The Missionary Message of the New Testament

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

By the Same Author

MAN AND HIS CHARACTER

THE MASTER AND HIS MEN

THE MAN IN THE DARK ROOM
and other Addresses to Children

THE UNITY OF BODY AND SOUL

The Missionary Message of the New Testament

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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PREFACE

THE course followed by the chapters of this book is determined by the general aim of the series of which it forms a part. It is not meant to be critically or exegetically exhaustive. Readers who are in search of that specialized treatment may be referred to the well-known commentaries on the Acts of the Apostles and to the relevant articles in the Bible dictionaries. Our purpose is rather to take advantage of the findings of the specialists, and in a broad survey of the dramatic story unfolded by the Acts of the Apostles to seize upon the essential missionary motive of the earliest followers of Jesus.

We shall watch that motive in its expression. Our concern is with the men and women of the Apostolic Church, with their experiments, failures, and successes. We set out to understand, if we can, the explanation of the remarkable energy and enthusiasm which sent the primitive communities into an ever-widening campaign of evangelism. We begin with the narrator, Luke, in Jerusalem, and leave the story where he leaves it, in Rome. Since The Acts of the Apostles is a great drama, we are interested in characters and in movement; but

deeper than this is our interest in that Power which is the explanation of the Church in the first and any century. Men may preach and heal and organize, but behind all this there is the missionary idea, and behind the missionary idea the great commission of Christ.

To realize this, and its implications for modern Christianity, is the predominant purpose of our brief study.

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Introductory

THE COMING OF THE GOSPEL

THE Acts of the Apostles is a dramatic narrative of Divine Power and human enterprise. Its dramatic character makes it more than history. "The drama," said Lord Bacon, "presents the images of things as if they were present, while history treats of them as things past"; but in a very real sense all history has to be dramatized if it is to be understood. Figures and events of a bygone age have to be brought down to our modern time. When we are dealing with the events of a remote century we are concerned not with moods, impulses, and achievements which have played their part and vanished, but rather with these things as expressing the permanent in human nature. We open our New Testaments at the Acts of the Apostles; we read that such a man acted thus in the first century; there is the fact; but what we really want to discover is the idea behind his action, and whether that idea has any meaning for our life to-day. This, then, is our aim: in a broad survey of those thrilling days in which the Church set out on her long adventure to learn the secret of power and progress, so that in the providence of God we, too, may continue the adventure.

We are concerned with a definite Christian movement, and it is helpful to remember that no move-

ment begins where it appears to begin. There is always a prelude. The author of Acts rings up the curtain on a scene in Jerusalem. A small group of men and women have come together. They are excited and hopeful. Picture them there: the Eleven and also members of that wider circle of followers—women who had ministered to Him, and perhaps Barnabas and Cleopas, Junias and Andronicus. Their excitement and hopes are centred in Jesus, risen and triumphant. Hardly has He appeared among them than they begin to ply Him with questions—eager, nervous questions about the future. We have to ask: What is behind this assembly? What common aim or longing brought these men and women together in the Holy City?

We have to go back a little way and recount as thrilling a story as ever was told in the annals of men. In a small and obscure part of the Roman Empire there had appeared a Man. His father and mother were known, and His training had not at first singled Him out from among His brethren. He had undergone a man's training at the carpenter's bench, but at the call of a Voice no one understood save Himself He had left the carpenter's shop for the highways and villages. He had begun to preach to the people, not in the official and customary way, but with a new freedom. He had declared to them the Kingdom of God, had claimed to be Son of God, had spoken out strongly about the true way of life. Soon He had gathered around Him a little band, including fishermen, a tax-gatherer, a hot-headed zealot. In private He had spoken to

them about Himself and His Mission. In public He had challenged the sins of His age, sometimes reversing men's common standards and showing unusual sympathy with the despised and unfortunate. He had been very hard to understand. They could not make out why He could not follow the usual line. At times He had seemed to withdraw from popularity; often He had let slip a great chance of arousing the masses. Altogether, it had been very perplexing, and yet there had been something about Him which had compelled the disciples to cling ever more closely to Him. Where they could not understand they had trusted; where their own natures and inclinations had bidden them hold back they had gone on—with Him. Hopes and enthusiasms had grown in their hearts, but He would sometimes chill them with a remark about His coming death. Death? What had He to do with death? Was not He the Prince of Life? Who would dare to lay hands on such a Man?

But it had happened, nevertheless. There had come a week never to be forgotten. His own anguish was painful to behold, yet it gave way to a heroism Palestine had never before seen. There had come, at last, three crosses, and men had put Him on the middle cross. Nature shuddered and went dark; people felt that something was amiss here; yet the Cross was there, and on it their beloved Master. Tender hands had taken Him down and prepared Him for burial. In Joseph's tomb they had laid Him, and in tears had looked their last on their broken Lord.

All over! A dream of three short years. Such a Presence, such a winsome Voice—and then silence.

But wait; there had come the dawning of a great day. News, first to some women; then it had spread like fire to the rest, and at last they knew that the Lord was risen.

The story of His appearances is told with a reverent charm. There were two to whom He appeared on the road to Emmaus; He appeared to Peter, to the disciples in Jerusalem, to the disciples at the Sea of Galilee . . . but why try to make a list? Lists and schemes are out of place here, for we are dealing with mystery, rapture, and wonder. Let it be summed up in the simple dignity of Luke's record:

"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple praising and blessing God."

Before we can begin to understand the Acts of the Apostles we must get in our minds a picture of Jesus as the Gospels present Him. If we are true to that Gospel portrait we have to draw it in bold outlines so as to give the impression of victory. He was Conqueror. It is Jesus as Conqueror who is behind the Acts of the Apostles, in the sense that the Acts were a sequel not so much of the Death as of the

Resurrection. It takes a big conviction to send out a small group on an imperial enterprise, and this was the big conviction: He is alive, a Living Presence, a Present Power. In the light of the Resurrection they could see the real significance of all His work. He had always been the victor. Had He not stilled the tempest, killed the virus of plague, overcome the pangs of hunger, and, at last, triumphed over death? In this triumph He had triumphed over sin. It was an innovation to have a crown of thorns; the Cross itself was an unexpected way of triumph; but we cannot hope to anticipate God's ways, or to measure them. Let it be sufficient that Jesus had won. So we are to understand "the victorious energy of the first great Christian enterprise, the glow of confident optimism and power with which it adventured forth on its mission of carrying the Gospel to every creature, and swept on, overleaping the well-nigh impassable barrier of Jewish nationalism, from Jerusalem to Antioch, and from Antioch to Rome."[1]

[1] Cairns, "The Faith that Rebels," p. 41.

Chapter I

THE RECORDER AND HIS RECORD

THE writer of this great record of Christian advance was modest enough to leave out his name, but, fortunately, we are not left without indications of his authorship. There was a strong tradition in the early Church that the author was Luke, the writer of the Third Gospel. Here, for example, is the verdict of Eusebius, who produced a History of the Church about the year 324: "Luke, by race a native of Antioch and by profession a physician, having associated with Paul, and having also associated less closely with the other apostles, has left us examples of that healing of souls which he acquired from them in two inspired books, the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles." It is no part of our purpose in this short survey of Acts to go into critical matters—for that the reader may be referred to well-known commentaries on Acts—but it is interesting to notice how from the study of the record itself the scholars of the Church have arrived at their conclusion as to Luke's authorship.

We may mention some of the important points which any reader may verify for himself:

(*a*) The book of Acts begins by a reference to another work penned by the same hand. "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus," implies that Acts was written by the same author as the

Third Gospel, and both books are addressed to the same individual.

(*b*) The Third Gospel and Acts show a very striking similarity of style and language. More than fifty Greek words are used in both books, and are nowhere else found in the New Testament.[1]

(*c*) In both works we have a similar viewpoint—viz., the universal range of the Gospel of Jesus.

(*d*) In the 16th chapter of Acts there occurs a very curious change in the narrative from "they" to "we." Describing Paul's second missionary journey, the author says "*they* . . . came to Troas," but soon afterwards "*we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia." At various points in the subsequent narrative the "we" appears again, and indicates that the story of some parts of Paul's adventures is told by one who was there—a companion of Paul. There has been a great deal of discussion concerning these "we sections," as they are termed, but we may summarize the dominant view by saying that the "most probable explanation is that St. Luke was the companion on these occasions . . . there is no reason to deny these sections to Luke, who, we know, was with St. Paul at Rome. It is natural to suppose that he accompanied the apostle on his voyage thither. . . . Moreover, the style of these fragments agrees with Luke's style elsewhere."[2] It is considerations of this kind that compel us to agree

[1] For details see "Acts of the Apostles," pp. xi. *f.*, T. E. Page (Macmillan); Moffatt, "Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament," pp. 297 *f.*

[2] Biblical Introduction, Adeney, p. 342.

that the writer of Acts is the same person as the writer of the Third Gospel. From the second century downwards this Gospel was assigned to Luke, and there is no evidence to show that this authorship was ever disputed.

One could wish that we had more facts about the life of this remarkable man, for the scanty references we have show him to have been a man of considerable charm. He is mentioned three times in the Epistles. In Colossians iv. 14 Paul speaks of him as " the beloved physician "; Philemon 24 indicates that he was with Paul during at least part of his first imprisonment in Rome; while in 2 Timothy iv. 11 we find him again with Paul in his second imprisonment: " only Luke is with me " reveals Luke's loyalty to the great apostle during his severe testing.

From Pauline evidence, then, we know Luke to be a doctor, and a traveller, and capable of great friendship and loyalty. How did these two great-hearts meet? We cannot say with certainty, but perhaps conjecture may be permitted. We are to think of Paul in Antioch, sick in body and wearied by his journeying. He is not without a companion, for there is Barnabas, gracious in bearing and kindly in interest. Perhaps Barnabas is deeply concerned at the weakness of the apostle, and desires medical advice. A doctor in the district is summoned to the sick couch, and thus Luke is called in to begin that acquaintance with Paul which was to last through many vicissitudes. If this did actually happen, it is not difficult to reconstruct the meeting

and the conversation. What more natural than that Luke's care for the body should lead Paul to that topic ever uppermost in his mind—the work of the Great Physician? Luke supplies the skill and professional tending that the apostle so sorely needs, while Paul pours into the doctor's mind the light that brings peace and power. It may be objected to this that it is very romantic; but who will say that romance is out of place either in the career of Paul or of the doctor-traveller who so loyally recorded his doings?[1]

There are suggestions in Acts that Luke, although a Greek (probably of the class of freed-men among whom there were many doctors), had some sympathy with Judaism before his acceptance of the Christian faith. He was certainly familiar with the Old Testament, and knew how the Jews handled it. He knew about Jewish feasts and customs, and frequently refers to God-fearing Gentiles as if he knew something about them from experience. If his approach to Christ was via Judaism from Gentile thought, this would explain his sympathy with Paul. He would be well fitted to narrate the adventures of one who was always a lover of Roman dignity and justice, and whose gospel rose far above the confines of Judaism to comprehend the vast area of Gentile need.

Is there anything beyond this that we can deduce from the Acts about its author? To say that he

[1] Another conjecture is that Luke was the man of Macedonia who appeared in the vision (Ramsay, "S. Paul, the Traveller and the Roman Citizen," pp. 202 *f.*).

was a physician and that he had possibly studied at the university of Athens (which seems familiar ground to him, as he describes the Athenian scenes in chapter xvii.), and that he tended Paul, is not, after all, to get very close to the man himself. Knowing so much, we are the more eager to understand the man, his outlook and sympathies. These emerge, of course, in his narration of the story, and as we review that story we shall continually read behind it into the mind of the recorder; but we may here point out some of the more prominent marks of the man which may help to secure our sympathy with him before we begin a closer study of his book.

Like the true physician, he had the heart of a lover of mankind. For him there are no barriers of sex or class. He has time to mention servants as well as masters, and it is by no means casually that he records the power of the Gospel on these. There is a place in his narrative for the poor, and evidently the author's blessing falls on those who love and serve them. There is an emphasis on prayer and the spirit of thankfulness. To read his account of the first enthusiastic days of the Church, with their wealth of fellowship, joy, and praise, is to feel that the writer himself is moved by these human notes. This, it will be remembered, is also characteristic of the Third Gospel. In that Gospel Luke makes the spirit of gladness shine through the teaching of Jesus, reveals God as full of grace and loving-kindness, includes incidents which show the human tenderness and sociability of Jesus, and gives promi-

nence to the place of women in the Gospel story. All these notes are present in the Acts, and to this in large measure it is due that we find the narrative much more than a historic record; it is a thrilling account of great happenings made possible by the Spirit of God. Luke has "all the tender notes of the physician, raised to their highest power by the grace of God on which he dwells."

So far the writer: What can we say of his purpose in sending this important narrative forth to the world? Again, this will emerge as we proceed in our story, but it will be an advantage to set forth briefly his main purpose. The facts he gives us are obviously but a selection,[1] and we need to understand the principle by which he selected them.

(*a*) First, we may take account of his purpose to bridge the gap between those stirring events in the career of Jesus which we have already noted and the condition of the Christian movement as seen in the Epistles. He wants to make it clear how the Spirit of God impelled Christ's followers ever onward. Jesus had said "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." So Luke traces this witness, and records with joy how "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." His historical purpose is concerned with men who give their lives for the further-

[1] For a summary of evidence showing the remarkable accuracy of Acts, see Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible," p. 10.

ing of the Christian witness—Peter, John, Stephen, Philip, and especially Paul. He delights to show the ever-widening circles of influence, beginning in Jerusalem, continuing to Judæa and Samaria, Phœnicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and, at last, to the very centre of civilization, Rome. He leaves us in Rome, exulting in the picture of the valiant apostle "preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, no man forbidding him."

(*b*) But if there is an outer geographical extension, there is also an inner spiritual development. He takes us through the struggle by which the Christian Gospel freed itself from Jewish narrowness. The Gospel whose progress he is narrating is a universal Gospel. "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off." God hath "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."

(*c*) Side by side with this we have brief indications of the manner in which the earliest Christian communities began to organize their life. Problems arose, and steps were taken to solve them. Widows had to be cared for, arrangements had to be made for the instruction of believers, and for the proper observance of worship. All this organization, we feel, was extremely fluid. It was tentative, experimental; it could not be otherwise, for these first followers of Jesus were far too excited to frame permanent schemes. Still, we see the impulse at work, the impulse to seek regular forms for the orderly expression of the Christian spirit.

(*d*) Lastly, it is clear that the author had a deep personal interest in Paul, for the second half of the book is devoted to his doings.

The account, of course, is not a full biography. The facts are selected, but they are successful in conveying the impression Luke wished to convey—viz., the tremendous labours of an apostle who not only extended the sway of Jesus territorially, but also vindicated the universality of the Gospel, thus making possible its ultimate sway over Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, bond and free. The portraiture is fine and vivid: we see the apostle witnessing the martyrdom of Stephen, setting out with nervous zeal for Damascus, smitten with blindness that his soul might see, fastening his eyes on a sorcerer, stretching forth his hands before Agrippa, indignantly rending his clothes at Lystra, praying and singing in the prison, reasoning with the Athenians, tent-making in Corinth, voyaging to Rome—a great and gripping story. It was with true discernment that Luke made Paul central in the spread of Christianity, for again and again in the history of the Church interpreters of Jesus have found in Paul a masterly mind as well as a tireless missionary.

We may sum up by saying that the purpose of Acts is, in the truest sense, missionary. It tells us of men who turned their faces north, south, east, and west, in order that they might bear their great witness. But even more important than this is the impression we gain from the narrative—that they could not help it. There was an inner constraint,

a moving of the Spirit within them. Not by human artifice, not by human experiment, but by Divine Power did the earliest Christian communities win their converts and extend their boundaries.

Chapter II

CHRIST'S FIRST MESSENGERS

ONE of the early impressions which come to us as we go over the narrative in Acts is the disappearance of most of the original disciples of Jesus. At the beginning of the story they are the acknowledged leaders of the church in Jerusalem. The Eleven are mentioned in the first chapter as continuing "with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren." They elect a successor to Judas the betrayer, experience the remarkable inspiration of Pentecost, and in the power of that experience continue their noble fellowship of prayer, worship, and witness. But after the stoning of Stephen most of them disappear from the story. James the brother of John was slain by the sword at the instigation of Herod, and Peter was imprisoned but miraculously released; but as for most of the rest, they fade out of the story, and tradition is not very illuminating about them until the third century. We feel we would like to know how they fared and what they did.

There is no definite information.[1] Origen in his commentary on Matthew remarks that tradition

[1] For an interesting account of the various traditions, see Myrtle Strode Jackson's "Lives and Legends of Apostles and Evangelists."

makes Thomas go to Parthia, Andrew to Scythia, John to Asia. Eusebius, quoting Origen's commentary on Genesis, suggests that Bartholomew took a copy of the Gospel according to Matthew in Hebrew characters to India. Dr. Foakes Jackson, in a recent article, suggests that the first Christian missionaries in Jerusalem would naturally turn their eyes towards the great Hebrew settlements in the East. "Among these they may have had a transitory but not a permanent success in persuading the people to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, but their converts may have gradually abandoned their belief and become merged in the prevailing Judaism. This would account for the disappearance of definite record of the labours of most of the Twelve and conserve the widespread conviction that they were active missionaries."[1] We may be sure that, whether successful or not, they went out somewhere to bear their witness. They could do no other with the great challenge of Jesus ringing in their ears.

It is worth while to devote some attention to the men whose witness is recorded in Acts. The characters in the great drama fall naturally into two classes: those who laboured prior to the entry of Paul upon the scene, and those whose achievements are gathered round his dominating figure. Of the former group, Peter and John first claim our attention. The order in which they are mentioned is perhaps significant. During the great days when the

[1] "Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge," pp. 394 *f.*

Master was with them, John entered the more closely into the Master's fellowship. He was the disciple whom Jesus loved. If we may judge from his writings, his mind, under the refining and mellowing influence of Christ's fellowship, was especially suited for the better understanding of the mind of Jesus. But in the rough days of adventure, when the Church to live at all had to fight, and fight hard, there was a place for the vigour and boldness of the valiant Peter. It was Peter who, greatly daring, challenged the crowd on the day of Pentecost, and who made a valiant and successful defence before the council. These two were sent as a delegation to inquire into the success of the Gospel in Samaria. It was Peter who had the vision on the housetop in Joppa, a vision which taught his perplexed mind that God did not desire the Gentiles to be regarded as unclean. He was afterwards able to rehearse these things to the church in Jerusalem, and there is no doubt that it was largely due to Peter's testimony that all united in praising God that He had granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life. Apparently, Peter was not always able to maintain this broader view in all its implications, for Paul speaks in Galatians ii. 11 *f.* about withstanding him to the face; but who can withhold admiration from this man who so greatly triumphed over failure and dishonour? The record of Peter's achievements endorses the verdict of Jesus, given when every appearance was to the contrary, that Peter was a man of rock. Perhaps it was the memory of Christ's gracious dealings with him that brought such fine

purpose and heroic persistence to the fisherman-apostle.

It is significant, and prophetic, that among the earliest witness-bearers we have to include the names of martyrs. Of James we have the terse record: "And [Herod] killed James the brother of John with the sword." He secured less distinction than his brother, but not, we may be sure, from any lack of devotion to Jesus, but because he came to such an untimely end. The first martyr was Stephen, one of the Seven who were chosen to administer the distribution of alms. He belonged to one of the numerous synagogues in Jerusalem, and, as a Hellenist, or Greek-speaking Jew, he devoted his powers to the conversion of Hellenists. His ardour quickly stirred up opposition, and as argument could not silence him they arraigned him before the council. To Stephen the religion of Jesus was essentially spiritual, and superior to any ritualism or legalism. We can easily see how such a view would arouse the opposition of Jewish pride, and he was charged with teaching a religion which jeopardized the exclusiveness of the Temple-worship and the permanence of the Mosaic ritual. His speech in reply, recorded very fully in Acts, has been called "the apology to the Jews for the universalism of Christianity," and marks the movement in the early Christian Church towards the world-embracing range of the Christian Gospel. He was dragged to a place beyond the city wall and stoned to death. Even after this long lapse of centuries few of us can read the story without being moved, and we fasten on two features of his

death which make it memorable: his dying prayer, " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," is beautifully reminiscent of the Master; and while he died, there was a young man named Saul who was a witness of the murder. Who shall say that this spectacle was not an important factor in the change which afterwards turned Saul into the great missionary of the Cross?

Persecution often brings blessing in its train. We have an early illustration of this in the events which followed the martyrdom of Stephen. The followers of Jesus were prohibited from gathering in meetings; wherever they so gathered, the meetings were quickly dispersed, homes were raided, and men and women dragged out to prison. Many stood their ground, and some took counsels of discretion and sought safety in removal from Jerusalem. There was thus a scattering, which meant a scattering of the Christian witness over a wider area. Prominent among those who thus carried the sound of the Gospel over wider fields is Philip the Evangelist. Like Stephen, he was a Greek-speaking Jew and one of the Seven. He began to preach the Gospel to the Samaritans, and with great success. He was able also to secure the allegiance of the chamberlain of the Queen of Ethiopia, and thus the witness spread into Africa. Following this, Philip undertook a preaching tour along the cities on the coast as far as Cæsarea, where he settled. In this broader diffusion of the Christian faith Philip was a forerunner of Paul, and when Paul on his visit to Cæsarea enjoyed his hospitality we can easily picture the

fellowship of two men who in mind and outlook were very much alike. Acts records that Philip had four unmarried daughters who were prophetesses—an indication of the importance of women in the development of the Church.

If we could gather together the men and women who form the Pauline circle we should have a group quite as interesting as that which gathered around Plato or Aristotle. Gamaliel interests us not only because Paul "sat at his feet," but also on account of his tolerant and large-hearted views. The advice he gave to the chief priests in regard to their dealings with the apostles reveals a wise and tolerant mind (Acts v. 34*f.*). Then there is Apollos, an eloquent and cultured preacher; Aquila and Priscilla, who gave Paul hospitality in Corinth and became his fellow-workers in Christ; Aristarchus, a companion on the missionary journeys; John Mark, at first companion of Barnabas and Paul, but afterwards unable to continue with them (Acts xiii.); Barnabas, whom the church in Antioch dedicated with Paul for missionary service; Timothy of Lystra, a young disciple chosen by Paul as companion and assistant during the second missionary journey; the women who played such an important part in the story, Dorcas, Mary, mother of John Mark, Drusilla and Bernice, Damaris and Rhoda. Among them we may mention Lydia, the prosperous seller of purple-dyed garments at Philippi. She and her household were the first-fruits of the Gospel in Europe.

In the study of the Pauline letters we are apt to allow our enthusiasm for the doctrine to obscure

the human interests that are always there. Paul made many enemies, but he made many friends, and to read such a chapter as Romans xvi. is to realize his capacity for friendship and his concern for those who laboured with him in the Gospel. Luke, in his record, never fails to supply this human touch. And Paul's friendships had their disappointments as well as their joys. Differences of opinion, personal rivalries and jealousy, timidity and weakness, are all there, but amid it all there is a nobility and heroism about the Pauline group that is worth careful investigation and study.

Paul, of course, dominates the field. He is first made known to us as Saul; this was his Jewish name, and as a Roman citizen he would have other names, of which one was Paul. He was a native and citizen of Tarsus, and we infer that his family was one of some substance. This view is not weakened by the fact that Paul earned a living as a tent-maker, for every Jew was taught a trade. Later in the story he obviously had money at his command, and the record of his imprisonment and journey to Rome suggests that he was regarded as a prisoner of distinction. Educated at Tarsus, influenced probably by Stoic teachers, and in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, he was brought up a strict Pharisee. His familiarity with the Old Testament is seen on every page of his letters. In addition to this Jewish heritage and training he enjoyed the privileges of a free-born Roman citizen. He was proud of this status, and appealed to it to prevent ill-treatment in Philippi (Acts xvi. 37), and in Jerusalem (Acts xxii. 25).

Acts introduces him to us at the stoning of Stephen, where he was "consenting unto his death." Here he is the rigorous Jew, ready for relentless persecution of the new sect. But doubts have already begun to assail him, and on the way to Damascus there occurs the dramatic conversion. Then follows a period of retirement into Arabia, and at length the beginning of his campaigning for Christ. Acts does not fully record his story. The narrative concludes with an account of a two years' confinement in Rome, during which the Gospel is preached without hindrance.

Beyond this point we have no definite evidence of his career, save such as can be gathered from the later Epistles, and for the ending of this wonderful campaigning we have to rely upon tradition. It would appear that the order of events is somewhat as follows. After his imprisonment he was tried and released. It is certain that he would then resume his campaigning, but the exact extent of it is uncertain. From evidence supplied by the Pastoral Epistles we infer that he went eastwards, with visits to Ephesus, Macedonia, and Crete. Whether he went to Spain, as he meant to (Romans xv.), we cannot say, as there appears to be no trace of such a visit, and no church in Spain claims to have been founded by him. The Second Epistle to Timothy reveals Paul once more in Rome, forsaken by some of his companions. "Only Luke is with me." To read this letter is to feel that Paul realized the near approach of the end. "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith." Solemn and pathetic these words, but noble in their pathos. He is writing his own epitaph, and the best that we can say about it is that it fits the man. The end is in sight, but nothing can daunt his spirit. He is triumphant as ever—" the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work."

There is some difference of opinion as to the date of Paul's execution (Harnack, 64; Turner, 64, 65; Ramsay and Lightfoot, 67), but tradition is almost unanimous that he suffered martyrdom in Rome during the Neronian persecution. The details do not matter, for our concern is more with Paul living and active than with Paul the martyr. The great thinkers of the Church have paid their tribute to Paul the theologian and administrator; here our interest is in Paul the man and the missionary, as Acts so clearly reveals him.

The impression we get is that of tremendous energy, both physical and mental. We wonder how his weak body can stand it all. Shipwrecks, beatings, buffetings, journeys arduous and long, imprisonment, hunger, thirst. . . . As Deissmann says,[1] this challenges our admiration as a physical performance. Of his mental energy we have early evidence. The thoroughgoing persecutor becomes the thoroughgoing apostle. There are no half measures for Paul. There is no doubt that he was sensitive about his personal appearance, but there is a strength in his mind which carries him through.

[1] " Paul," p. 65.

They may scoff at his appearance in Corinth, and scorn him in Athens, but what is that to a man burning, as he was, with such a passionate purpose? His energy is directed to one great end; it is constrained by the love of Christ, so much so that he can claim no credit for what he does. "Woe to me if I preach not the Gospel," he cries. The power that gripped him on the Damascus road was not a momentary force that seized him for the time; it remained throughout his life. He was more conscious of this than of anything else. In a real sense he was a missionary in spite of himself. He is not to be esteemed only as a theologian, interpreting the Gospel in relation to the Jewish faith; he founded churches long before there was any need to write to them; the work of evangelist came before that of teacher. We may be sure that many of his finest passages were composed, not in serene retirement, but as he journeyed along, eager mind keeping pace with eager foot. He thought as he walked, and prayed as he worked. The end of a prayer was always a new desire to rise up and set off again. "Come over into Macedonia and help us." He was always hearing calls like this, and to respond to them was the great joy of his life.

This is the mark of the true missionary, to place one's life unreservedly in the hands of God, to count labour a blessing, opposition a challenge, and thorns a crown.

Chapter III

THE MESSAGE

THE ultimate factor in successful evangelism is the message. For a time an audience will be attracted by the personality of the messenger, but in the end it is the message rather than the messenger that has to be faced. Peter and John, Philip and Paul, have their own special ways of presenting the truth, but in every case the truth is bigger than the exponent of it. It will linger in the mind long after the preacher has passed on. If the preaching is to have permanent effect it must awaken responsive chords deep down in human life, so that the evangel may work its beneficent work even though the evangelist is stoned, like Stephen, imprisoned, like Peter, or beheaded, like Paul. What is the good news they bring? This is the important question, and so we turn naturally from the men to the message they delivered.

At the outset these earliest messengers of Jesus gain our sympathy because, clearly, they are all the time *finding out* their message. It is not delivered to them as a kind of deposit, or a series of self-evident propositions. They are in difficulties with it. They have to be continually adjusting their minds to it, and only after a long development do they see clearly all that Jesus meant them to see. It is in this way that we are to regard the teaching

of the Acts of the Apostles: a gradual and in some ways painful apprehension of the truth of Christ.

One great problem had to be solved. The band that first gathered round the Master was a band of Jews. They were proud of their ancestral religion—as they had good reason to be. They loved their nation, and believed that God had special regard for it. If anyone were to challenge this, could they not point to the wonderful story of their past? They were God's people, and their great problem was: Now that Jesus has come, what difference does this make to our old religion? Does He mean us to embrace a new religion, or are we still to remain within the old, just taking the new emphasis He gives us? There is no doubt that the Christian Church, as originally formed, was " simply a Jewish sect, differing from orthodox Judaism in the single point that it recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the expected Messiah." Jesus Himself had not broken with the old faith. He had conformed with Jewish rites and customs, and had distinctly said that He had come to fulfil, not to destroy. And yet there were elements in His teaching which made the break inevitable. For the law of external codes He substituted the law of the inner life; in place of the idea of God as Judge and King He gave the idea of our Heavenly Father; His Sermon on the Mount placed before men a new scheme of moral values very different from the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The break was inevitable, and the story of the thought of the Acts of the Apostles is largely that of the gradual realization of this tre-

mendous truth—that Christianity, though rooted in Judaism, was a new religion which transcended the old.

Before the early Church could fully realize this, there had to be some clear thinking about two points in particular—the Death of Jesus and the Kingdom of which He spoke. What really did that Death mean? The Gospel story shows us that the Crucifixion was regarded as the failure of their movement and the blighting of their hopes. But as they were brooding over this tragedy, the news of the Resurrection came, and that renewed hope in their hearts. Perhaps, after all, the expected Messianic deliverance might be realized, and the Death be revealed as a necessary part of the Divine Scheme. We find this very note in the earliest preaching. On the Day of Pentecost Peter boldly addressed the crowd: " Men of Israel, listen to my words. Jesus the Nazarene—a man accredited to you by God through miracles, wonders, and signs—this Jesus, betrayed in the predestined course of God's deliberate purpose, you got wicked men to nail to the cross and murder; but God raised Him by checking the pangs of death . . . so let all the house of Israel understand beyond a doubt that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this very Jesus whom you have crucified" (Acts ii. 22 *f.*, Moffatt). This was a new idea of the Cross; and it was a tremendous step for a Jew to take; but it was the beginning of that exaltation of the Cross which was later to be so strong a feature of Paul's teaching, and which, indeed, has always marked the true evangelism.

Jesus had been crucified by men who really did not know His full significance, but now that His Messiahship was plainly revealed there should not be any further opposition between Judaism and the new religion.

This was a very fine utterance on the part of Peter, but there were still deeper issues to be settled before Jews could understand how they stood in regard to the new religion. It is likely that the Jewish leaders saw this more clearly than the early apostles; in any case their action soon brought the issue to a head. The trial of Stephen was a turning point. The charge was blasphemy against God, Moses, and the Temple. Stephen made the countercharge that the Jews, and not he, were really unfaithful to the God of their faith. Take the instance of the Temple. It was built by Divine command, but its value is really only typical and preparatory. You cannot confine the Divine presence to any one locality, even though it be so honoured a locality as the Temple. True religion is essentially spiritual, and in refusing Jesus and His teaching the Jews were only showing that preference for the formal and external which had marked all their history. Stephen here is supporting a position which had two important implications, one in regard to the scope of Christ's Kingdom, the other in regard to the mode of entrance into the new religion. Both points require careful attention.

It has been doubted whether the earliest Christian preaching realized the full scope of Christ's salvation, but from Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost

it seems clear that the world-view is beginning to come into its own. The promise is to " all that are afar off." The Spirit has been outpoured upon men from all nations, and Peter sees in this the fulfilment of the prophecy that " whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Later references support this universal conception. " Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life " (xi. 18); " He hath opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles " (xiv. 27; *cf.* x. 10-16; x. 35 *f.*, xv. 17). This note of universalism, present as we see in the earliest speeches, became the charter of their campaign, and the conversions of the Ethiopian, Cornelius, and many Gentiles were prophetic of what was to happen in the far-flung campaigns of Paul.

There still remained, however, the vexed question of how the Gentiles were to come into fellowship and enjoy the blessings of the Gospel. The scattering of Christians through persecution, and the consequent conversions over a wide area, made the matter a pressing one, and many Jewish Christians began to demand that circumcision ought to be enforced as a necessary requirement in Gentile converts. The struggle was very keen, as we can see from Acts, but we need not go into details. The important point to notice is that this demand of the Judaizers was not sustained.[1] The account given by Paul in Galatians ii. supports the narrative in Acts xv. that the Jerusalem conference, called to

[1] Although a minority persisted in the narrower view and dogged Paul's footsteps.

consider the question, decided that no such requirement as circumcision was necessary, but that Gentile converts be required to abstain from pollutions of idols, fornication, from things strangled and from blood (xv. 20).[1] It remained for Paul to champion this principle and to support it by careful arguments, but we cannot emphasize too strongly the victory even as it appears in the narrative of Acts. Without such a victory a missionary church would have been impossible. However ardent the first apostles might have been, there could have been no hope of going "into all the world" so long as their minds were obsessed by a nationalistic outlook. It was natural for them to think in terms of their nation and of their national religion. "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?" was expressive of the deep yearnings of the race. But the coming of Jesus made all the difference. His was the Gospel of the "whosoever," and was to transcend all racial prejudice and nationalist barriers. The entrance into His Kingdom could never be a matter of formal requirement. All depended on the spiritual attitude. It followed, therefore, that the salvation offered by the Messiah was available for all, and for all on terms which are spiritual. The importance of this for the future of the Church cannot be over-estimated.[2]

[1] A practical measure in the interest of good fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

[2] It is interesting to compare this Conference of *c.* A.D. 50 with the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, where such a remarkable gathering of different races took place. As Basil Mathews points out ("Roads to the City of God," 9 *f.*),

If our field of survey in these chapters were the New Testament message, we should be called upon to show how the implications of this message of a free and catholic Gospel came to be elaborated as the churches grew and as the apostolic writers faced the various problems. But we are concerned with Acts, and we have to remember that here the message has not yet reached that philosophic and theological elaboration which it attained in the sub-apostolic age. It would be misleading if we were to attempt a " theology " of Acts; the term hardly applies. It is more correct to speak of a simple, vigorous message. The earliest Christian preachers were hardly theologians in the accepted sense of that term. They just burned with a passionate conviction about Jesus the Messiah, the Lord, the Prince of Life, the Saviour. All these terms involve a deep theology, but there is no working out of it until we come to the Epistles; and even there the treatment is not so much systematic as practical, called out in the main by pressing practical needs. The Gospel that carried the early Church into an ever-widening field was a simple Gospel of Divine love, the offering of salvation through Christ, the Anointed of God.

But there were two special ideas of which account must be taken if we are to understand the atmo-

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the two conferences were concerned with parallel subjects—viz., the relation of older to younger churches and the inter-racial problem. The problems of the early Church have tended to persist, in different form, all through the story of Christian advance.

sphere of apostolic preaching. These are the belief in the return of Christ and in the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the opening chapter of Acts, Luke pictures the company gazing after the ascended Jesus, and as receiving the assurance that He would so return to them. The idea of the Messianic kingdom was very strong in their minds, and a good Jew always associated the Kingdom with the King, personally present and regnant among them. In the days of His earthly ministry the Master had often spoken about His Kingdom, and in terms that suggested that it was to come by Divine intervention and in a spectacular fashion. But He had also spoken in another way about the matter: He had emphasized the inner growth of it. The Kingdom, He said, was within them; and by parables He illustrated its growth as slow and pervasive. It is beyond doubt that both aspects are presented in the Gospels, and the relating of them is still a problem of extreme difficulty. But for the apostles, we may be sure, the external and spectacular idea would be far easier to understand. It was in keeping with the traditional expectations of their nation. The death of Christ on the Cross would seem to dash all such hopes to the ground—you cannot have a glorious kingdom if the King is killed! But His Resurrection and fellowship with them in His risen state would revive the hope. So they looked for the speedy return. The prevalence of this expectation in the New Testament Church is very clear. To quote from one of the greatest books ever written about Paul: "Among

all Christians in that first age of the faith, so soon after the disappearance of our Lord from the earth, there was a very confident expectation of His speedy return. It was thought that the existing generation would not pass away before He would be seen descending to establish His reign on the earth. Jewish elements and mundane conceptions were largely mixed with this hope. Nor was it wholly unnatural."[1] Paul undoubtedly at one time expected that the Lord would return before he died. "In his great ardour he did not apparently think that the compassing of the Gentiles with the Gospel would require more than his own lifetime." The experience of the first apostolic enthusiasts tended to modify this view, and perhaps more mature reflection upon the words of Christ led them more and more to the idea of the slow development of the Kingdom. In any case, although the beliefs of the early Church were coloured by Jewish apocalyptic, the missionary view of the Kingdom gained greater and greater power through the force of events and, as we believe, through the guidance of the Spirit.

This, indeed, is the feature of apostolic achievement which impresses us as we read the Acts—the guidance and power of the Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost there came the gift of power. After his great speech on that day Peter said to the inquirers: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Peter and John laid hands on those baptized by

[1] R. D. Shaw, "Pauline Epistles," p. 31.

Philip and they "received the Holy Ghost" (viii. 17). Many phrases bear witness to the connection between faith in Christ and the possession of the power of the Spirit. "Full of faith and power" (vi. 8); "full of faith and the Holy Ghost" (vi. 5); "full of the Holy Ghost and of faith" (xi. 24). Only this Divine Power can explain the enthusiasm of the first messengers, the remarkable fellowship in which they shared, and the rapid expansion of the movement. A Christian is one filled by the Spirit (ii. 4; ix. 17). The Church is the great sphere of the Spirit's activity. The presence of the Spirit means unity and fellowship, and all the gifts and graces of the Christian life are the operation of the Spirit in the individual.

Thus we have failed to understand the real meaning of Acts if we think of a group of men and women as concocting a religious idea and setting out to propagate it. They did not set out; they were rather driven forth; they could not help it. A Power which they could not fully comprehend urged them onwards. It played upon their minds, dominated their wills, sent them out in a sort of glorious abandon. They were the messengers of a Risen Lord, pledged to carry on the work He had begun. In face of that nothing else mattered. These first messengers looked around them and saw scribes busy with the law, priests intent on sacrificing, the Sanhedrin stately and dignified in its legislating, Roman officials gathering taxes and administering the Empire. But, they felt, there was a bigger thing than all this, and all these people

must pause to listen to the word of life. They must all repent, and through faith in Christ enter into the real Kingdom of God. This was the supreme message. In a real sense the message made the messengers, for it was the Spirit of God that made both.

Chapter IV

FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME

IT is recorded in the Fourth Gospel that on one occasion Jesus bade His disciples lift up their eyes to the fields. He was looking in the direction of Sychar. He saw the fields " white already unto harvest." But there can be no doubt that His vision embraced something far richer in promise than the fields. He saw a band of inquirers approaching from the city. " So when the Samaritans came unto Him they besought Him to abide with them; and He abode there two days. And many more believed because of His word." This was the harvest for which He yearned, and it was ever His concern to arouse a like expectancy in the minds of His disciples. It is one of the special contributions of Acts to our knowledge of early Christianity that it shows how the first messengers did indeed lift up their eyes to behold the fields wherein they were to labour for the Lord, and how, eventually, they realized that " the field is the world."

They had not far to look for a field rich in promise and certainly abounding in challenge and difficulty. Jerusalem itself provided an excellent starting-point for their new campaign. They loved it as they loved no other city in their land. Romance and heroism marked its story. Every good Jew was proud of the city of David, as he had good reason to be. It had known anxious days, for its walls had

seen the approach of the invader and its streets had resounded with the tramp of alien feet. It had not always kept faith with the God of their fathers, for social injustice had sometimes joined with idolatry to degrade its life. Still, it was their city of God. Amid all its vicissitudes, the Temple stood as a monument to God's care for His people. Jews might be scattered to the ends of the earth, but their eyes always turned back in yearning to the Holy City. The Songs of Zion were known even in proud Babylonia, and the feet of eager pilgrims wended their way back to the sacred streets and the holy shrine. In the days of Jesus the Temple stood, eloquent still, in spite of all its varied fortunes, of that faith which had nourished generations. We may say, then, that the first Christians could hardly have had a better background for their new venture. The Master had yearned over the city, loving it in spite of its treachery to Him. There was an Upper Room, sacred with memories, and for the sake of that Upper Room, if for no other reason, they must begin in Jerusalem and tell the deathless story.

The first church was the church in Jerusalem. Naturally, it had its own special marks, for most of its members were circumcised Jews and their Christianity a kind of reformed Judaism. From the beginning, and in spite of persecution (or was it because of this?), the mother-church flourished. We can see how the daughter churches regarded the Jerusalem church from the way in which they looked to her for guidance, and how they contributed their gifts. Obviously this mother-church

contained a great many of the poorer classes, but even in their poverty they were so impressed with the idea of fellowship that they made an experiment in voluntary communism. "All that believed had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and shared them with all as every man had need." (Acts ii. 44 *f.*). This experiment was not successful; perhaps in the nature of things it could not be, but we must not allow the failure to blind us to the essential spirit which underlay the movement. We cannot be too thankful for the spirit of enthusiastic fellowship which prompted the mother-church towards practical brotherhood. The members were alert, too, to the need of systematic provision for the needs of widows and orphans (Acts vi.), and thus instituted a system which has always, in some form, marked the practical Christianity of the Church.

One further point we may remember in connection with this church—viz., the long and honourable association of James the brother of Jesus. For about a quarter of a century James devoted his life to the leadership of this community. There is a tradition, mentioned by Eusebius,[1] that "he was in the habit of entering the Temple alone, and was often found upon his knees there, interceding for forgiveness for the people; so that his knees became hard as camels' knees, through his habitual supplication and kneeling before God." His traditional death by stoning[2] serves to illustrate the persecution

[1] "Hist. Eccles.," ii., 23.
[2] Josephus, "Antiquities," xx. 9, 1.

through which the Jerusalem church lived, and seems to have ushered in a period of hardship which culminated in the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Shortly before the siege the Christian community seems to have removed to a town beyond the Jordan called Pella, where for about sixty years they continued their witness, but did not make any further contribution to the development of the Church.

The expansion of the New Testament Church from Jerusalem took the Gospel into various cities of the Mediterranean world, but we may summarize the movement by concentrating on two, Antioch and Rome. Jerusalem—Antioch—Rome—the progress from the home base as far as the centre of Mediterranean civilization. This indicates the enlargement of the idea of the " field " from the first conception of Christianity as (with differences) a section of the great Jewish religion, to the ultimate idea of Christ as Saviour of all, Jew or Gentile, Greek or barbarian, bond or free.

Antioch was a great city in the days of the Acts. It had come into being through the colonizing activity of Alexander the Great, one of his generals building it and naming it after his father, Antiochus. It ultimately became part of the Roman Empire. Situated about twelve miles up the river Orontes, it had much to charm the visitor. Herod the Great built a street in it four miles long, lined with rows of splendid columns. A suburb developed, called Daphne, where human art and device supplemented great natural beauties: groves, gardens, terraces,

fountains, formed a picturesque background for a pleasure-loving people. Altogether Antioch was a gay city. Its people were reputed to be laughter-loving, quick-witted, and clear-brained, and their literature polished and epigrammatic. Later, in the fifth and sixth centuries, Antioch was to attain greater prominence and rival Alexandria, and the historian of its fortunes would have to take account of Lucian of Samosata, who was associated with the city, and the Emperor Julian, who tried to re-introduce the splendours of pagan worship into the Empire. Apparently his attempts in this direction in Antioch did not meet with approval, for as he left the city he cried: " I turn my back upon a city full of vices, insolence, drunkenness, incontinence, impiety, and impudence!"

But however much Julian may have been disappointed in Antioch, it is clear that in New Testament times there was a brighter and happier side to the city, for we read of the evangelizing of Antioch by some of those who were scattered in the persecution following the death of Stephen (Acts xi.) At that time Antioch was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the ancient world, with an atmosphere free from that racial and nationalist prejudice which was so marked a feature of Jerusalem. And so Antioch was exceptionally well fitted to become " the cradle of the infant Gentile Church." News of the successful evangelism in Antioch reached Jerusalem, and Barnabas, a Hellenistic Jew, was sent to report upon it. " When he was come and had seen the grace of God he was glad; and exhorted

them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. And he went forth to Tarsus to seek for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass that even for a whole year they were gathered together with the church, and taught much people; and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts xi. 23 *f.*). The name was first applied as a nickname, but soon became a title of honour.

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of this work in Antioch. When the Gospel arrived there it entered the full stream of the Roman Empire. It took its definite stand among the conflicting powers of the Gentile world, and the rapid growth of the church in Antioch showed that the Gospel was suited for that universal application which had always been implicit in the teaching of Jesus. This church is so important that we may briefly summarize its main contributions. Not only was it cosmopolitan, it was vigorous and progressive. It enjoyed good instruction—the presence of Paul for a year was enough to ensure that—and it was extremely generous. Within little more than a year it was not only self-supporting, but was also able to send help to the mother-church in Jerusalem. Best of all, this church seems to have realized at once the missionary implications of the Gospel of Jesus. Barnabas and Saul were ordained here for their missionary labours, and when the first great missionary journey was completed they returned to tell the story. "And when they were come, and had

gathered the church together, they rehearsed all things that God had done with them, and how that He had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts xiv. 27). What a church meeting this must have been! As we know from the record, there were still conservative brethren in Jerusalem who looked with suspicion on this wider movement, and Barnabas and Saul were sent to Jerusalem to put the matter before the church there—and, as they went, they held a series of deputation meetings *en route*. How gladly they returned back to Antioch to report the decision of the Jerusalem council. A great decision had been made, and although some of the Jerusalem members were still hesitant, the decisive step had been taken. The conservatism and traditionalism of Jerusalem were now to give way before the wider and untrammelled freedom of the Gospel, and it is now Antioch, and not Jerusalem, that is to be the real "home base."

The successful and active work carried on by the church at Antioch indicates the second stage in the extension of the Gospel, and the transition of the centre of interest from Jerusalem to the more cosmopolitan city. The missionary activity which began with so much promise when Barnabas and Saul were consecrated to their great work was to extend in many directions, embracing cities of such importance as Philippi, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. All the towns and cities wherein Paul laboured would repay our careful study, but our main interest in his campaigns lies in the steady advance of the new

movement through the provinces to Rome. This was the great objective.

It was an objective worthy of the great campaigner. Indeed, in the apostle's day "Rome was hardly any longer Rome. It was an epitome of the whole world." A population of a million and a half crowded its irregular, narrow, and winding streets. Into the vortex of its life poured a ceaseless stream of adventurous spirits: "some merely attracted by the life that was there, the luring hum of its pleasures and excitements; others by the opportunities of traffic and occupation, to pursue a career or to amass a fortune; some to be parasites of the rich and panders to their passions; some to escape the nemesis of their crimes, to be lost to vengeance, if not to vice, in the great multitude of the unknown."[1] Here were the very rich and the very poor. Slaves from every nation under heaven, far outnumbering the freemen, brought into the city every form of vice. The populace, demanding constant excitement, sought amusement in gladiatorial shows; the lust for pleasure and excitement knew no bounds . . . gory spectacles in the arena whetted the appetite for more, while the theatre and the ballet cannot easily be described.

The strange thing is that, with all this, there was no dearth of at least the outward forms of religion. Temples abounded, and it was a feature of Paul's day that Oriental religions were seizing upon the Roman mind. Aphrodite, Cybele, Mithras, and especially Isis, with their initiations and sacred

[1] Shaw, "Pauline Epistles," p. 167.

mysteries, attracted crowds of devotees, but where was the mind and heart in it all? Superstition abounded—witchcraft, necromancy, belief in auguries and astrology filled the city with quacks and adventurers. And the sensual association of many Oriental cults, we may be sure, proved very attractive to a dissolute society. It is possible to paint a very black picture of Roman society at this time, and the historians have not failed to lay bare its vices and excesses. It is wise, however, to remember that truth and virtue were not without their advocates and witnesses. "Even at Rome in the worst of times, men of affairs, particularly those in the middle stations, most removed from the temptations of luxury and poverty, were in the habitual practice of integrity and self-denial . . . all the relations of life were adorned with bright instances of devotion, and mankind transacted their business with an ordinary confidence in the force of conscience and right reason."[1] Yet when all has been said in support of this, there still remains enough to make us feel that when Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans the terrible indictment in chapter i. had all too solid a background of truth.

Rome, then, presented a real challenge to the new religion of Jesus. The old Roman religion was in process of decay. Amid the wealth and luxury of the time there was a prevailing note of gloom, as if doubt and uncertainty were all that could be reached. Here, indeed, was a great field for the Gospel, with its hope and certainty, its strength of

[1] Merivale, "Romans under the Empire," ch. liv.

mind and purity of life. A church was in existence in Rome before Paul accomplished his purpose and paid his long-desired visit, but exactly how the church came into being it is most difficult to say. It was not founded by Paul himself. We are told in Acts xxviii. 14 *f.* that when Paul arrived at the city he was greeted by Roman Christians, and from the Epistle to the Romans it is clear that it is addressed to people he has not yet seen (Romans i. 8-11; xv. 28 *f.*). Nor can it have been founded by Peter. Paul would hardly have written as he does in the Epistle if the Roman Church had been founded by an apostle. His principle is that he does not build on another man's foundations (Romans xv. 20). If Peter had founded the church it is strange that there should be no reference to his visiting Rome, either in Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament, earlier than 1 Peter (and here such a visit rests on the supposition that the Babylon of 1 Peter v. 13 means Rome). If Peter had been there when Paul wrote we should have expected some reference to the fact. One suggestion is that the church was founded by converts from Pentecost—some of those who listened to Peter's speech were from Rome. Sanday and Headlam think, however, that "it would take more than they brought away from the Day of Pentecost to lay the foundations of a church." These commentators offer the alternative suggestion that not a few of Paul's own disciples would ultimately find their way to Rome, for there was great freedom of movement and circulation in the Empire. So little

groups of Christians would find their way to the metropolis: "some from Palestine, some from Corinth, some from Ephesus and other parts of proconsular Asia, possibly some from Tarsus and more from the Syrian Antioch. There was in the first instance, as we may believe, nothing concerted in their going; but when once they arrived in the metropolis the freemasonry common among Christians would soon make them known to each other, and they would form, not exactly an organized church, but such a fortuitous assemblage of Christians as was only waiting for the advent of an apostle to constitute one."[1] There may have been other influences. "Palestinian Christianity could hardly fail to have its representatives," while "we may well believe that the vigorous preaching of Stephen would set a wave in motion which would be felt even at Rome."

But however the beginnings are to be explained, it is clear that there was already, when Paul purposed his visit, a community of Christians in Rome, a community of Jews and Greeks. Paul was most anxious to visit Rome. This is not surprising. He was always proud of his Roman citizenship, and often appealed to Roman justice against Jewish ill-treatment. There can be no doubt that such a mind as Paul's would at once realize the immense possibilities for the Gospel that lay in Rome's network of communications throughout the Empire. "He was the first to grasp the significance of the Empire for the growth of the Church. The mission-

[1] "International Critical Commentary" (Rom. xxv. *f.*).

ary statesmanship which led him to seize on the great trade centres like Ephesus and Corinth found its highest expression in his passionate desire to see Rome; he was ambitious to proclaim his Gospel there, departing even from his wonted resolve to avoid the scenes of other men's labours."[1]

The author of Acts shows no little dramatic power when he brings Paul to Rome and leaves the story at that point. It does not fall within our purpose to trace the adventurous stages by which Paul reached his goal, nor to trace in detail his work there. It is enough to note that when Luke lays down his pen we see the apostle in Rome, preaching the Kingdom of God with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

[1] Hastings' " Dictionary of the Bible," p. 803.

Chapter V

PREACHING AND HEALING

IT is a useful exercise of the imagination for readers of the Acts of the Apostles to place themselves as far as possible in the position of those earliest messengers of the Gospel. With little equipment as we count equipment, with but a brief tradition of Christian witness behind them (and that having ended tragically), in the midst of a society difficult by reason of its mixed character, they were required to embark on their adventurous campaign. They were to go forth believing in a Name; but what a Name! For the apostles, it is true, that Name had come to mean Life, Power, and Victory; for those outside the Christian group, as far as they took account of Jesus at all, His Name meant only a despised and crucified teacher, a disturber of the peace and a preacher of very strange doctrines. The commission of the apostles was to get that Name established and honoured above every name. They were to be witnesses to that Name " unto the uttermost parts of the earth." How was it all to be accomplished?

To-day, if we wish to extend the knowledge of Christ, we may place into the hands of any inquirers a Book. We have the written record, and we realize how very important in all missionary propaganda is the translation of the Gospel record into dialects.

But there was no such book about Jesus which the first apostles could use. There was, it is true, the sacred collection of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the interpretation of that could be of great help, as Philip found when he came upon the Ethiopian eunuch reading the prophet Isaiah. Men and women who were seeking a deeper knowledge of God might well be directed to the Psalms and the Prophets. There, indeed, was a rich mine of spiritual inspiration. Moreover, the apostles could point to the foretellings of Jesus in the Old Testament. But for the actual details of His ministry they had to rely on oral tradition and whatever words or sayings of Jesus were beginning to circulate. To quote Moffatt: " The retentiveness of the Oriental memory enabled the disciples of Jesus, like the disciples of the Jewish rabbis, to preserve not inaccurately the main sayings and deeds of their Master in the original Aramaic. No need was as yet felt for committing the tradition to writing, partly on account of the superiority attached in the Greek as well as in the Jewish world to the spoken word over the written as a means of training and informing the mind, partly because Jesus Himself had written nothing. Those ' who from the beginning were eye-witnesses ' could vouch for what Jesus said and did, and it was in the atmosphere of this oral tradition that the rudimentary faith drew breath. The transition to written records may have been due to the requirements of catechetical instruction or of the active propaganda, probably to both. . . . There is reason to believe that notes and collections of the

words and deeds of Jesus were circulating when Paul was writing his Epistles. So far as even written sources of the synoptic tradition can be traced, they go back to a period preceding the fall of Jerusalem, and they reflect the interests of a Palestinian Christianity. But this was no more than the embryonic stage. The full-grown Gospel meets us for the first time after Paul had written his last word. It did not at once supersede oral tradition, but it marked the rise of a new literary category for the Christian faith."[1] Thus it was that the Christian evangelists at first were not able to use the power of the written Gospel. Not until pressing practical difficulties arose in the growing churches, not until the original eye-witnesses were passing away, was the power of the Book to be added to the power of the spoken word.

But although they could not hand to an inquirer a copy of the Gospels, they could tell the story. This they did, and hence the first and obvious method of evangelism was that of preaching. For this there was excellent precedent in the method of Jesus Himself, and, further back, there was the preaching of the Hebrew prophets of the eighth and later centuries. Thanks to the Resurrection, the apostles had something to say, and men like Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul constantly felt the urge to stand up and say it. The book of Acts devotes considerable space to reports of speeches, and although, for our purpose, it is not necessary to

[1] Article on "The Development of the New Testament Literature" in Peake's "Commentary."

analyze the speeches in detail, it is instructive to note the general manner of this preaching and its effect on varied audiences.

The preaching recorded in Acts shows variety in the kind of pulpit from which it was delivered, in the type of audience, and in the occasions which called it forth. Jesus had made good use of the synagogue, and His followers easily and naturally followed His example here. In the days of the New Testament the synagogue gave to any members of the community an opportunity for exercising gifts of preaching. The speaker sat while delivering his message (often described in the New Testament as " teaching "). If a stranger happened to be present, and seemed to possess the necessary qualifications, he might be invited by the ruler of the synagogue to address the assembly—an invitation of which Paul frequently availed himself (as at Antioch in Pisidia, Acts xiii. 14 *f.*). It seems to have been a usual method of Paul to seek first the opportunities offered by the synagogue in any place where he wished to extend his campaign. At Ephesus, for example, he " went into the synagogue and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God." But when that pulpit was closed to him he utilized the school of Tyrannus. The impression we gather is that the particular platform did not matter so much if he could deliver the message; if the synagogue is available, then the synagogue; but if not, then anywhere: in the open air where crowds are gathered, on Mars' Hill in Athens, in his hired house in Rome, where

he received all that came to him. Peter, also, could take advantage of any opportunity that came to him, whether on the occasion of a gathering like that on the Day of Pentecost or before the Sanhedrin.

The apostles delivered their message on varied occasions. Sometimes it was called out by challenge or opposition. Examples of this will readily occur in the cases of Peter, Stephen, and Paul. Sometimes it was more deliberate, a definite attempt to lay down the great principles of the Christian view of life. Doubtless the character of the audience determined the line of the discourse, and there is no doubt as to the great variety in the type of listener. On the Day of Pentecost there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews—devout men—" out of every nation under heaven." The phrase is a bold one, but it indicates the cosmopolitan character of the men and women who came within the sound of the Gospel. There was a ministry to crowds, to small groups, to individuals. The Word was preached to Jews, Greeks, Roman officials. An African heard the message from Philip, while a jailor in Philippi was converted and baptized through the influence of Paul and Silas. Greeks, both men and women, were moved by Paul's preaching in Athens, and even important officials like Felix heard the message from Paul's lips.

An excellent example of the wide range and effect of the earliest Christian preaching is given in Acts xvi., one of the greatest missionary chapters in the New Testament. This chapter records: (*a*) the

conversion of Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira; (*b*) the influence of Paul on a slave girl, the property of a group of charlatans who traded on her powers of soothsaying; (*c*) the conversion of the jailor and his family. Here we may note: (*a*) the influence of the Gospel on different social orders, on a business woman of considerable independence, and a slave girl; (*b*) the appeal of the Gospel to different nationalities, to the Asiatic Lydia, the Greek slave girl, and the Roman jailor; (*c*) the suggestive order in which the Gospel spreads, to a proselyte—*i.e.*, one who had become attached to Judaism—to a Greek slave girl, and then to a Roman. To quote Lightfoot:[1] "They are representatives of three different races . . . in the relations of everyday life they have nothing in common: the first is engaged in an important and lucrative branch of traffic; the second, treated by the law as a mere chattel without any social or political rights, is employed by her master to trade upon the credulous superstition of the ignorant; the third, equally removed from both the one and the other, holds a subordinate office under the government. In their religious training, also, they stand no less apart. In the one the speculative mystic temper of Oriental devotion has at length found deeper satisfaction in the revealed truths of the Old Testament. The second, bearing the name of the Pythian god, the reputed source of Greek inspiration, represents an artistic and imaginative religion, though manifested here in a very low and degrading form. While

[1] "Commentary on Philippians," pp. 52 *f.*

the third, if he preserved the characteristic features of his race, must have exhibited a type of worship essentially political in tone. . . . In the history of the Gospel at Philippi, as in the history of the Church at large, is reflected the great maxim of Christianity, the central truth of the apostle's preaching, that here is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus."

It is unlikely, however, that preaching alone would have achieved such great results as are suggested in the Acts. In those happy days when the Master trod the lanes and highways of Palestine there was another factor—His ministry of healing. A sermon may speak of power, but a cure demonstrates it, and the people of the first century were no different from those of our own in that they were impressed by what they could behold. When the Twelve went forth at the command of Jesus He commissioned them, saying: "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils" (Matthew x. 5 *f.*). Preach and heal; this was the combination which made such a deep impression. The Acts of the Apostles represents the implied promise of Jesus as abundantly fulfilled, and in this connection we may bear in mind that the account is given by a doctor. There is a great Power at work; the apostles are merely the channels of it.

Watch this Power at work. It is revealed in judgment, as on Ananias and Sapphira (v. 1 *f.*), and on Elymas the sorcerer (xiii. 11). It secures

the deliverance of Peter from prison (xii. 6 *f.*) and of Paul (xvi. 26). It brings health and strength to weak and impotent men and women; a lame man is cured at the Temple gate Beautiful, a cripple at Lystra. Æneas is cured of his palsy, and Dorcas is restored to life. The tremendous impression caused by the healing ministry of the apostles is illustrated by two interesting accounts: "They brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them" (v. 15); of Paul it is recorded: "From his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (xix. 12). Without attaching too much importance to incidents like these, we may clearly infer that Peter and Paul were regarded as possessed of supernatural power.

How are we to regard these miracles of healing? Probably as the continuation of the Power which Jesus had manifested, continued in the early Church for the strengthening of the faith in the minds of those to whom the great message was delivered. It would be easy to place an exaggerated value on these works. Ramsay declared: "The marvels recorded in Acts are not, as a rule, said to have been efficacious in spreading the new religion; the marvel at Philippi caused suffering and imprisonment; to the raising of Eutychus no effect is ascribed. The importance of these events lies rather in their effect on the minds of the apostles themselves, who accepted them as an encouragement and a confirmation of

their work."[1] The value in this statement lies in its suggestion that it was far from the aim of the apostles to win spiritual adherents just by the use of attractive medical benefits. As Harnack says: "We do not know of any cases where Christians desired to win, or actually did win, adherents by means of the charities which they dispensed."[2] We are not to regard the cures and other works of power as a sort of pleasant bait to entice the stubborn. So much ought to be said in fairness to the high motives and principles of the apostolic propaganda. Yet it seems hardly to meet the case to say, as Ramsay says, that their importance lies in their subjective effect on the apostles themselves. That there was such an effect we cannot doubt; still, it cannot be doubted that works of healing would have a great effect on the crowds. They would attract the curious; they would serve as a kind of confirmation of the authority of the apostles; they would help to show that the Power of Jesus did in fact work out in the normal life of men and women; they would help to emphasize the love and human sympathy which were essential to the new religion. We make no mistake, therefore, if we regard the miracles of Acts as supplementing the ministry of preaching. Both were in direct continuation of the method of Jesus.

But while we are considering the apostolic method of evangelism, let us beware lest we over-emphasize the methodical nature of their work. That work

[1] "St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen," pp. 115 *f.*

[2] "Expansion of Christianity," ch. i., p. 386.

was simple, direct, in a measure experimental, and very much under the guidance of the Spirit. We do not get a correct picture of Paul and the rest if we think of them as poring over maps to work out exact routes. Their work had a spontaneous character. They were alive to calls, however suddenly they might come. Their work did not always go according to expectations. We are told, for example, that Paul tried to preach in Asia and again in Bithynia, but he was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost" (Acts xvi. 6, 7). It was a vision, not a map, that directed him to Macedonia. Sometimes he preached in a town because he had been driven out of some other town. True, he returned to some places, and in some towns stayed for considerable periods, but in the main we are to think of him as moved by the Spirit, going forward hardly knowing whither he went. But it was going *forward.* The field was so large, and the efficient labourers so few, that in most places there was hardly time to do more than scatter a few seeds of truth, and then on to another part of the field.

Seed-scatterers. That is the term. It was a fine life, to spread abroad the seeds of truth, and here and there the seeds of healing. Preachers without (for most of them) special academic training; healers without a travelling dispensary. Unlike many of the travelling teachers of the time, they looked for no financial reward. Paul, indeed, is rather proud of the fact that he works his way along, but that did not prevent money coming to him from one source or another. Unlike the work of quacks and

charlatans who abounded in any city of considerable size, the apostolic campaign had no commercial side. It was Truth they were concerned with, and they were not even selling it; they were giving it away with a lavish hand. Truth, but not in the abstract form so common in the philosophies; it was Truth in Jesus, the Truth of solace, healing, refuge and salvation. Wherever they went they met men and women who sought a religion with real salvation and peace within it. Harnack summed up the need and expectancy of the age when he wrote: " No one could be a god any longer unless he was also a Saviour."[1] Paul summed up the secret of the apostolic evangelism when he wrote to the Corinthians: " We preach Christ crucified—Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God " (1 Corinthians, i, 23, 24).

[1] " Expansion of Christianity," ch. i., p. 107.

Chapter VI

THE ROUGH ROAD

"BEHOLD, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues, and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake . . ." (Matthew x. 16 *f.*). At the time when those solemn words were uttered it is unlikely that the disciples realized all they meant; but they were soon to realize it and to find out through hard experience that the way of the Master was also the way of the servant.

Within a few generations the opposition to the Christian movement became imperial: the might of Rome was arrayed against the growing Church.[1] But at the outset what opposition there was to Christian evangelism was due to the Jews. It was the endeavour of the Jewish hierarchy to crush the new sect. The story of this persecution begins early in Acts. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold . . ." (Acts iv. 1 *f.*). From this point onwards there is scarcely a chapter

[1] See the present writer's "The Master and His Men," ch. ii.

without its record or implication of persecution. It rises to its height in the persecution associated with Saul, and in the consequent scattering of the little groups throughout Judæa and Samaria. Occasionally the representatives of the imperial power joined in, as when Herod had James beheaded and Peter imprisoned "because he saw it pleased the Jews" (Acts xii.). But it was mainly Jewish bitterness that the evangelists had to face, as Paul constantly found to his cost. In Iconium the Jews stirred up the Gentiles (xiv. 2), and this opposition followed Paul to Lystra and Derbe. It continued in Thessalonica (xvii. 5), and in Berea (xvii. 13). He encountered it in Corinth (xviii. 12) and in Jerusalem (xxi. 27). Doubtless there was exceptional opposition to Paul on account of his recantation of the Jewish faith, but the general antagonism on the part of the Jews affected the work of all the evangelists.

Quite apart from the definite warning given by Jesus, this opposition could not have been altogether unexpected. The new movement inevitably attacked vested interests. It disturbed the security and prestige of the elaborate Jewish hierarchy, but there were also other interests which were affected. In Philippi, for example, the earning power of the slave girl was destroyed, and Paul's influence, therefore, quite apart from spiritual considerations, was dangerous commercially to her owners. In Ephesus there was a world-famous temple where the Great Mother, worshipped under various names throughout Asia Minor, was venerated as Diana. The sale of small silver shrines provided a very lucrative trade

for the Ephesian craftsmen, who were quick to see the commercial danger in Paul's campaign. One of them, Demetrius, gathered together his fellow-craftsmen in a sort of trade union meeting and declared " not only is there danger that this our trade come into disrepute; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana be made of no account, and that she should even be deposed from her magnificence " (Acts xix. 24 *f.*)—a subtle combining of commercial and religious arguments. The result was uproar, and if Ephesus had not happened to have a level-headed town clerk, the issue might have been serious. As it was, Paul was able to leave for Macedonia and Greece, where, however, after a stay of three months, he encountered another plot!

There were other difficulties. Mention is made of famine (xi. 27 *f.*), and although there was no famine fund in existence, " the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judæa; which also they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul "—another of those charming pictures of good fellowship which rise again and again in the story. Then there was, at least on one occasion, the unexpected difficulty of popularity. After Paul's cure of a cripple at Lystra the crowd acclaimed the apostle and his companion Barnabas as Mercury and Jupiter, and it was only with extreme difficulty that Paul restrained the people from offering sacrifices to them (xiv. 8 *f.*).

It would not surprise us to learn that Paul was more embarrassed by this than by many a riot!

Of the actual physical strain of his campaigns, Paul has himself told us: " Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches " (2 Corinthians xi. 24*f.*).

Here is a combination of physical and mental strain. Much has been made of Paul's " thorn in the flesh " (2 Corinthians xii. 7). This persistent and troublesome malady has been variously diagnosed. Lightfoot approved the view that Paul, like Cæsar, Mohammed, Cromwell, Napoleon, was an epileptic, while Ramsay inclined to the view that it was malarial fever, the latter theory apparently having more to support it. But troublesome as this must have been, especially in conjunction with Paul's hazardous adventurings, we cannot doubt that the greater anxiety was the mental. " The care of all the churches "—who can tell how much that involved? " He was besieged on all sides. So much, everything, indeed, was incomplete in the young churches. The new converts knew so little, with their new world in their hearts, how to see their way in the old world without. Doubt and scruples,

faintheartedness and effervescent enthusiasm, strife and bickering, old and new sin, influences of all kinds from without, shook the tender new life again and again to its very roots. A host of cares for the man's loving heart, and a continual question for his conscience; for he knew he would have to render an account at the Day of the Lord for every soul the Father had given him."[1] Add to this strain on behalf of the churches the disappointment when John Mark turned back and when Demas forsook him, and we learn something of the roughness of the road.

We have already noted the place of martyrdom in the story of early Christian enterprise. The early Church was quick to seize upon the importance of these martyrdoms, and saw in them the literal fulfilment of the Master's word. Origen wrote: " As we behold the martyrs coming forth from every church to be brought before the tribunal, we see in each the Lord Himself condemned." Irenæus regarded the martyrs as " endeavouring to follow in the footsteps of Christ." In consequence of the importance which attached to these heroic deaths, legends abounded, not all of which will bear a close scrutiny. But when every allowance has been made for the legendary material that gathered about the apostles, there is sufficient in fact to evoke our reverent admiration. A mere catalogue of the tribulations which the apostles endured will show that the Via Crucis was, for them, no mere figure of speech; while if we search further and inquire into

[1] H. Weinel, " St. Paul, the Man and His Work," p. 176.

the attitude they took up in regard to death, we shall marvel still more at the heroism of those early days.

Here is the bare list. Stephen, the earliest martyr, was stoned. Herod Agrippa I., the grandson of Herod, killed James the brother of John with the sword. "With St. James there seems to have perished a disciple of our Lord belonging to the highest caste in the hierarchy, who bore the somewhat common name of John. Possibly this mysterious martyr suffered later, perhaps at the same time as the other St. James. But the date, the place of execution, and the identity of this John are alike matters of dispute."[1] James, the brother of Jesus and the first Bishop of Jerusalem, was murdered—the last important event of which we have knowledge in the long persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem. Hegesippus tells, with what accuracy we cannot be certain, that as James was being stoned on a wing of the Temple he knelt in prayer. "I entreat Thee, God and Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "Stop your stoning," cried a priest, "the Just One prays for you." Upon which a fuller ran up and with his club finished the evil deed. Amid all the traditions which gather round the death of Paul we know that he died by the sword during the Neronian persecution. Peter, according to tradition, glorified the Lord Jesus on a cross, but head downwards. Tradition also relates that John accompanied Peter to Rome, and was condemned to be plunged into a cauldron of boiling oil near the

[1] Workman, "Persecution in the Early Church," p. 25.

Latin gate. How he escaped tradition does not say. We have the further account of his banishment to Patmos as a result of the Neronian persecution, but do not know by what means he secured release from the convict settlement. He lived through the trials of two great persecutions and died in extreme old age at Ephesus. Of the group we have considered, only John died without violence.

A rough road! In what spirit did they face it, and with what courage were they sustained? Luke in his narrative gives plain indications of that indomitable spirit which marked nearly all the apostolic band. He is fond of describing how they gave their testimony with boldness. When the Jewish authorities beheld the boldness of Peter and John they marvelled (iv. 13). Peter declared: " We cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard " (iv. 20). After their release, Peter and John reported the turn of affairs to the church, and in the prayer meeting that followed we note the petition: " And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants to speak Thy word with all boldness, while Thou stretchest forth Thy hand to heal " (iv. 29). Apprehended again, and released after a beating and a warning, " they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name " (v. 41). How bravely Stephen stood his ground is apparent from the beautiful account of his death (vii. 59). Paul and Silas were thrown into prison in Philippi; they sang hymns (xvi. 25) ! At Lystra Paul was stoned and dragged

out of the city and left for dead. But it took a great deal more than stoning to quench that indomitable spirit: Paul recovered, went as far as Derbe, where he preached, *and then went back to Lystra* (xiv. 19 *f.*). Even supposing that Paul went back quietly for intercourse with the converts, to go back at all to a place whence he had been ejected marked the determined spirit of the man. He was not to be daunted. To the elders of the Ephesian Church he said: " I hold not my life of any account, as dear to myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God " (xx. 24).

At Cæsarea Paul stayed for a while with Philip the evangelist. The prophet Agabus made a gloomy prediction about Paul, and his friends in Cæsarea begged him not to go up to Jerusalem; whereon Paul replied: " What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus " (xxi. 10 *f.*). There is the same courageous and dignified bearing on all occasions, whether he is meeting charges before rulers or encouraging distressed fellow-passengers on a stormy voyage (xxvii. 22 *f.*). Luke leaves him in Rome, where he is preaching and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness.

We may be glad that Luke ended on that note, for thus the end is like the beginning. The apostolic courage was no mere bravado summoned up to carry off a difficult situation; it was too persistent to be merely assumed. It arose from an inner

conviction: they were engaged in Christ's work, and they would have Christ's power to carry it through. They never doubted that. Though all things might seem to the contrary, the forces of God were on their side, and the certainty of this gave them resolution. The attitude they adopted in the testing times recorded in Acts is supported by their writings, and this is significant. A man may conceivably present a bold front in face of a sudden danger; he may call upon his courage for the moment; but if, in calmer moments, when he is setting down his careful thoughts about life and God he can sincerely write about the joys of the rough road, and the thrill of endurance, we know that his bravery is not a superficial excitement of the moment, but the expression of the soul's calm assurance. Read, from this point of view, the words of Peter and Paul: "If ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye" (1 Peter iii. 14). "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter iv. 12 *f.*). As for Paul, there is a clear clarion note ringing through his epistles. "I think," he writes, "that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed unto death, for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." (1 Corinthians iv. 9). "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we intreat." He has learned the secret wherewith to be content with his great mission. That brings him all the honour he needs. He has

learned both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. Here is the secret: " I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." Nothing can separate him from the love of Christ—tribulation, distress, nakedness, sword—nothing, not even death. Read that great passage in 2 Timothy: " For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith . . . and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom " (iv. 7, 8, 18). With the end in sight, his mind is calm, his faith sure. The Crucified, who has been his daily companion, will see him through. To live is Christ; to die is gain.

Chapter VII

INGATHERING

In looking back to the first romantic beginnings of the Christian Church there is the danger of thinking that, in those days, all was success and progress. It seems to be a natural tendency of the human mind to find its Golden Age in the past, and, consequently, we who are perplexed by modern problems and disheartened by modern apathy tend to see in the first century the happy story of uninterrupted prosperity. We throw a halo not only around the heads of the apostles, but also over the roofs of the buildings that served as churches, and imagine that all was at its best then; motives, we think, were pure, the Christian life was extraordinarily Christ-like, the universal characteristic was deep consecration. But it was not so. If we are to draw a correct picture we must leave room for failures, for hardness of heart, for doubtful motives. Acts, indeed, supplies suggestions of all this, while if we turn to the Epistles we find that the black sheep was not unknown even in the first-century fold. The preaching of the apostles did not always arouse agreement. There was indifference then as now. Here and there were to be found those who sought to make the best of both worlds, or who were interested in the religion of Jesus merely for commercial advantage. They were not all like Barnabas, or Lydia, or Cornelius.

Others find a place in the story, like Ananias and Sapphira, and Simon Magus.

Yet, when all account has been taken of rejection, treachery, and failure, it still remains that the record of those early times is one of extraordinary expansion. Here and there in the narrative Luke puts in a sentence or two to show how the fire is spreading. Sometimes his figures are so great that the reader wonders whether he is speaking in "round numbers," if not exaggerating. After Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost: "They that received his word were baptized; and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls." We need not necessarily assume that they were all baptized on the one day—a point of difficulty with some commentators. Nor need we assume that such a great crowd represented conversions which all persisted. Still, Luke conveys the impression he clearly meant to convey, that on the great day there was a very great ingathering. Early in chapter iv. there is mention of about five thousand men who believed. In the next chapter we read that "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." In the earlier chapters the emphasis seems to be laid on the crowds who were influenced; later the effect of the preaching on important individuals is emphasized. Both emphases point to what actually happened; in reflecting on the mass movements we may bear in mind what we have learned in recent times about mass psychology; in estimating the effect of the Gospel on prominent individuals we

may bear in mind the narrator's purpose. Conversions of important people like Cornelius and Lydia are valuable as suggesting the growing effect of the Gospel in Gentile circles and among women.

We miss the point, however, if we spend our time counting *numbers*; more important is the *type* of convert. To make a list of types—African eunuch, Italian centurion, pro-consul of Cyprus, Thyatirian business woman, Athenian councillor, Corinthian city treasurer, and so on—is to marvel at the range of the Gospel's power, and we understand why Paul could be so jubilant about the universality of his message. But, for our purpose, it is most important of all to inquire what it was about those first Christians which made their influence so widespread. For the fire continued to spread. It was no sudden flame, to be extinguished after a few short years. As Harnack says: "Seventy years after the foundation of the very first Gentile Christian Church in Syrian Antioch, Pliny wrote in the strongest terms about the spread of Christianity throughout remote Bithynia, a spread which, in his view, already threatened the stability of other cults throughout the province. Seventy years later still, the Paschal Controversy reveals the existence of a Christian federation of Churches stretching from Lyons to Edessa, with its headquarters situated in Rome. Seventy years later again, the Emperor Decius declared that he would sooner have a rival emperor in Rome than a Christian bishop, and ere another seventy years had passed, the Cross was

sewn upon the Roman colours."[1] What is the explanation of this great and continued ingathering?

The great work of the apostles themselves must not blind us to what is a legitimate inference, the solid service rendered by the ordinary convert. In ancient as in modern churches a few come into prominence, but the enduring work of any Christian community depends on the quiet worker in obscure tasks. Lydia has received her meed of praise, but what of her household? We know about the leaders of the Jerusalem Church, but what of the groups of converts, unnamed, obscure? Much of the success of the early movement, we may be sure, was due to the ministry of the " average " Christian. They were all ministers. They were all missionaries. We would like to know about those who threw open their homes for the meetings of the fellowship, and about the many Rhodas who opened doors for the apostles. Barnabas, we know, sold his field and gave the proceeds to the Work, but we would like to know about the scores who " sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all, according as any man had need." Any reader who has imaginative power can easily see many pictures in this brief record. The workman's savings, the widow's mite, the youth's pocket-money, are all represented here. Although their names are not mentioned in Acts we may be sure they found a place in the great Book of Devotion. We would like a list of the men and women who offered hospitality to Paul on his travels, a list of the subscribers to the fund for

[1] " Mission and Expansion of Christianity," ch. ii., p. 468.

the Jerusalem Church. Who were the people who gave him a hand-grip on his departures? Who were the unnamed through whom the church at Antioch grew in strength? If the veil could be lifted from these numerous helpers we should read a story of quiet and patient devotion, a story, perhaps, worthy to stand side by side with the well-known records of prominent evangelists.

Possibly the very fact that as yet the " official " ministry had not developed served as a challenge to every believer to take his share in the spreading of the good news. Paul, as we shall see, recognized a good many varieties of Christian service. There was so much to be done that in a real sense everyone was " saved to serve." By a natural process leaders would come to the front in every community, but *all* were capable of some kind of service. Just as in the beginning (as we shall see) Sunday observances were added to the duties of a working day, so evangelism was naturally linked with the normal life of trade. A man need not take leave of his work to bear his witness. There was always a field for good sowing close at hand—among the workmen, or in the little social groups where men congregated after the toil of the day. The mother in the home, the carpenter at his bench, the trader on his travels, the civil servant in his daily routine, the servant girl among her companions—ministers and missionaries, all of them. If persecution drives them from one town to another, well, here is a chance to make known the Gospel in a new district. This was the unofficial ministry: unordained, save

by the ordaining of the Spirit; unpaid, save in the rich reward of souls won for the Lord. And if it was all very simple and spontaneous it was none the worse for that.

The life they lived would count for so much. They professed a religion which had the merit of making a difference to life in all its aspects. The social conditions among which the first churches were founded certainly did not lack the influence of religion, but the moral effect of Christianity marked it as something apart from the rest. Consider the religious atmosphere in any large town in the Empire. Everywhere the Christian disciple would meet the prevalent belief in demons. The earth was full of them; they ruled every phase of human life. "They sat on thrones, they hovered round cradles, the earth was literally a hell." It was not that this belief in demons was the mark of the poor, ignorant and superstitious; the cultured and powerful shared it as well. Evil spirits lurked everywhere, and the great business of religion was to guard against them. Incantations, magic, veneration of bones, love-potions—in short, the whole paraphernalia of fearful credulity were the resort of rich and poor, educated and ignorant. All this the Christian found around him.

We have to take into account the reality of this spirit-world before we can understand the vigorous teaching of Paul. There, lurking in every corner, were the dread spirits; and yet the Christian went about his daily duty with a serenity and inner peace that the pagan found hard to understand.

For the Christian there was no dread spirit hovering over the cradle, but the Spirit of Him who was the Friend of little children. Love-potions, amulets, charms—these meant nothing to men and women whose first principle was that God loved them and was their kindly Father. It is not hard to understand why the Christian serenity should have made an impression upon fear-haunted pagans.

Then there was religious observance. The little churches were overshadowed by costly temples, but contrast what went on inside the one and the other. Pagan temples were the homes of indecency and obscenity. Paul knew what he was writing about when he told the Ephesians that they were to walk " not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness " (iv. 17 *f.*). You came out of a pagan temple feeling you would give anything for a breath of sweet, pure air, and longing for a moral bath. And then there were the wandering priests who made a round of the villages with shrines and idols, dancing and mutilating and then taking the collection! Contrast all this with the pure joy and serenity which marked the Christians in their meetings; yes, even when to meet together meant danger, the meeting brought courage and the power of healthy-minded fellowship. What need of idols when they knew the presence of the

Spirit of God? The only shrine they knew might be the larger room in a modest house, but the prayers of the brethren, the singing of hymns, the declaration of the Truth of Jesus, turned it into a temple of true blessedness. The Christian disciples might be despised, but at any rate they showed themselves superior to the corrupt enjoyments of the theatre and amphitheatre. They had *real* joys and everybody could share them, even slaves. The Christian was not only out-thinking the pagan, he was outliving him.

Paul has a phrase: " Ye are our epistle . . . known and read of all men " (2 Corinthians iii. 2). The Christian life was there to be observed, an open letter to be read by anyone. It stood out well by comparison with the fear-filled neurotic life of pagan society. Both in precept and practice the Christian Way shone resplendent. To set about living according to the teaching of Jesus was to become at once a powerful advocate for His religion.

From all this it will appear that there was something spontaneous, natural, and inevitable about the missionary activity of the growing Church. The modern Church suffers for lack of this. Today missionary activity is an organized activity; by too many it is regarded as a sort of " extra "; we have grown to use the adjective " foreign " to describe it. Africa, India, China, are a long way from our shores, though not now so far away as in the days of Carey. The Church member in a home church too frequently feels satisfied if the various activities near at hand are well sustained. The

maintenance of Sunday worship, the equipment of Sunday schools and youth organizations, with perhaps now and then an effort of evangelism in the slums, these, we feel, are as much as can be expected. "Charity begins at home," we say, but what is often behind the phrase is the feeling that "it ought to stop there." The Missionary Society is something with central offices in London, and its support the hobby of the few enthusiasts.

It is not unfair to suggest that this is the attitude, not always vocal, of very many Christians of to-day. But it was not the attitude of the Church member in apostolic days. The outposts of Asia Minor were just as far away from Jerusalem, comparatively, as India is from England to-day, but the early Church, once established in its real universalism, did not feel that gap between "home" and "foreign" which we too often feel to-day. It may be urged, of course, that the cosmopolitan character of any great city made the difference between "home" and "foreign" less marked. Even on the Day of Pentecost there were present in Jerusalem people "from every nation under heaven." Still, when every allowance has been made for the difference between the situation in apostolic days and now, we cannot resist the impression that missionary activity was part of the very *esse* of the early Church. Paul longed to go as far as Spain and Rome, but there were many others unnamed who would have gone with him, and on the same great errand, if they had had the chance.

This, then, is the explanation of the great and

continued ingathering, as far as the human side of it is concerned. It was the duty of everybody, official or unofficial. The whole Church was at work. It evangelized as it went about its normal business, utilized every trade-route, made capital out of persecution, and thus penetrated remote places in the Empire. The Message itself was unique, and just what society then needed; but the Message could not have won its way if there had not been deep consecration on the part of all. Nothing less will explain the first century Christian contagion.

Chapter VIII

THE CHURCH AT WORSHIP

RELIGION cannot live for long without some form of organized life. It begins in the heart of the individual, but since man is incurably social it soon forms social contacts. Thus the Christian spirit begins to operate in a Christian fellowship, and not the least interesting of the many sidelights thrown by Acts on the Christian movement of the first century is its revealing of the first companies of Christ's comrades. The work of the Holy Spirit was seen in the formation of groups of believers. From the beginning Jesus had preached the Kingdom, and there can be no doubt that it was part of His purpose to secure the establishment of that Kingdom through the groups of men and women who believed on His Name. In a word, just as there was a challenge and a mission for the individual convert, so there was a challenge and a mission for the fellowship. We may well inquire, therefore, what the records have to tell us about these early communities. What were the marks of the various fellowships which were formed, what were the conditions of entrance, in what manner and at what times did they organize their worship?

We cannot do better than quote in summary the description given by T. M. Lindsay of the marks of

the New Testament Church.[1] The Church of Christ is: (1) a *fellowship*, with Christ and with the brethren; (2) it is a *unity:* just as there was one assembly of the congregation of Israel, and one sovereign assembly of the Greek City States, so there is only one Church of Christ (Lindsay points out that the great majority of the occurrences of the word " church " in the New Testament do not contain this note of widespreading unity, but refer rather to local societies; still, Paul uses the word in this wide sense in Colossians and Ephesians, and the idea of the unity of the Church of Christ is never far from his mind); (3) it is a *visible community*—the universal Church of Christ is made visible in the local communities; (4) it has *authority*, derived from Christ Himself, an authority shown in the exercise of oversight and discipline upon the members; (5) it is a *sacerdotal society*, for the *whole Church* exercises priestly functions, representing God to man and man to God. This priesthood is the universal priesthood of all believers. Not all these elements in the conception of the Church were realized at the beginning, and doubtless the emphasis on the various points varied in the different communities, yet the fundamental ideal of fellowship was realized, and Acts shows us how the fellowship of the believer with Christ issued naturally in a warm brotherhood and a common interest in the things of the Kingdom. " The Church is thus primarily the company or brotherhood of all who accepted Jesus as their

[1] " The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries," pp. 6 *f.*

Master and Lord, and shared a common life and rites of worship, recognizing their common responsibility and obligations; and this company or brotherhood was one and the same society or Church although existing in separate local organizations. There is no trace in the New Testament of any idea on the part of the first Christians that it was possible to be a member of the Church without being a member of one of these visible local societies, or to receive in any other way whatever benefits which membership of the Church bestowed."[1]

How was membership of the Church secured? " Except by Baptism no one could enter the Christian society; that no one could remain a member of it without partaking in the one bread which was the outward mark of union seems certain." This inference made by Dr. Bethune Baker is supported by passages such as Acts ii. 41, 42, 46, and draws attention to the importance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in the fellowship of the early Church. Both sacraments have been the occasion of much controversy in the Church, and there is divergence of opinion as to the interpretation of their place in New Testament teaching. But it is possible, without entering into the details of controversy, to gain a general idea of what Baptism and the Lord's Supper meant to the earliest communities.

It is clear that in the beginning entrance to the fellowship of the Church was not a step to be lightly regarded. It was not like joining a kind

[1] Bethune-Baker, " Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine," p. 23.

of high-toned club. The privileges offered by the Church are spiritual privileges not to be gained by mercenary means or according to social status. Baptism must be preceded by repentance (Acts ii. 38; viii. 37). In the New Testament it is associated with the remission of sins (Acts ii. 38; xxii. 16). It is linked to the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts x. 47; xix. 1 *f.*). According to the teaching of St. Paul (Rom. vi. 3 *f.*), Baptism effects union with Christ. To quote the excellent rendering of this passage given in Sanday and Headlam's commentary on Romans, "Baptism has a double function: (1) It brings the Christian into personal contact with Christ, so close that it may fitly be described as union with Him; (2) it expresses symbolically a series of acts corresponding to the redeeming acts of Christ: Immersion=Death; Submersion=Burial (the ratification of Death); Emergence=Resurrection. All these the Christian has to undergo in a moral and spiritual sense, and by means of his union with Christ. As Christ by His death on the Cross ceased from all contact with sin, so the Christian, united with Christ in his Baptism, has done once for all with sin, and lives henceforth a reformed life dedicated to God." It is not to be supposed, of course, that all those who were baptized in the early days of Christian enthusiasm realized the full meaning of this. But the significant fact to be noted is that this was the way into the Church, and that the noble teaching of Paul placed the ceremony on a high spiritual level. The way to fellowship with the society is heart-fellowship with the Master.

As it began, so it continued. If Baptism signifies union with Christ, participation in the sacred Supper maintains that union. The effect of participation in the Lord's Supper is variously regarded in the New Testament; this is not surprising, for it will take many terms to express the full significance of so holy a rite. It means union with the Lord, fellowship with the Body and the Blood of Christ (1 Corinthians x. 16 *f.*). It binds together those who participate into one body (1 Corinthians x. 17). It perpetuates the memory of Christ's death, for which it is always a thanksgiving (as the prevalence of the word "eucharist" signifies). It points forward to that fuller and deeper fellowship which the believer will share with Christ in the consummated Kingdom. These are the predominant ideas which emerge in the New Testament interpretation. Once again, we need not suppose that all those who participated realized the full significance. As we know, there were those who failed to observe the Sacrament in the proper spirit—Paul had to rebuke such—and doubtless for some the holy meal would have points of similarity with the secret feasts of the surrounding paganism. But it cannot be stressed too much that the idea of Church fellowship, both in its beginning and its continuance, centres upon the experience of union with Christ.

In order to fill in the picture of the corporate religious life of these early communities it is necessary to say something about their forms of worship. We have already seen that the enthusiasm and exuberance of their fellowship led them to practical

expressions of brotherhood. Their worship, we may infer, was a very happy and vital affair. In this matter they had a very strong tradition behind them. There was the Temple, which had meant so much in the story of their forefathers and never failed to appeal to the imagination of the Jew. The Master had trodden its sacred courts, and at first, as we see from Acts ii. 46, the Christian converts carried their new joys with them into the Temple. Then there was the synagogue, the centre of Jewish life in the first century—an institution which was to reveal its greatness and importance for Judaism, especially when the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Every town and village had its synagogue, and so wherever groups of Christians gathered there was ready to hand a model, so to speak, for their worship if they desired a model. With Temple and synagogue they had a strong tradition of public worship; but as followers of Jesus the first Christians had something even greater—viz., His clearly defined teaching on the meaning and place of worship. The practice of Jesus was associated more with the synagogue than with the Temple (which for Him was primarily a house of prayer), but His teaching shows a fine spirituality, which puts all institutions and forms in their proper place. Those who had heard Him speak knew what worship meant for Him—filial trust and love to God, loyalty to His will, expressed in love for mankind. "He never treated ritual or cultus as determinative of man's real relation to God, as did current Judaism—a fact revolutionary in the history

of ancient religion."[1] God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. The background, therefore, of the earliest Christian groups as they set about the task of organizing their worship had two main elements in it. There was the tradition of the outer forms—Temple and synagogue; there was Christ's insistence upon the inner spirit. How did they proceed to make the necessary arrangements for the corporate devotion?

For Jewish Christians there was, of course, the special sanctity attaching to the Sabbath, and it is likely that they would keep the Sabbath holy. But before long the spread of the Gospel embraced many who had no Jewish inclinations and for whom the seventh day had no special sanctity. Paul had a wide experience among Gentile converts, and perhaps this is reflected in his attitude to the observance of special days. From Romans xiv. 5, we infer that he was prepared to leave the choice of one day over another to individual conscience; Galatians iv. 9. *f.* suggests that he saw in the observance of days, months, seasons, and years, something perilously akin to pagan bondage; in any case, it is a matter on which no one should censure another (Colossians ii. 16). "In the Pauline mission Sabbath observance probably fell rapidly into abeyance."[2]

But it is not correct to suppose that Sunday observance, with all that it implies in modern

[1] E.R.E., xii., p. 763; art. "Worship" (Christian).
[2] Peake's "Commentary," p. 647; art. "Organization, Discipline," etc.

usage, at once took its place. There are only three references in the New Testament to the religious observance of Sunday. Paul urged his Corinthian converts to lay aside money for charity every Sunday (1 Corinthians xvi. 2). Acts xx. 7 records that upon the first day of the week Paul preached at a service at Troas. There is the well-known record in Revelation i. 10: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." We may well infer that Sunday observance began among the Pauline churches where the membership was strongly Gentile. We ought, however, to bear in mind that at this early date Sunday would not possess the fuller meaning which it later acquired. How, for instance, would it be possible in a church where many were slaves to insist on the first day as a day of rest? For many of the early Christians, religious services would be possible only either before or after the normal course of daily toil. It required considerable development, both in the numbers and social prestige of the Christian converts, before the demand for a special time, free from toil, could be sustained. We are to think, then, of the earliest Sunday services as held on the first day not because it was a day of rest, but because it was the day of the Resurrection, the Lord's day. As the Church developed there came into Sunday observance two other ideas: (1) Popular opinion moved in favour of a Sunday holiday, and by the time of Constantine a decree (A.D. 321) enjoined the observance of the Day of the Sun as a public holiday. Doubtless, in this the emperor was influenced by Christian sentiment;

but there was another advantage, in that it was better to have a fixed weekly holiday than the somewhat irregular celebrations which paganism enjoined. (2) It was not until the ninth century that the identification of Sunday with the idea of the Sabbath was taken for granted.

What are we able to infer in regard to the character of the services which the early Christians held? From the beginning it is clear that private houses supplied the accommodation necessary for corporate worship. There is one record of Paul holding meetings in the Schola of Tyrannus (Acts xix. 9 *f.*), but for the most part the houses of the brethren served the purpose, even for the observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts ii. 46). A ground plan of a very early church in Rome was discovered in 1900, and it is modelled, not on the style of a public hall, but on the audience hall of a wealthy Roman burgher. To get the correct picture it is necessary to put out of mind our modern elaborate buildings and to think rather of domestic gatherings here and there—a kind of "cottage meeting." There is apparently no trace of a special building set aside for worship until the beginning of the third century. How very domestic were the gatherings can be inferred from that interesting ancient liturgy which commands the deacon, at the point in the service when the Lord's Supper is to be administered, to see that the mothers take their babies on their knees.[1]

In addition to a meeting for the transaction of

[1] Neale and Littledale, "Translations of Primitive Liturgies," p. 75.

business (which will be considered later), the early communities seem to have had two kinds of meetings for worship, one for prayer and edification, the other marked by the Lord's Supper. Lindsay pictures the former meeting as that of "an earnest company of men and women full of restrained enthusiasm, which might soon become unrestrained."[1] We are to picture the men on one side of the room, the women on the other. The order in all likelihood was somewhat as follows: A blessing, an invocation of Jesus and confession that He is Lord, prayers, followed by hymns. Psalms were sung, and of Christian hymns perhaps fragments may be seen in Luke i. 45-55, 68-79; ii. 14, 29-32; Ephesians v. 14; Revelation v. 9-13; xi. 17 *f.*; xv. 3 *f.* There is a probability that some of the singing was antiphonal. Then followed readings from the Old Testament, readings or recitations from the sayings and deeds of Jesus; then instruction, and we are probably near the mark when we think of many of the addresses as centred on the proof of the Messiahship of Jesus. There was an opportunity for those who believed themselves to possess a message to declare it, an opportunity which was often the occasion of excitement and emotion. Then followed the benediction and the "kiss of peace." The great feature of these meetings was their enthusiasm, their spontaneity; emotion would be apt to override rules and forms—as happens amid the enthusiasm of the Mission field to-day, or even in the Western churches during a period of spiritual up-

[1] "The Church and the Ministry," p. 44.

lifting. The worship was free, and anyone who had a message could take part. The congregations comprised all types and social classes.

The second type of meeting was preparatory to, and centred in, the observance of the Lord's Supper. In Corinth, for example, the members of the Christian community assembled in one place and ate a meal which they had provided. From Paul's remarks we infer that such gatherings as this were not always conducted with the decorum he considered necessary. Paul's ideal was a high one, although the Corinthians might not come up to it. The dominant note was thanksgiving, and doubtless this note would appear in the hymns and exhortations which accompanied the meal. The very food they ate and shared was evidence of the bounty of God, and their own fellowship was with the Father as well as with each other. When the meal was finished there followed the celebration of the Lord's Supper, as Paul had enjoined. It is clear that our modern elaborations of the Eucharist are very different from the comparative simplicity of apostolic times, and it is always a salutary exercise to pierce back through all the elaborations and accretions which have come, in the ecclesiastical development, to the homely gatherings of New Testament times. Behind the apostolic observance there is the memory of our Lord's last supper with the disciples. Like the disciples, the early Christians met for a meal, the fellowship around the board finding its holy consummation in fellowship with the Master through the holy symbols.

They who composed those earliest communities must have realized acutely the great difference between Christian meetings for worship and those by which they were surrounded. For the Jewish Christian it was a far remove from the stately and historic Temple to a quiet meeting in some brother's house. For the Gentile Christians there was a great contrast between the little modest Christian gatherings and the elaborate and unseemly rites of the pagan temple. Yet, though they lacked the elaborate and the artistic, there was one thing they possessed. The house of the brother wherein they met might be bare and unadorned, the service itself free and simple; but the experience was rich, and beyond the power of Judaism or paganism to equal; it was the experience of the presence of Christ. This made it worth while. This explains the joy, gladness, and persistent enthusiasm which made those early years times of blessed fellowship.

Chapter IX

THE BEGINNINGS OF ORGANIZATION

So far in our rapid review of the Acts of the Apostles we have seen the messengers of Jesus engaged in their honourable and heroic task of evangelizing the world they knew. We have traced their steps from Jerusalem to Rome, noting their methods, marvelling at their fortitude and endurance, and rejoicing with them as they gathered together for instruction and thanksgiving. We have been living on the high level of ideals and inspiration; we have found the story to be romantic as well as arresting. At first thought it may seem to be a descent to turn from this high level of ideals and inspired impulses to mundane questions of organization; but organization has to be considered if we are to gain a balanced impression of the first ventures of the Christian Church. Religion, to be real, must find practical expression. It must concern itself with the ordinary and the commonplace, and bring down to the level of the plain the great inspiration of the heights. This means that it must operate in a world of problems, those problems which inevitably arise when men and women set about the business of living together.

Individuals in all parts of Asia Minor heard the call of the Gospel and responded to it, but they were not all of the same outlook or temper. Their views did not all harmonize. Even the smallest

community would contain varied types: the eager and the reticent, the dreamer and the practical, the vigorous and the hesitant, the spiritually-minded and the commercial-minded; add to these differences those springing from difference in social standing, and we realize that it was no small problem to organize into harmony the life even of a small group. And when we consider that churches in different areas and with different traditions had to be united into one Church, we can understand that there was a great need for all the skilled statesmanship which Paul had at his command.

Jesus Himself had not created any organization. Part of the genius of the new religion was its freedom; but freedom means a constant challenge, and is enjoyed only at a cost. It is clear from the record that many of the earliest followers did not know how to use their newly found freedom; from this point of view the stories of excess and mistake in the Pauline churches seem quite natural, and, under the circumstances, inevitable. But if the new religion was to win its way in the world it must present an unblemished witness and leave as little room as possible for harmful criticism. It was vitally necessary, therefore, that Christian men should learn how to live together, how to work together in common enterprise, how to realize their oneness with brethren of other churches far from their own. In an age of excitement and mass enthusiasm standards were to be laid down by which the genuine teacher or prophet might be distinguished from the charlatan. It was necessary

to think out ways whereby the youthful convert might be instructed in the things of Christ. It was essential that some clear guidance should be placed at the disposal of the churches, so that they would know how to deal with the wayward brother who brought scandal on the church. All these, and other problems of which they are typical, meant organization. The churches found then, as they have found ever since, that it is one thing to *win* converts and quite another to *keep* them.

We must avoid the impression of any definite and fixed scheme of organization in those early years. The widespread anticipation of Christ's return made the arrangements provisional, and much of the organizing was experimental. The logic of events forced church leaders into this or that method, and amid all the variety of the scattered groups of Christians it was not to be expected that one series of rules would meet all the needs. We are to remember, therefore, that the Church was finding her way into these things, and to allow both for mistakes and for alterations. The gradual development towards an organized Church may be illustrated by reference to the ordering of a local church, to the ministry, and to the relating of the various churches to each other.

In the last chapter we noticed two kinds of meetings in the local church; there was a third, which may be regarded as a " church meeting " for the transaction of the affairs of the community. It is instructive to note that the aim of the church meeting, like the other two, was primarily devo-

tional, but business was transacted. Apparently all the members of the local church had the privilege of taking part in the discussion, women at first as well as men. It is not difficult to surmise what problems the meeting would be called upon to consider. From the Acts we note such important questions as the appointment of the Seven, the sending of relief from Antioch to Jerusalem, the separation of Barnabas and Saul for their special mission. We may include in these activities of the congregational meeting the appointment of officials, the settlement of disputes, the supplying to members of letters of recommendation, arrangements for hospitality, and financial matters. Very important was the exercise of discipline. We can see from the letters of Paul that the need for discipline was not infrequent. Christ had laid down a line of procedure in cases of dispute between members of the community. The parties to the dispute should try to talk the matter over together; if that failed, then in the presence of two or three witnesses; if that did not suffice, then the matter was to be brought to the church (Matthew xviii. 15 *f.*). 1 Corinthians v. 11 forbids the reader to keep company with anyone who bears a Christian name but is "a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner."

It was extremely difficult to maintain the high moral tone of Christ's teaching amid the pagan allurements of the time, but it is not hard to realize how the Church, if she was to maintain her great witness in those days, would have to adopt a strict

attitude in these matters. Probably the discipline of those early days was more stringent than to-day, and finds more of a parallel in the church minute books of seventeenth and eighteenth century Baptists than in the minute books of to-day. If we take together the three meetings of the local church we see that " the meeting for thanksgiving represents the centre of spiritual repose, the quiet source of active life and service; the meeting for edification, the enthusiastic, eager, aggressive side of the life and work; and the business meeting the deliberative and practical action of men who recognize that they are in the world though not of it."[1] Of the three meetings it may be said that the spirit of the first two should operate in the third if the third is to be worthy of its place in the church. The leaders appear to have recognized this, and one of the most significant points in the story of Acts is that two of the leaders, Stephen and Philip, who were among those appointed to serve tables, gained prominence by their evangelism.

We pass to the question of the ministry in the Apostolic Church, and obviously the starting-point is the choice, by Jesus, of the Twelve. He chose them that they might be His companions, watch Him at work, gain an insight into His teaching, and so form the beginning of an expansive movement when His earthly ministry was over. It did not follow inevitably that the disciples who had companied with the Lord would take leadership in the primitive church—the new conditions might call

[1] Lindsay, " The Church and the Ministry," p. 58.

forth others, as they called forth Paul—but the very fact of their association with the Master would predispose them for leadership, and their authority would naturally be high. Quite early in Acts we see the infant church taking steps to organize its leadership. Acts vi. records the appointment of the Seven to relieve the apostles of the management of such matters as the administration of relief. There is the suggestion here of a division of ministry: (*a*) that of teaching and preaching; (*b*) that of administration. But we are probably not to stress the division too much, for the prophetic ministry, though not limited to a local church, would include men of organizing ability, and among the local office-bearers there were those who possessed the prophetic gift. Paul gives various lists of those who serve the church: apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues (1 Corinthians xii. 28); there are references to the varied ministries also in Romans xii. 6 *f.*; Ephesians iv. 11—and these lists do not exactly coincide. The specific function of all these enumerated is difficult to discover; more important, however, is the fact, of which we are certain, that every type of ministry depended on spiritual gifts. Anyone who possessed a special gift was at liberty to use it, the church, of course, being at liberty to test the gift as it was used.

A convenient way of distinguishing between the two main types of ministry in the Apostolic Church is to regard the "prophetic" ministry (including apostles, prophets, and teachers) as a ministry to

the whole Church, and the administrative ministry (pastors, elders, bishops, deacons) as the ministry of the local church, always bearing in mind the point already mentioned that the line between the two types was not a hard and fast one. The prophetic ministry included the threefold division of apostle, prophet, teacher. "It does not seem possible to make a very strict or mechanical division between the kinds of 'Word of God' spoken by each class of men, but it may be said that what was needed for zealous missionary endeavour was the distinguishing characteristic of the first class, exhortation and admonition of the second, and instruction of the third. In virtue of their personal gifts they were the venerated but not official leaders of every community where they were for the time being to be found, and were worthy not only of honour but of honorarium (1 Corinthians ix. 13, 14; Galatians vi. 6)."[1]

This threefold ministry of the Word can be traced from the most primitive times down to the end of the second century, if not later. An apostle was one who had given himself for life to be a missionary of the Kingdom. Jesus called the Twelve apostles (Mark iii. 13 *f.*). Matthias was elected to fill the place of Judas (Acts 1. 25). Paul was in a class by himself. Others were chosen by the churches to be their apostles, such as Barnabas. Andronicus, Junias, Silvanus, Timothy, Epaphroditus, are all called apostles. These men were the pioneers, called for a life work: they were aggressive mission-

[1] Lindsay, p. 73.

aries. The work they did opened the way for teachers and prophets. " The new revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the new way of approach to the Infinite Father, manifested in the appearance of the Son, had created for the primitive Christians a new life and had illumined them with a new light. It gave them a new insight. . . . There arose in the midst of the primitive Christian societies men specially filled with all this wealth of insight, and inspired or gifted to disclose to their fellows the Divine counsels and the hidden mysteries of the faith. These were the prophets."[1] The third group, teachers, had an important sphere in the church. They took part in the service for edification, after the praise, and went from church to church teaching and preaching the things of the Kingdom.

It will be apparent that there is no absolute line of division between these three types in the prophetic ministry: it is more correct to speak of a " function " than of an " office ": the apostle, or wandering missionary, would often be all three. This type of ministry did not persist very far into the development of the Church, for by the second century the local administration of the churches had begun to assume greater power. But while it lasted, in the apostolic and sub-apostolic periods, it occupied a position of dominance and control.

In regard to the ministry of the local Christian communities, the second main branch of ministry, the evidence suggests that there was a growth from looser to more compact forms of organization.

[1] Lindsay, p. 93.

Since the local churches were in different areas, and surrounded by social orders of various types, it was natural that different kinds of local organization should arise in the primitive churches. The appointment of the Seven, about A.D. 34, to administer the charity of the church, is the earliest instance we have of local organization. A little later we learn that Barnabas and Saul took money collected among the churches to the Jerusalem church, and placed it in the hands of elders and presbyters (Acts xi.). It has been suggested that these elders were identical with the Seven already mentioned. Acts also records that when Paul and Barnabas left Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium, they "appointed for them elders in every church" (xiv. 23). In the Pauline churches we find men elected to leadership—perhaps the first converts, or men whose houses were at the disposal of the community. In the Epistles to the Romans and Thessalonians these men are called "those who are over you in the Lord." In Philippians i. 1 we read of "bishops and deacons," and as this is probably Paul's latest epistle we infer that towards this time the organization of the local church was becoming more definite. The bishops have usually been identified with the elders, as the terms seem to be used interchangeably (as in 1 Timothy iii. 1-7, v. 17-19). The Philippians passage refers to bishops in the plural, and we are probably to think of the bishop, not in the sense he acquired later, but as an office-bearer who, with the deacon, formed the two orders in the local church towards the close

of the apostolic period. The idea of the bishop in the later sense of the monarchical episcopate does not emerge until the time of Ignatius (*c.* A.D. 115). For the details of this very involved and difficult question, the reader may be referred to such studies as Lindsay ("The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries"), and Lightfoot ("The Christian Ministry," in his commentary on Philippians). Here, in this rapid survey, all we are concerned to point out is the gradual and fluid nature of the organization, and the fact that spiritual qualifications tended to find their way to leadership and authority. From the variety in apostolic forms, we may well infer that in missionary enterprise it is a wise proceeding to make organizations flexible and adaptable to local conditions. It is the spirit that matters: the form is subsidiary.

One further point in regard to organization remains to be considered. We have already noted that one of the marks of the New Testament Church was its unity. Most of the occurrences of the word "church" denote a local society varying in extent "from all the Christian congregations within a province of the Empire to a small assembly of Christians meeting together in the house of one of the brethren." And although Paul uses the word only twice in its universal sense, indications abound that he thought of all the scattered communities as bound together in one great Church. It was not easy to make this a practical accomplishment. The gulfs were numerous and hard to bridge. Think of the sectionalism which was almost inevitable

from geographical reasons: what unity could two churches enjoy when they were at extreme ends of the Empire? How difficult to link together cultivated Greeks and illiterate slaves. There were, indeed, serious dissensions within the same church. Jerusalem had a strict and a broader party, while Corinth had rival claimants for leadership. What kinship could there be between narrow Jerusalem and cosmopolitan Antioch? These were the difficulties in the way of the realization of unity, and Paul did not hesitate to meet them. The Corinthian divisions, he said, arose from a lack of belief in essential Christian unity. As far as he was concerned, he had only one message for all alike, and he never ceased to urge that the local churches ought to show their sympathy with each other.

He preached the ideal of unity, not indeed after the manner of some who followed him, a unity of external organization and form. He did not lay down any one form of polity for the local communities, but, regarding them as independent autonomous societies, laid stress on the underlying spiritual principle of unity. The local societies were to be one in fellowship. How earnestly he strove to foster in the Gentile churches a love for the mother-church in Jerusalem! He always showed respect for the leaders there—after all, they had been Christians before him—and was ever anxious to provide for their needs. The great collection for the saints in Jerusalem illustrates this. It was a careful attempt to unite very different communities in a common effort of goodwill. Note how it was organized.

The groups of churches who contributed sent delegates, all of whom joined Paul at one place or another and accompanied him to Jerusalem with their gift. Note how his letters contain greetings from one church to another. His own journeys helped to maintain the links between the communities. His organizing genius saw the value of grouping churches round important centres like Corinth, Ephesus, and Thessalonica.

These practical measures were the expression of his great ideal. It is in the Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians that he rises to the great height of the ideal, and both of them date from his Roman captivity. May we not see something significant in this? Luke, in the narrative of Acts, brings the apostle to Rome: there in captivity he sends out to the world his ideal of the one Church. If Luke will have us leave the apostle in Rome, we are content to leave him in possession of this great truth.

It is the essential missionary truth; let the Ephesian epistle declare the message: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. . . . For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone. In whom the whole building fitly framed together

groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." No more strangers and foreigners—but comrades all: Indian and Chinese, African from Nile or Congo, Eastern and Western—comrades all.

The mind of the apostle pierced beneath colour of skin, variety of social rank, tradition and caste. All are one in Christ Jesus. Paul rejoiced in that unified empire symbolized by the Roman eagle: he rejoiced still more in the empire of the redeemed, a world-wide empire of the soldiers of the Cross.

Chapter X

THE FIRST CENTURY AND THE TWENTIETH

MUCH has happened in the Christian Church since the romantic days we have been considering. Almost every century can tell an interesting story of Christian adventure, and perhaps the very fact that the Christian movement is by now so familiar has tended to lessen our sense of urgency and rob the enterprise of some of its glamour. " Of course it was very different in the first century," we hear it said: " the conditions were different, the world smaller, and enlightenment much less diffused than it is to-day." Consequently, the modern reader of the New Testament may regard the story of the Acts of the Apostles as interesting historically, but no more. He may fail to realize that it has a meaning for to-day, that the challenge is just as insistent and the need just as great as in the earlier day. The survey we have undertaken in the preceding chapters will have failed of its purpose if it has not suggested the world-wide challenge as the vital concern of every generation.

There is always a value for the Christian man in an inquiry into the beginnings. If there is nothing else there is a sentimental value, and sentiment is not to be despised. The late Professor Peake, during a visit to Palestine, jocularly remarked that he

must go to Anathoth, for when he met Jeremiah on the Other Side he would like to be able to say that he had visited his home village! Anathoth has a sentimental value—because of Jeremiah. So the Upper Room, the streets of the Holy City, the teeming life of Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, all have a value by reason of their associations. For the Christian there will always be something sacred about these early scenes of apostolic activity. Far better, if it were possible, to venerate the ship in which Paul sailed to Rome than many a modern battleship; and were the hired lodging wherein he dwelt preserved to us, would that not be worthy of the pilgrim's veneration? Sentiment?—admittedly, but there is something ennobling even in the outward associations of great enterprises.

There is much more, of course. We are helped to pierce through the accretions of centuries, and to see the movement in being before it has become over-elaborated. The stream is purer at its source. There is enlightenment also, and much to be learned of simple, though effective, methods. And there is encouragement: who fails to be thrilled as he notes the triumphant progress of the first Christian evangelists?

The value of any inquiry such as we have been conducting is to be estimated by its reaction upon ourselves. If, when we read the speech of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, or of Stephen before the hostile crowd, or of Paul on Mars' Hill, we feel within us the urge to stand up and tell our generation the great message, the historic events of that

remote period have ceased to be mere history. They have become part of our life; they have entered into the sphere of ageless inspirations. So the past becomes part of the present and the evangelists of the first century our friends and comrades in the twentieth.

What is the reaction of the Acts of the Apostles upon our modern mind? Doubtless some things in method and organization will not capture us. But it is not essential that they should. As we have seen, the apostolic age had much variety and fluidity in its methods. As Canon Streeter points out,[1] there existed at the end of the first century in the different provinces of the Roman Empire very different systems, and the various modern forms of Church organization can, without difficulty, discover elements which suggest their own special type. We may be grateful that in the beginning there was an adaptability, a superiority of spirit over form, and that the genius of the Christian faith does leave such matters as forms and orders to the special circumstances of any particular period. Only thus can the true spiritual oneness of the Church, through all her multiform expressions, be preserved. We are at liberty, if we wish, to try one form in India, another in China, another on the Congo, according to the special needs and responsiveness of the district.

But if there is no imperative necessity to maintain or recover this or that form, there is a prime necessity to penetrate through the apostolic forms that we may learn their spiritual inspiration. It was a

[1] " The Primitive Church," p. ix.

Way of Life that conquered paganism in the early days, and there is still, if not exactly a paganism, yet a secularism, waiting to be conquered to-day. What Basil Mathews calls the " monstrous hydra-headed menace of materialism " is the enemy common to all religion to-day. " All over the world millions are drifting not only from Christianity, but from Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and Animism. They are shedding what faith they have had and are finding nothing in its place."[1] This was the challenge that confronted the Jerusalem Conference of 1928, and it is confronting the whole Church of Christ today. In face of this the study of the Acts of the Apostles cannot fail to make its suggestions for our modern situation.

A pressing need in this age is the re-discovery and interpretation of the Mind of Christ. Could we have asked the apostles why they were doing what they were doing, we should have heard the answer, " This is what Jesus means us to do, and we cannot help it." They did not at the beginning realize what was His Mind in all its noble breadth, but it was their perception of His purpose that sent them on. When at last they fully realized His message, it was a tremendous discovery, and came to them with the thrill which it still brings, for example, to converts on the mission field.

We are not necessarily called upon to express that Mind in the same terms. There were elements in the apostolic environment, such as the widespread belief in demons, which may, or may not,

[1] " Roads to the City of God," p. 34.

be present to-day. In a typical Western environment it will not be present; in some mission fields it abounds. But we have factors in our modern situation which were unknown in the primitive Church, factors both in national and international life. We may be sure that the Message which was adequate in the Roman Empire is adequate for any human situation. We have not to make the Message. It is there, the gift of God to the world; but we have to understand it and to express it in terms which meet the modern need.

The Christian Church of to-day is faced with a variety of problems which never appeared on the apostolic horizon, industrial, international, and religious (in the sense of the relation of the Christian message to the claims of non-Christian faiths far superior to the cults of first-century paganism). Evangelism means facing these problems with an open and eager mind, bringing the central message of the Christian religion to bear on them. To quote from the message framed by a group in the Jerusalem Conference: "Our true and compelling motive lies in the very nature of the God to whom we have given our hearts. Since He is love, His very nature is to share. Christ is the expression in time of the eternal self-giving of the Father. Coming into fellowship with Christ we find in ourselves an overmastering impulse to share Him with others. We are constrained by the love of Christ and by obedience to His last command. He has become life to us. We would share that life. We are assured that Christ comes to men, to societies, and

to nations. We believe that in Him the shackles of moral evil and guilt are broken from human personality, and that men are made free. . . . Since Christ is the motive, the end of Christian missions fits in with that motive. Its end is nothing less than the production of Christ-like character, in individuals and societies and nations, through faith in and fellowship with Christ the living Saviour, and through corporate sharing of life in a Divine society."

A further need of our day is the recovery of the apostolic consecration. A complacent Christian ought to be unknown in the Church. Casual service yields little. The service that extends the Kingdom may be quietly rendered, may, indeed, lack all publicity, finding its strength in private intercession, or it may be vigorous on the battle front; but quiet or vigorous, if it is to be truly Christian it will be consecrated. There will be no holding back. There are those on the foreign field; there are those at home; but in the love of God the field is one, and the work one. There are no geographical separations in the Eternal plan of Redemption. So the whole Church is to bend every effort to the task, and it is to be counted an honour even to be in the great ranks of the unnoticed if only the work be the work of Christ. It is a matter of consecration, and the inner side of consecration is prayer. In this connection it is worth noticing that the Jerusalem Conference issued a great call to the churches everywhere to prayer. Perhaps that such a call should be necessary at all is signifi-

cant, and indicates that we are very far from the apostolic practice. Prayer, it is urged, should be for a missionary spirit, for a spirit of prayer, for a spirit of sacrifice, for a spirit of unity, for the gift of interpretation, for courageous witness in moral questions, for a spirit of service, for the completion of our own conversion—*i.e.*, the removal of all hindrances in our own lives to the manifestation of God's redeeming love and power.[1]

Basil Mathews, in the same context, pictures the members of the Jerusalem Conference of 1928 going back to their work—to primitive African villages, to the chaos and confusion of China, to the confused cross-currents of India's life, to the modern "Babylons of the West," Berlin and Paris, London and New York, Rio and Sydney, Cape Town and Toronto, and all the vivid conquering materialist civilization for which they stand, going back with "a new and clearer picture of the nature of the hostile forces in the world, a fresh alignment of battle that will inspire effort and instruct strategy." It is a great picture. Few were privileged to attend that memorable meeting of the International Missionary Council on the Mount of Olives; but it is possible for all, with a copy of the New Testament in their hands, to make a journey back to the Holy Land to witness once again the first heroic enterprise of the apostolic band. And all can return to their normal sphere, in church and school and busy world, determined to carry forward that great work so greatly begun.

[1] "Roads to the City of God," p. 109.

The First Century and the Twentieth

The Acts of the Apostles, as we have noted, comes to an abrupt termination. Luke does not complete the story. The completion was left for other ages, in the power of the same Spirit, motived by the same great Love. Indeed, there cannot be any completion until at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.

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