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The trouble is not thrown away on either side that is bestowed on an Epistle so dear to the heart of Christians.

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*THE STONING OF ST. PAUL AT LYSTRA, AND THE
EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS.*

IN writing to Timothy, St. Paul reminds that Lystrian convert of what had happened when he met him first in his native town. "Thou hast fully known my . . . persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me . . . at Lystra" (2 Tim. iii. 10, 11). It is therefore only to be expected that he would have his sufferings in mind if ever he wrote more generally to the Christians of that district, and St. Luke has plainly recorded that those sufferings took the form of that terrible and unique experience which he still had fresh in his memory when he wrote, "Once was I stoned" (2 Cor. xi. 25). It is now a commonly accepted view that he included the people of Lystra among the recipients of his letter to "the churches of Galatia." Consequently it is quite legitimate to examine that Epistle in order to find language reminiscent of experiences which had befallen him in that neighbourhood. The most familiar passage in this connexion is that in which St. Paul says, "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh (*δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός*) I preached the Gospel unto you at the first" (Gal. iv. 13). He adds that his physical condition was such as might have provoked their scorn and nullified his preaching, but, owing to their forbearance, it did not have that effect. He gratefully records that, "if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (Gal. iv. 15). The varied nature of the theories which depend largely on this passage for their support shows us how little certainty

can be obtained. One familiar suggestion is that an attack of malaria compelled St. Paul to leave Perga and seek the higher ground of Pisidia. Another is that he was kept in that district instead of journeying further owing to an ophthalmic weakness which made the Galatians desire to give him their own eyes to help him in his preaching. In all such theories, two things are taken for granted: that the infirmity spoken of was part of that recurrent malady which he speaks of elsewhere as his "stake in the flesh" (2 Cor. xii. 7), and that his preaching the Gospel to them "at the first" must necessarily apply to the first moment that he appeared among them, before the stoning at Lystra took place. But can either of these presuppositions be justified? First, it must be remembered that neither malaria nor ophthalmia nor any other complaint guarantees immunity from sickness of other kinds. However tempting it may be to connect the *σκόλοψ* with the *ἀσθένεια* in Galatia, their identification remains unproven. Had it been a particular malady of which St. Paul reminds his converts, would he not have prefaced the word *ἀσθένεια* with an article, instead of the vague and somewhat unusual expression *δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός*?

Secondly, with regard to the moment of his Galatian preaching to which he refers, there is nothing which demands that we should think of its earliest stage. Had he said that his *coming* among them was due to an infirmity, we should have been obliged to suppose that he would not have come into that locality at all but for its occurrence. If this were so, we must imagine, as Professor Ramsay and many others have done, that his presence in Galatia was due to a previous attack, and that the purpose of his going there was in order to recruit from it. But it is his *preaching*, and not his *coming*, which he attributes to an infirmity. We may therefore equally well understand him to mean that it was the cause

of his *staying* among them when he might otherwise have passed on more rapidly through their towns. And if we ask at which period of his first visit he "evangelized" (*εὐηγγελισάμην*) them, is not the answer to be found, not in his curtailed and sadly interrupted efforts to address them as he was being hunted from one town to another on the outward journey, but in his more leisurely and effective return, during which he set up churches in one town after another, beginning with Derbe ?

All this suggests that it is perfectly legitimate to seek in the period subsequent to his first entry into Galatia for some cause of infirmity which not only kept him among them, but made the sympathetic Galatians long to give him their own eyes, instead of turning away from him, as might have been the case. Is not the stoning at Lystra in itself a sufficient explanation ?

It is probably the general view that he fell stunned by a well-directed stone, and came to himself after his assailants had taken him for dead and flung his body outside the gates. This involves a terrible head-wound, and, amid the onslaught of an infuriated mob, it is highly improbable that it was the only one. He would be a pitiful object indeed when he reached Derbe shortly after. The question why he returned instead of pressing on has long exercised commentators. Had he pursued the route south-east from Derbe, and passed through the Cilician gates, he would have only had to traverse 160 miles to reach his home at Tarsus, and he could thence have easily returned to Antioch. Professor Harnack suggests that he elected to return to Lystra because "he shrank from making his way into the wild territory of Isauria."¹ If he was afraid, there must have been some cause. It can scarcely have been cowardice, in the light of his previous boldness. Could it not have been a physical

¹ Harnack, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 96.

cause, and may we find the solution of the problem of his itinerary in these words of his to the Galatian churches, "because of an infirmity of the flesh I preached unto you at the first" ?

In this case, Derbe assumes a new importance as the place where a critical decision was made (influenced, perhaps, by the solicitude of the Apostle's friends), on which hung the question of the real Christianising of the district to the West of it. If something had happened to him exactly at that time which made the journey impracticable through the wilds of Isauria and the fastnesses of the Taurus, all is explained. Such an event we find ready to hand in the stoning at Lystra. Crippled and wounded as he was, his indomitable will might help him to limp into Derbe, and his zeal could find vent before long in a slow return by easy stages over the old ground of the Galatian cities. But it would have been madness to attempt the arduous journey through the region of the Taurus.

And when his work of "confirming," "exhorting," and ordaining under these disadvantages was done among the people of that region, they might easily have treated with mockery an evangelist of such sorry appearance, who stood before them disfigured and bandaged. They might naturally have "despised" and "rejected" so unseemly a preacher. There was indeed a "temptation" to them in his flesh to give way to that loathing which the ancient world felt for what was maimed and unsightly. Yet they seemed only to see in him what was beautiful, and received him "as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. iv. 14). And as they looked upon his poor eyes, blackened and swollen, and perhaps still covered with bandages, they longed to pluck out their own eyes and give them to him.

It is difficult to see how such forbearance was necessary on the part of the Galatians if the infirmity was only caused

by malaria, or ophthalmia, or any such complaint. Nor would the Apostle have had any such special recollection of an indulgent hearing at a particular time and locality, if his complaint were a recurrent one, which would doubtless have often evoked, in the course of his many journeyings, an unexpected kindness on the part of those to whom he taught the love of Christ.

If the above suggestions can be accepted, the stoning at Lystra was of greater permanent importance than has been supposed.

But there is another passage in the Epistle which may contain a reference to the same Galatian experience, namely, the pathetic appeal which he makes at the close of the Epistle (vi. 17): "From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear branded in my body the marks of Jesus." These words have already been recognised as possibly referring in part to the same incident. Professor Ramsay, in a comment on "The Stigmata of Jesus,"¹ says, "The marks are those cut deep on Paul's body by the lictors' rods at Pisidian Antioch and the stones at Lystra, the scars that mark him as the slave of Jesus. . . . Obviously, it must appeal to something that lay deep in the hearts and memories of the Galatians." But the lictors' rods are after all a matter of surmise, whereas the stones are a certainty. The wounds and scars which he received from the latter would doubtless leave a life-long mark, and nothing could be more natural than that he should identify with the service of his Lord the sufferings which had befallen him, as he addressed a letter to the very district where they had been inflicted.

We come to the interpretation of the passage. "Let no man cause me trouble," he cries, as in some agitation he concludes the Epistle with his own hand. He is thinking of the new trouble that has come upon him in the defection of the

¹ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on the Galatians*, p. 472.

Galatian churches. But it is impossible for any man to permanently break him down and cripple his activities, for such a claim would ignore the fact that he is already the slave of a Master to Whom he stands or falls. It is useless and impertinent for other men to treat him so, for he bears branded on his body "the marks of Jesus." We here follow the accepted line of explanation, seeing in the *στίγματα* the marks of ownership branded on the slave, with possibly the added suggestion¹ of the *ιερόδουλος* marked for the service of his temple.

It has been thought that the Apostle means no more than this in connecting his sufferings with "the marks of Jesus." But there is another passage in his Epistles which may be so interpreted as to throw further light on this one. In a letter which some still think to have been written about the same time as that to the Galatians, he describes to the Corinthians the inwardness of apostolic persecution as "always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus" (2 Cor. iv. 10). Here it is impossible not to see in *νέκρωσις* some reference to the Passion.

Nor is the idea of fellowship in the sufferings of Christ absent from the Apostle's thoughts in his other writings, as when he speaks of his own ideal of knowing "the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death" (Phil. iii. 10). Such passages suggest that a similar thought is also contained in his words in the passage before us. If men are troubling him, he will identify this new cross with that of his Master, and such a thought must needs transform all his *κόποις*, and indeed remove them. But as he thus identifies the branding of wounds upon his heart with that physical moment of his Lord's sufferings when "He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities," he combines the physical experience with the mental,

¹ See Lightfoot, *Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 225.

and turns from the recent wounding of his heart and mind to the wounding of his body among them once in time past. The *κόποι* of that time, which hindered his journey and almost cost him his life, have the same explanation, for "I bear branded in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

A further point is suggested by the exact form of his words, though I would carefully limit this part of my inquiry to the region of suggestion. "Marks of Jesus" is a general expression, which would well identify the Apostle's sufferings with the Passion as a whole. But surely, if that were what he meant, he would have said *στίγματα Ἰησοῦ*. What he does say is *τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*. Why is the article prefixed? It does not seem to be for the sake of *Ἰησοῦ*. That name for Christ is, of course, very rare by itself in St. Paul's writings,¹ but its use with the article prefixed is much rarer. We conclude that there is some stress on the *τά*, which thus particularises the *στίγματα*. In after time the *στίγματα* were to be given a special signification as the wounds in the hands and feet of the crucified Saviour. Is it wholly an anachronism to read something of this meaning into the words of the Apostle? Ramsay describes it as an interpretation of the "dark ages." And yet it is at least significant that in the Latin versions "stigmata" remains untranslated. If such a meaning is after all admissible, may there not be a definite sense in which St. Paul bore these marks in his body? Long afterwards, St. Francis of Assisi meditated upon them till they seem to have gradually appeared upon his own hands and feet. If we look for any means whereby the same experience may have befallen St. Paul, we find it in the stoning at Lystra. In the case of St. Stephen, it was a regular Jewish stoning, sufficiently formal for the fatal result not to be

¹ In 16 passages, out of over 200 where Christ is named. Of these only 6 contain the article, and 3 of these are in one paragraph (2 Cor. iv. 10-14), where there seems special reason for the insertion.

in doubt for a moment. Such was not the case at Lystra. It was indeed the Jews who began it, but we are particularly told that "they persuaded the multitudes." They made use of a mob violence somewhat like that of Thessalonica. The circumstances of the moment do not suggest that the Apostle would kneel down like St. Stephen and calmly await death. The impulse which had just made him "leap" among them and disclaim divinity, would be exerted now to check this further misunderstanding. At any moment an explanation might become possible, or at least events might take a new turn. Perhaps the scene may be reproduced thus. St. Paul sets to work to defend himself against this sudden attack. As stone after stone comes through the air, he lifts first one hand and then the other, and receives on his open palms those which threaten his head and body. Of those aimed lower he takes no heed, nor of those which fall short and strike his feet and ankles. The shower soon grows too heavy for such protection, and he falls to the ground stunned by a blow on the temple. They drag him outside the city for dead, but the disciples are left standing round him in a circle, possibly having formed this ring in order to prevent his persecutors from touching his body and making sure of their victim's death. Consciousness soon returns and he quickly recovers from most of his bruises. But there remains the wounded head, which must needs be swathed in bandages. If we are to take literally the words that the Galatians would have plucked out their eyes and given them to him, I have suggested that it was when he preached in the weeks that followed with the stone cuts round his eyes, which perhaps required to be wholly hidden from the light. Add to this his poor crushed, limping feet, and his hands pierced and shattered, and his preaching thus robbed of half its effectiveness before an Eastern audience by the absence of gesticulation, and we can readily understand that, in such an

ἀσθένεια τῆς σαρκός, there was to them a *πειρασμός ἐν τῇ σαρκί*, which, if yielded to, might have made him ridiculous even to his converts.

And when the years had gone by, and his wounds were healed, there would be still a mark of that unique experience when "once was I stoned." The laceration of his palms would have left great scars, which he might easily connect with the print of the nails in the hands of his Lord, and the very word *στίγματα*, punctures, would be what they would suggest to him. Perhaps, too, the wounding of his feet may have left marks there also, while the scars above his eyes might suggest the marks of his Master's crown of thorns.

I do not wish these suggestions, which may be somewhat fanciful, to vitiate my main contention, and I return in conclusion to the earlier theme of this article. If it be true that, in writing to the Galatians, St. Paul is able to refer to events which happened at Lystra, it seems to suggest that region as the centre of the Galatian churches. This tends to prove that his Epistle was written to a small community, and was not a manifesto to South Galatia. If this were the case, it would have a considerable bearing on the question of date, as we generally assume that the Judaizing mission extended from Perga to Derbe, whereas, if the "Galatians" lived in the district of Lystra, a small and speedy mission of Judaisers might have done all the mischief. An early date would thus be suggested.

And if Lystra were the centre of the churches addressed, a possible objection to the theory I have advanced would fall to the ground. In Acts xiii. 49 we are told that during the first visit to Antioch "the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region." If Antioch be included in the churches to which the Apostle preached "at the first" through an infirmity of the flesh, these words suggest that this was *before* the stoning at Lystra. But in any case, there

is an answer to the objection. For in the first place, the phrase *διεφέρετο ὁ λόγος* does not necessarily suggest St. Paul's own preaching, and in the second place, we may say that St. Luke has laid most stress on the first dash through the province, either because he wanted to show the obstacles encountered in the spreading of the faith, or, as Professor Harnack suggests, because he possessed no more than "some anecdotes of the mission," which naturally included only its most exciting parts. The verse quoted need not be more than an editorial summary concerning a district which was soon Christianised.

If the theory which I have advanced can be accepted, it gives to the stoning at Lystra a new importance, in its bearing on the problem presented by the Epistle to the Galatians, a problem which has not yet reached its solution.

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