing to a close. Looking round, early in A.D. 57, from his central post of observation at Ephesus, on the churches of Asia, this wise master-builder perceived that the foundations were so firmly and strongly laid as no longer to need his personal supervision, and that he might safely leave to his disciples the charge of further building on those foundations. In Asia he found no call to tarry anywhere save at Troas; if he visited any other church at this time, it was but a passing visit, like that to Troas, by the way. The European churches still claimed a few months' delay, for those of Macedonia had been of necessity committed early to the care of others; while the Corinthian church was torn by intestine factions, and afflicted by moral and spiritual disorders which demanded sharp remedies, and could not be healed without the personal attention and tender care of a wise father in God. The first Epistle to that church, written at this time, presents a vivid picture of its internal condition. The grievous faults there censured ought not to blind our eyes to the vigorous church-life which is there revealed. Comparing this with the other Epistles of St. Paul before his imprisonment, the reader finds himself for the first time in presence of an organised Christian society. These Epistles are all alike rich in personal allusions and personal narrative; all deal with

current controversies and passing events; all alike appeal to the personal conscience of individual believers, impressing upon them such fundamental truths as man's sin, God's holiness and Christ's redemption, the works of the Spirit and those of the flesh, resurrection and judgment, law and grace, faith and love. But the new feature which differentiates the first Epistle to the Corinthians from the rest is its analysis of a new social life consequent on their conversion, its evils and dangers, its duties and its possibilities. The factious support of rival ministers, the toleration of vices and scandals within the pale of the church, the quarrels of its members, the regulation of Christian marriage, the terms of intercourse with idolaters, the consideration due to weak brethren, the good order of their assemblies, are the kind of topics handled in succession; finally, the true ideal of a church is set forth as the body of Christ, animated by one Spirit, to which every member contributes its several functions of life and action, while all are cemented by the bond of an all-pervading love. The community thus addressed had evidently passed beyond the stage of infancy. The Apostle determines accordingly, after one thorough visitation of the churches, to venture on a prolonged absence. For he had these many years cherished a longing desire to carry forward the banner of the Cross a step farther, and plant it firmly in the centre of the empire, that he might be enabled thence to pursue his course to its extreme western limits, and win the whole Roman world for Christ (Rom. i. 10–13, xv. 23, 24). It had been necessary to pave the way by first bridging securely the wide interval between Antioch and the Italian seas; but this work ended with the visit to Corinth in the winter of 57–8. He made there a final announcement to the Roman Christians of his intended coming, for which some preparation had been already made in the departure thither of Aquila and Priscilla, with other beloved disciples from Ephesus

and Corinth. (Compare the list of salutations in Rom. xvi. 1–18.) He had now nothing more to do in these parts except to bid farewell to the old and tried friends whose society he had so long enjoyed, but who would see his face no longer among them (Acts xx. 25),[1] and to speak the last words of counsel and love to the churches which he had planted and watered hitherto, but which he was now leaving to grow up without his fostering care.

8. Still, however, though the time is ripe for his departure from Greece, one duty remains to be fulfilled before he can turn his face towards Rome. This was to present in person at Jerusalem the deputation from the Pauline churches which should convey thither their joint offerings. The Epistles of this season evince plainly how deep an interest he felt in this collection. But the narrative of the Acts exhibits in still stronger light his intense earnestness for its success. We are there forcibly reminded of the imminent risk involved in his present plan. Jerusalem was a dangerous place under any circumstances for the renegade who had once been the foremost champion of Judaism; doubly so at a festival when bitter enemies from Ephesus and Corinth were likely to meet and denounce him; but the danger was infinitely aggravated by his appearance as the public representative and acknowledged chief of Gentile Christianity. Nor was he suffered to forget the peril; for voices of the Spirit met him in every city along his route, warning him that bonds and afflictions awaited him at Jerusalem. Yet, in spite of all these warnings, in spite of urgent remonstrances and entreaties from his companions, he persisted in encountering his doom. Why was this? There must have been some adequate cause; for he had shown again and again, though he was ever ready to face

[1] The impression of a lifelong departure given by the expression *no more* in the Bible version is erroneous; the Greek text intimates only the cessation of their personal intercouse in consequence of his journey to the west.

death for Christ, that he was at the same time duly careful to save his life for Christ. His motive must be sought in this deputation of the churches; for he himself testifies before and after the event that his special object for visiting Jerusalem at this time was to present these offerings (Rom. xv. 25; Acts xxiv. 17). For the accomplishment of this object he counted not his life dear unto him, so that he might finish his course with joy.

To understand the intensity of this desire we must glance at the early history of the apostolic Church, and review for a moment its relation to the Pauline churches. The first great social change effected by the impulse of the Spirit in the Christian community was their provision for the Christian poor; the Church determined with one accord that no brother or sister should lack bread. Nor was this a transitory outburst of enthusiasm; the election of the Seven as regular church officers to assist the Twelve records its adoption with proper safeguards as a systematic principle of Christian society. The claim of the poor for maintenance was primarily local, and devolved upon the several churches as a matter of internal economy. It has been already pointed out that the one exception to this rule hitherto recorded was due to exceptional circumstances. But an extension of this principle was inevitable, if the Church of Christ was true to her profession of universal brotherhood; the whole family of Christ, however widely scattered throughout the world, must be ready and willing to step forward to the relief of a sister church in its hour of need. Even the Roman empire had begun to recognise the necessity of providing for occasional distress in cities or provinces by imperial subventions, and the Church could not fall behind the State in providing as a body for any local distress amongst her own members. This duty had been acknowledged in principle some years before; for when the Twelve met Paul and Barnabas in conference to ar-

range a basis of communion for Jewish and Gentile Christians, they impressed upon them in private the poverty of the churches committed to their care, and urged on them the duty of remembering the poor as a common duty of all the churches alike (Gal. ii. 10). This St. Paul was forward to do; and now, if not before, his desire bore conspicuous fruit in this contribution. Two motives for liberality are suggested in his Epistles, the debt of gratitude owing by his converts to the church of Jerusalem as their spiritual fathers (Rom. xv. 27), and the relative abundance of their own resources (2 Cor. viii. 14). He preserves a judicious silence as to a third motive, which was probably uppermost in his own mind. The Church of Christ had been on the brink of an open rupture on the subject of circumcision, as Gentile Christians refused to bear the yoke of the Law, and Jewish Christians counted communion with the uncircumcised an unlawful thing. The disastrous schism had been for a time averted by the wise forbearance and mutual concessions of the leaders on both sides, and a treaty of peace had been concluded which had so far secured the unity of the Church. But it left a soreness behind in the church of the circumcision; conscientious scruples wrought on some, and wounded pride on others; so that the rapid growth of the Pauline churches could not fail to stir some natural jealousy, even among believing Jews, as they saw the future preponderance in the Church passing away from them to the once despised Gentile. This graceful act of bounty, therefore, was a timely reminder how close and real were the bonds of sympathy which united these new brethren to them. The demonstration, however, must be public and impressive to be effective; and this was accordingly a notable feature in the design of the Apostle. For though he put forth his scheme at first tentatively until he was assured of a cordial response, the general deputation from the several churches under his own presidency was

distinctly contemplated in his original project (1 Cor. xvi. 4); and all hesitation on this head had vanished when he next wrote, in spite of some decay of zeal for the project in the Corinthian church (2 Cor. viii. ix.).

9. Did then the eventual result correspond to the Apostle's intention? We are fortunate in possessing materials for answering this question in a narrative written by an actual deputy who shared the journey to Jerusalem and attended the reception there; for the author of Acts xx. 4–xxi. 18 (whether he was, as tradition reports, St. Luke or another) distinctly identifies himself with the party who started from Philippi, and went in with Paul to the elders at Jerusalem. From him we learn that the majority of the members met Paul at Corinth, with the intention of crossing thence by sea to Ephesus, picking up there the Asiatic deputies, and proceeding to Palestine; but eventually there assembled at Philippi, besides the author, Sopater of Berœa, two Thessalonian representatives, and two Galatian, viz., Timothy of Lystra and Gaius of Derbe. *As for those of Asia, they* (it is said) *waited for us in Troas*[1] (Acts xx. 5), that city having now been appointed as the starting place. In this list two churches are conspicuous by their absence, the Philippian, so noted for its liberality, and the Corinthian. As for the former church, there is good ground for connecting the author with Philippi; for in Acts xvi. 10 he pointedly associates himself with the call to preach the gospel in Macedonia; he subsequently took part in preaching at Philippi; he remained there when Paul and Silas were forced to leave the city, and apparently succeeded so well in building up the Philippian church that they sent more than one contribution to the Apostle after his departure (Phil. iv. 16); he rejoined the Apostle there some years later as a deputy. No Corinthians appear in the

[1] I have here departed slightly from the Bible version in order to give what I conceive to be the true meaning of the Greek text.

list, but it is certain that the church did contribute (Rom. xv. 26); probably they entrusted their contribution to the two brethren named in 2 Corinthians viii. 18-22, as despatched on behalf of the fund from Macedonia to Corinth. The prominent position of Sopater in this list, though a member of the smallest church, suggests his identity with the brother who is there described as chosen by the churches to travel in charge of the fund; and the description of the other brother in *v.* 22 agrees well with the antecedents of the author already referred to. However this may be, there is no doubt that all the Pauline churches were in some way represented, and that at least eight representatives gathered round the Apostle at Troas.

10. Speaking afterwards to the elders of Ephesus of the imprisonment in store for him, he describes this last act of his ministry as its climax, and a crowning joy for which he would gladly lay down his life if necessary (Acts xx. 24). Such language suggests that, as he stood amidst this chosen band of disciples, his mind travelled far beyond any immediate wants of Jerusalem, beyond any temporary differences or jealousies that then disturbed the harmony of the church, to a future federation of all the Gentile churches which should hold forth hands of brotherhood to their brethren of the circumcision across the middle wall of partition which Christ had broken down that He might make of twain one new man, so making peace. The unity of the whole body of Christ was then only a doctrine and a principle which the Apostle had learnt of his Divine Master; the substantial unity of Christendom, in spite of many unhappy divisions, is now an admitted fact which underlies the thoughts of this generation; it was then an ideal which he had conceived in the Spirit, but had scarcely begun to reduce to practice throughout the Gentile churches. Under God the Christian future of the Roman world depended

largely on the wisdom and foresight of this inspired statesman, who had been charged with the duty of translating the spirit of Christian brotherhood into rules of united action, and constructing the framework of a world-wide kingdom of Christ. He had already devised chains of continuous churches to link east and west together, he had grouped clusters of sister churches round Christian centres. He was now feeling his way a step further onward to an enlarged federation of churches. The principle of representation, which he now for the first time introduced, was a decisive step towards the creation of a central unity within the church as extensive as the imperial organisation, which should bind whole provinces together, as individual churches had been already linked in groups. This was the more indispensable for the Gentile churches, as they had no such natural centre of authority as the church of the circumcision possessed in Jerusalem; the Apostle himself was their only outward bond of union in Christ, and it rested with him to forge permanent links of association between them. At present their mutual intercourse for aid in distress, or counsel in doubt, for support under trial, for refuge from persecution, for new life in times of apathy or stagnation, centred in him alone. In the next century bishops became a regular channel of intercourse; their synods and councils established in time a common system of church government, and united the scattered members of the Christian commonwealth. But no such system as yet existed, nor any machinery for evolving it out of the apostolic form of government. The impulse of a creative mind was needed to call it into operation. This was given in the modest form of a collection for the saints, and a deputation to Jerusalem; but the policy thus originated was not the less far-reaching. These representatives of the churches were precursors of the future bishops in that important part of their functions which concerned the church

or the world outside their own particular church; and when they met under the presidency of the Apostle, the first decisive step was taken towards a federal union of Christendom. It was full time to banish local jealousies and selfish isolation by a closer alliance of Christian communities; for the peace which then prevailed in the Church could not be lasting; a few years only passed before she provoked the jealousy of the empire, which had hitherto befriended her with contemptuous toleration. She was shortly destined to measure her strength against the most formidable system of centralized despotism which the world had ever known, and to drink the cup of affliction and martyrdom to the dregs. In that fearful conflict with despotic power the purely spiritual power must have succumbed in death without the solid system of church union which the great Apostle to the Gentiles did so much to initiate. Here for the first time that glorious conception of the several churches fitly framed together and growing into a holy temple in the Lord, of which he wrote to the churches of Asia from his Roman prison, began to take material shape. His visit to Jerusalem ended indeed, as had been foretold, in exposing him to the malice of his enemies; but he did not suffer in vain; his policy did not fail, nor were his designs fruitless; for though the only immediate result recorded is the hearty welcome granted by the church of Jerusalem to the deputation, the union commenced under his auspices spread by degrees throughout the provinces of the empire, and proved an invaluable support and strength in the years of trial that were impending.

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