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*CORINTH AND THE TRAGEDY OF ST. PAUL.*

Beside that which cometh on me daily, the care of all the Churches.

IN regard to the single church to which St. Paul wrote these significant words we have a great deal to learn from the Epistles of which we get no inkling from Acts. Luke's narrative, in spite of its immense value, reveals strange lacunae. We must add to it startling catalogues of events like that found towards the end of 2 Corinthians xi., and we have to spell out letter by letter further events and aspects of events, reading between the lines of the Epistles themselves. There must always be a margin of uncertainty in such processes of divination, and yet a great deal has been achieved. Might it not further be found that a definite hypothesis—a construction of the history, stage by stage, as it *may* have happened—would be more helpful than the system of leaving events vague for lack of evidence in detail? We are to study here the history of Paul's relations with Corinth during his Ephesian ministry. And we may hope by conjectures—not *mere* conjectures in the sense of being arbitrary, for they are suggested by the evidence; still, by conjectures—to carry the process of interpretation one step or two steps further on.

It was natural that study of the Epistles to Corinth should begin, and should long persevere, with an attempt to connect them closely. They cannot, at the utmost, be separated by any great space of time. In Acts we read (xix. 22) of St. Paul's sending Timothy into Macedonia shortly before his own departure from Ephesus; in 1 Corinthians we hear of Timothy as *en route* for Corinth (iv. 17, xvi. 10); and 2 Corinthians is despatched from some point in Macedonia, when Paul and Timothy are together (i. 1, ii. 13; viii. 1,

etc.). The whole thing seems clear. Timothy has been detained by the service of some of the Macedonian Churches. Paul has joined him. They are going on together to Corinth.<sup>1</sup> But, when we read more closely, we find that this simple construction of events will not do. We cannot help seeing the difficulties; they have been so carefully worked out for us, even when they are not of the class which "leap to light," as some of them are.

Let us note the changes seen when we look back from 2 Corinthians to 1 Corinthians. (1) To take a simple external point first—Timothy has disappeared, and Titus takes his place. When 1 Corinthians was written, Timothy was to be expected by the church, to be welcomed, to be deferred to (xvi. 10). When 2 Corinthians is written, Titus has been at Corinth upon a memorable if painful mission (vii. 6, etc.), and is to return there once more (viii. 6, 16, ix. 5), while Timothy simply appears as joining in the Apostle's salutation at the opening of the letter. (2) When 1 Corinthians is written, Paul intends to travel from Ephesus to Corinth by the land or short sea route, "through Macedonia" (xvi. 5). When 2 Corinthians is written, he has to defend himself against charges of fickleness because he has taken that route and has *not* taken the direct sea passage, nor kept a promise of paying them two visits—one on his way to Macedonia, and one on his way from Macedonia to Jerusalem (i. 15–23). *He had meantime formed a new plan, told them of it, and then again set it aside.* (3) The tone of the letter is as different as possible. 1 Corinthians is the calmest and most orderly of all the Pauline writings. It deals with a series of topics, largely as suggested in a letter to Paul from the Corinthian Church (vii. 1). Each topic is treated in turn, settled, and left

<sup>1</sup> Romans xvi. 21 shows us Timothy at Corinth during this, the last recorded visit of St. Paul. Place and date of Romans are tolerably certain (xv. 25, 26).

behind. There are troubles and dangers at Corinth, but Paul's tone throughout is that of one whose mind is at peace and who is sure of the loyalty of the Church. How different is 2 Corinthians! To speak flippantly, one might say that it is written in a towering passion. It contains invective, sarcasm, even sneers; but, more than all, it reveals a noble and passionate disturbance of soul—"yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what longing, yea what zeal, yea what avenging!" There is little or no plan in the Epistle; it rushes on like a cataract; its intensity bewilders the modern reader ill acquainted with the "old, unhappy, far-off things" which gave it birth. And we may add that the Judaizing party, half visible in 1 Corinthians (i. 12, "I am of Cephas," and perhaps "I am of Christ") has grown manifest, rancorous, an extreme and deadly danger, by the time 2 Corinthians is written. (4) Paul in 1 Corinthians is pressing strongly for the most tremendous of sentences upon a Christian guilty of incest (v. 1-5), though he does not falter in his hope of the man's ultimate salvation. Paul in 2 Corinthians is eagerly accepting some limited penalty, and crowning it with the fullest expressions of his own forgiveness. Now, so far as we have gone, we have simply stated facts—bare facts, lying on the surface of the documents, not to be evaded unless by eccentric and hardly credible critical combinations. The traditional view, which we are contemplating, has no such combination at its service. May we not claim then that a great deal has happened between 1 and 2 Corinthians? That the old situation has disappeared and that a new and even more painful world has for a time occupied its place?

We pass on next to positions into which the element of conjecture begins to enter, at least in the judgment of some; there are conservative thinkers who will allow none of them. (5) Yet the first of the positions still to be mentioned is

hardly disputable. It is granted us by some who advance no further with us, but break off here. And it is of vital importance. *The sin which Paul forgives in 2 Corinthians is not the sin which he visited with spiritual and supernatural terrors in 1 Corinthians.* The earlier difficulty has passed out of sight. A new difficulty<sup>1</sup> occupies its place, in the shape of a direct rebellion against St. Paul's authority, uttering itself in insult and slander. We must keep in view, in studying this situation, not merely vii. 12, but ii. 5, seq. "He hath caused sorrow *not to me*"! Who but the person directly and immediately wronged could fitly use that tone? But indeed does not vii. 12 teach the same lesson? "I wrote not *for His cause that suffered the wrong*"! If "he" was St. Paul himself, the assurance is finely magnanimous; if "he" was Timothy, or some unknown wrangling Corinthian, it was less admirable, and surely also less wise. It might blister instead of soothing. It might rekindle rather than quench the strife. And when St. Paul tells us he wrote in order that "their earnest care for him might be made manifest to themselves in the sight of God," he says nothing inconsistent with these disclaimers. It was not mainly as a wrong to himself, but as a fault of his spiritual children, that the thing tormented his heart—a fault more tolerable, yet from another aspect all the more distressing, because it did not represent their deliberate choice. They misunderstood themselves; they had been so skilfully played upon by enemies. But of this, later.

(6) There was an intermediate visit to Corinth, a brief visit paid by St. Paul from Ephesus. Before he wrote 2 Corinthians xii. 14 and xiii. 1 he had been with the Corinthians twice—once when he founded the church, and upon one other, briefer, sadder occasion. This, we must take

<sup>1</sup> Incidentally it is a relief not to have to infer that the great Apostle is discreetly backing down.

leave to say, ought never to have been denied ; not by Paley, still less by the distinguished modern writers who have tried to revive his view. The only question that may seem at all open for discussion, is, when the visit took place ? Surely from Ephesus, and after 1 Corinthians had been written ! The chief rival opinion (Lightfoot, Sanday, and others) places it before 1 Corinthians ; but the objections to this seem insuperable. 1 Corinthians nowhere speaks of two visits. The *tone*, to which we referred above, is quite different from what it shows itself when the epoch of  $\lambdaύπη$  (2 Cor. ii. 1) begins. Nor, if 1 Corinthians had intervened, would it be seemly of St. Paul to cast up old scores against the Corinthians, telling them, *à propos* to a new trouble, that he could not bear to go through " that sort of thing " once more. Wisdom, tact, magnanimity, would all be lacking to such an utterance. I verily believe it would be more plausible <sup>1</sup> to put the visit (and chapters x.-xiii. of 2 Cor.) later than Ephesus, throwing them into Paul's Macedonian sojourn. But on that view we should not merely have to suppose that the cause of St. Paul suffered a set back ; we should have to infer that history repeated itself within a month or two in exactly the same phases. With this also, however, i.e., with the relations between 2 Corinthians i.-ix. and 2 Corinthians x.-xiii., we must deal later on. Here one can only repeat that the " intermediate " visit (for which 2 Corinthians xii. 14 and xiii. 1 vouch) *was*, in all probability, intermediate. If we reflect that, before the composition of 1 Corinthians, Apollos and the slaves of Chloe and the party containing Stephanas Fortunatus and Achaicus had all <sup>2</sup> appeared at

<sup>1</sup> With Drescher and some others.

<sup>2</sup> Probably three parties. A minimum of two, even if we identify Stephanas, etc. (xvi. 17) with those of the household of Chloe (i. 11) ; Apollos was at Ephesus before the Corinthian Church's letter arrived ; apparently it begged (xvi. 12) for his return. A maximum of four parties, if we suppose that the Church's letter was carried by still another embassy

Ephesus during St. Paul's stay there, if we think of the travels of Timothy, Titus and unknown "brethren," revealed to us by scattered notices in the Epistles, there will be nothing strange in the inference that St. Paul, upon some emergency, crossed the Ægean to Corinth and soon returned. At whatever time we date the visit, it is one of St. Luke's "silences," and really these silences are too numerous to constitute any ground for reviving the doubt whether the visit ever took place. It stands fast. It must be worked into our scheme of events.

(7) We have to recognize not only an intermediate visit, but an intermediate letter. If the argument so far has been decisive, there should be no difficulty at this point. As the references of 2 Corinthians do not suit the troubles of 1 Corinthians, so also they do not suit its emotional tone. Not that we are drawing an inference here from former results. On the contrary, former results do nothing to force upon us this fact of an intermediate letter. It is a fresh though similar inference from the language of 2 Corinthians. We are studying one evolving course of history, one many-sided change in the relations between Paul and the Corinthian church. Dr. Sanday<sup>1</sup> thinks the argument is worse off at this point because the New Testament text speaks of three visits to Corinth and does not speak of three (or more) Epistles. Yet surely the New Testament bears no faltering witness, if indirectly. The question is, whether 1 Corinthians was written "out of much affliction and anguish of heart, with many tears" (2 Cor. ii. 4), though it reads so calmly; or whether a different letter had come into being, caused by the troubles whose after-swell heaves through all the brightest pages of 2 Corinthians, and whether this middle letter

But most probably it was carried by Stephanas, etc., and the parties numbered three.

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Biblica*.

did not correspond more fully to St. Paul's description. Is the issue really doubtful? <sup>1</sup>

(8) Perhaps there is a less approach to certainty in the remaining point. Or at the least we must make plain to ourselves that it is a new issue, and that friends may refuse their sympathy now who have given it in full hitherto. It is one thing to say that Paul wrote an intermediate letter; it is another thing to say that we have the good fortune to possess it, or part of it, in 2 Corinthians x. 1-xiii. 10.<sup>2</sup> Bousset, in his brief and popular but characteristically brilliant commentary on Corinthians,<sup>3</sup> while believing in the changed situation, in the intermediate visit, in the intermediate letter, does not hold with Hausrath and his many disciples to the theory of the "vier-Capitel Brief."

What I hope to do after this introductory outline is first to reconsider the usually accepted view of the nature of the intermediate visit, point (6), offering some conjectures as to the possible course of events; and secondly, with similar use of conjecture, to deal with point (8)—Is the intermediate letter (which I shall assume to have existed) to be found, whether in full or in part, at the end of our 2 Corinthians?

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<sup>1</sup> Granting an intermediate visit and letter, the former came first: (6) is correctly taken before (7); see 2 Cor. ii. 1-4. (Drescher, who arranges differently, has to interpret ii. 1 violently.)

<sup>2</sup> There seems no doubt that we ought to draw the line at xiii. 10, but for brevity I have generally allowed myself to speak of the passage as 2 Cor. x.-xiii. Into the less important and less likely proposal to make a separate letter of chap. ix. I do not enter.

<sup>3</sup> *Schriften des N.T. für die Gegenwart*, ed. J. Weiss.