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PAUL'S COLLECTION AND THE BOOK OF ACTS

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IN the monumental work on *The Beginnings of Christianity*, now appearing under the editorship of Professor Lake and Professor Foakes-Jackson, on page 306 of the first volume, which appeared in 1920 in the form of partial prolegomena to the Book of Acts, we read this statement: "It is not surprising that the same book [the Book of Acts is meant] which in its early chapters relates the remarkable lack of poverty among the Christians, has in the end to describe the generous help sent by the Gentile churches to the poor brethren." The writer here is evidently Professor Lake, since the sentence is found word for word, in the same context, in his Haskell Lectures for 1919 (*Landmarks in the History of Early Christianity*, 1920, p. 46), in the preface to which he says, "I did not hesitate to make use of one or two paragraphs from the larger work." Homer is perhaps never more truly Homer than when he nods. The Book of Acts is nowhere more remarkable than in the fact that this "description of the generous help sent by the Gentile churches to the poor brethren" is precisely what it does *not* contain. This obvious and astounding fact obtrudes itself, in juvenile parlance, "like a sore thumb." In a very real sense, it represents *the* problem of the book. What lay in the back of Professor Lake's mind, undoubtedly, was a phrase of nine words in Acts 24:17: *ἐλεημοσύνας ποιῶσων εἰς τὸ ἔθνος μου παρεγνόμην καὶ προσφορὰς*, "I arrived [in Jerusalem] to render alms to my nation and offerings." This phrase, occurring in Paul's speech at Caesarea before Felix, is taken by practically all commen-

tators as containing, in the single word "alms" (not, as most agree, in the second word "offerings" as well), an allusion to the great Gentile collection for the Jerusalem church. Many commentators add further the truism that it is the only such allusion found in the whole work. So far, then, from a description of generous help sent by the Gentile brethren to the poor Christians in Judaea, we have, at best, a single brief allusion (in reality a single word), not in the course of the Acts-narrative but in a speech of Paul, to alms brought to the Jewish nation, without a hint that the gift came from the Gentile churches or that it was brought to the Christian brethren. The real basis for Professor Lake's statement, of course, is not "the same book" at all, but quite other "books," the Pauline letters, material from which is read into the word "alms" in the passage cited. Perhaps correctly so, as most commentators think. Whether certainly, or even probably, so, we may ask a little later.

But assuming, for the present, with Lake and the consensus of the commentators, that the word "alms" in Acts 24 17 does mean the Collection, we have yet, as said above, an astounding phenomenon. Paul is very distinctly the more important of the two apostles whose Acts are chronicled (with subordinate mention of a few others) by the annalist tradition calls Luke¹. Much more than half the whole work is concerned exclusively with him as the propagator of the gospel. And especially is the interest in his personal fortunes, apart from the spread of the Gospel itself, marked in that part of Acts we are considering. With chapter 20, verse 3, Paul's third and last missionary journey is ended and he starts on that fatal trip to Jerusalem. The succeeding narrative, covering his journeyings, arrest, trials and arrival at Rome, occupies almost one-third of the whole work, being depicted with a wealth of detail which has no parallel in the New Testament, and few, if any, parallels in ancient literature anywhere. We are told the names of his travelling-companions on the trip from Corinth to Jerusalem, the successive stops and the length of time consumed by each

¹ The present writer regards the author of Acts as clearly another than the writer of the "We-source," who may well be the doctor Luke.

run; the course of the vessel is precisely plotted. Moreover, it is related that Paul was hastening to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by a given date; repeatedly it is said that he was warned at practically every stop that the journey was madness, that he was putting his head into the lion's mouth, that bonds and affliction awaited him in the holy city, despite all which Paul with noble firmness refused to turn back, but, like his Master before him, set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. And yet there is no statement anywhere, indeed (with one exception, to be pointed out later) there is not even a hint to suggest why he was going to Jerusalem at all².

The whole matter begins in Acts 19 21. Being at Ephesus, "Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome." But why did he plan thus to go to Jerusalem? We know, because we have read his letters; he repeatedly, in such specific passages as I Cor. 16 3f., Rom 15 25, states that his one reason for going at all on such an arduous journey, at the sacrifice of other plans and at the risk of his life, was to take the collection. But the author of Acts here betrays no acquaintance with this or any other motive. Only in a much later speech of Paul, after his arrest, is there thought to be, in the single word "alms," an obscure allusion hinting at his purpose. Paley, as is well known, takes this as the first of those "undesigned coincidences" between Acts and the letters, of which he treats. He does well, for such measure of coincidence as exists is certainly undesigned. It may be noted that the statement of the journey's beginning (20 3) has simply "set sail for Syria," not till the travellers reach Miletus (20 16) is Jerusalem named as their goal. The reader may be supposed to have still in mind the statement of 19 21. But *why* is Paul so hastening that he "determined to sail past Ephesus, that he might not have to spend time in Asia" bidding a last farewell to his closest friends? *Why* must he reach Jerusalem

² This omission of the collection as a motive for the journey is all the more striking when we recall the writer's very keen interest, as evidenced by the third Gospel, and by other sections in Acts, in almsgiving and every similar activity of "social service."

by Pentecost?³ Why does he insist on going on, in the face of repeated warnings from the Holy Spirit, like an earlier Luther going to Worms? And every-where our only reply is echo's answer, Why? We are given strongly the feeling that the journey was tremendously urgent, but no explanation of its purpose. On the arrival of the party in Jerusalem nothing happens that can clear up our perplexity in the slightest. All this haste, this daring of death itself to reach the goal and accomplish some sworn and necessary act—all this eventuates in nothing. "And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James, and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them he rehearsed one by one the things which God had wrought among the Gentiles through his ministry. And they, when they heard it, glorified God." O lame and impotent conclusion! This is surely not what Paul had taken his life in his hands for, to make this report of the third missionary journey to the Jerusalem Elders! This is only a conventionalized Lucan *cliché*, repeated from earlier contexts like 14 27; 15 3f. Here was the place, if the narrator knew what secret insistent errand drew Paul into deadly peril, to reveal it. There is no word of explanation. Why, oh why? Did Paul hand over the collection? So we, fresh from the letters, ask. Was it acceptable to the saints and received with grateful appreciation? These are major mysteries. Professor Bacon well comments (*The Story of St. Paul*, 1904, p. 192). "Did the Jerusalem church accept the gift? The question may be propounded as a Bible-class puzzle of the first grade: What became of the money Paul took to Jerusalem?" Some scholars have argued that the source here followed told of the collection and its reception, but the author of Acts, for reasons of his own, has suppressed all

³ Incidentally, does he do so? Renan (*St. Paul*, chapter 19, first sentence, with note 1) counts the days, and decides that Paul, despite his best efforts, arrived a few days too late for the feast. Ramsay (*St. Paul the Traveller etc.*, 1896, chapter 18), with his detailed reckoning as to days and even hours, is wise above what is written, but he apparently thinks Paul left Caesarea in time to reach Jerusalem for the feast. The author of Acts, less minutely informed, does not say, nor can we.

this. Well and good; the "we-writer" must have known why he and his colleagues were being hastened eastward at such a rate. The collection was no secret! But what plausible "reasons of his own" can have caused the suppression on the part of the author of Acts? He has thereby made his whole story unintelligible. The magnificent tragedy of Paul's arrest at Jerusalem while on *just this errand* of peace and good-will, the whole romantic story, told with so much sympathy and vividness of appealing detail, is crippled by the omission of the one fact that would explain it all, the key to the whole situation, dramatically and humanly. That all commentators and readers of Acts have not felt this and voiced their pained amazement, is due simply to the fact that over the page, bound up with Acts, were the letters of Paul, which supplied the missing *datum* by an undesignated coincidence; inevitably all the material of the letters was imported into the Acts to make the story clear. A reader who had read *only* Acts would soon let us hear from him. It is more than doubtful whether the rather awkward and obscure phrasing (if the collection is meant) in Paul's later speech (24 17) would be understood by such a reader as in any sense filling the gap. The purpose of the journey should have been given in 19 21, with the original definite statement that Paul purposed to go to Jerusalem. If not there, then at least in the notice of what he did when he got there. If all that detailed account of the tragic journey itself is given without betraying the slightest knowledge of its purpose, is it not rather unlikely that the author knew perfectly well this purpose all the time, and refers to it in a single phrase in a later speech of Paul? Is not complete absence of the collection really more understandable than the one isolated, brief and obscure reference?

In other words, does Acts 24 17 refer to the collection at all? No commentator has, to the present writer's knowledge, hitherto doubted it. Loisy has come nearest to such doubt. He supposes that the source spoke of the collection as the motive for the voyage, which motive the redactor, for particular reasons, generally suppressed. Here, however, he decided to let pass a slight allusion to it, disguising it as "alms for the Jews." "Indeed," adds Loisy, "the reader is almost bidden suppose that the 'alms'

amount simply to the money which Paul spent for the sacrifice of the four Nazirites (21 23, 26)." It does indeed seem so. Whether, as Loisy supposes, the author of Acts is deliberately suppressing information in his possession, or whether he is honestly ignorant of the collection as the motive for Paul's visit, he seems clearly to have in mind here only such gifts and offerings by Paul as were related to *Judaism as such* (not specifically to *Christian Jews*) and were connected somehow with a service in the temple. In short, 24 17 is in exact agreement with 21 23-26, which relates how Paul, upon his arrival at Jerusalem, expended, at the suggestion of James and the elders to whom he had reported, certain sums of money for offerings in the temple in connection with four men who had a vow. This is really the carrying out of what he had come to do, as Acts conceives it. He had brought an offering of money, to present to his people at the feast-time, as pilgrims from the Diaspora were wont to do⁴. It was really to bring this offering as an act of piety toward his ancestral religion, that he had made the great journey. This is said in so many words in a passage whose decisive value in the present discussion has been strangely overlooked by commentators. In that same speech before Felix in Acts 24, Paul makes an earlier statement of the reason for his coming up to Jerusalem than the one we have been discussing. This first statement (vs. 11) is perfectly clear and definite: "I came up to worship" (*ἀνέβην προσκυνήσων*), that is, to participate in some rite of the Jewish religion. The statement is absolute and inclusive; no other purpose is hinted at. This act of worship finds some explication in succeeding verses. It naturally took Paul into the temple (vs. 12), where the trouble began. Verse 17 is only a harking back ("as I was saying") to verse 11, and repeating in slightly fuller form, what was there stated; note how verse 18 similarly repeats verse 12. Verse 19, which corresponds to verse 13, has less similarity of phrasing; with this verse Paul, now "caught up" after the digression of

⁴ Of the Deuteronomic (16 19) legislation for Pentecost: "Thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto Yahwè thy God with a tribute of a free-will offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give according as Yahwè thy God hath blessed thee."

verses 14-16, resumes the main current of his speech. His equivalence of verse 17 to verse 11 is curiously close:

ἀνέβην — παρεγενόμην

προσκυήσων — ποιήσων ἐλεημοσύνας καὶ προσφορὰς.

The verb forms are exactly retained. The two second aorist indicatives are synonymous here, and the future participles are precisely equivalent. The general word "worship" is resolved into the particular acts of piety which Paul had performed—pious activities in the temple, in the midst of which, ceremonially purified as he was, he was apprehended and the riot began. Thus 24 11 explains both 24 17 and 21 23-26, and makes the whole episode clear, as *Acts understands it*.

We can now understand that single earlier hint (if hint it may be called) in Acts as to Paul's purpose in coming to the holy city. It is in the words (20 16), "He was hastening, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost." That surely suggests that in the author's mind Paul was going on some religious errand, to be present at the celebration of a sacred feast. Now this particular sacred feast, Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, was a feast of offerings and presentations, when the first-fruits and voluntary thank-offerings were brought unto the Lord, when pilgrims came from all parts of the Diaspora with their pious contributions. The Ephesian Jews, who had seen Paul and Trophimus in Asia, and now see them again in Jerusalem (21 29), are such Pentecost pilgrims. Paul is another; his presence with offerings in the city at this festival will be a signal demonstration to the many thousands of believing Jews who have been informed concerning him that he is teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk after the ancestral customs, that this is without foundation. All shall know that there is no truth in the things of which they have been informed concerning him, but that he himself also walks orderly, keeping the law (Acts 21 20f., 24). The "many myriads" of Jewish disciples must have special reference to the numerous visiting pilgrims⁶.

⁶ A. H. Mc Neile: *St. Paul*, 1920, p. 91. "Probably . . . he wished the crowd of Jewish Christians who would come up to the city to realize that he was one who loyally observed the Jewish festival."

Arrived in the city, after his long absence (24 17), Paul asks himself and others how he shall make his offering so as best to attain his object. James and the elders have an answer. "Just do what we tell you" (τοῦτο οὖν ποιήσον ὃ σοι λέγομεν). Here are certain men under a vow; "spend your money on them" (δαπάνησον has for its implied object the money Paul has brought) and defray ὑπὲρ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου αὐτῶν the expense of the προσφορά (vs. 26). This is how the author of Acts conceives Paul's monetary gift, how he thinks it was received, what he thinks became of it. It was brought as a religious offering, so accepted and so presented, in the temple, in religious rites. Acts thus offers a perfectly clear and consistent picture throughout, from 20 18 to 24 17. To be sure, it is not a historic picture. Paul's letters show us that this whole construction is in error; it is none the less a perfectly coherent and possible picture, and it is what the author of Acts believed to be true, on the basis of such *data* as were in his possession. It goes together with his whole picture of Paul, through which runs one fatal misconception. The subject cannot be pursued here, but we may recall 18 18, "having shorn his head in Cenchreae, for he had a vow" and the "western" reading in 18 21, δεῖ με πάντως τὴν ἑορτὴν τὴν ἐρχομένην ποιῆσαι εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, which may possibly be the true reading. With these passages in mind, we shall not find it difficult to read a festal purpose into 19 21 and into the "setting sail for Syria" of 20 3 as into the "sailing for Syria" of 18 18. Then the departure from Philippi "after the days of unleavened bread" (20 ε) is quite in order, and all the rest follows as a matter of course.

To go back briefly to 24 17. Something perhaps depends on the gender of the relative with which verse 18 begins. The feminine ἐν αἷς is somewhat better attested, and is adopted by Tischendorf, Westcott-Hort, von Soden, Weiss, Wendt and most others. The neuter ἐν αἷς of the *Receptus* is, however, favored by some modern commentators. On the whole the neuter is the more likely to have been altered; it is preceded by two feminine nouns, one of which stands next to it and in the minds of most readers would be its most natural and obvious antecedent. An original feminine ἐν αἷς would offer no special temptation to correction. It must be observed that, though they are separated in the text, ἐλεημοσύνας

and *προσφοράς* are common coördinate objects of *πρόσω* connected by *καί*. Thus associated, they go together in the author's mind; the following relative, whether feminine or neuter, refers to *both*, and the whole thing, alms and offerings together, forms a single gift to Paul's nation. We cannot, as many would, separate the two objects, keeping *ελεημοσύνας* for the collection, and *προσφοράς* for some offerings of Paul's own in the temple⁶. The whole activity of verse 17, the presentation of alms and the presentation of offerings⁷, is included in the ceremonial performances in the temple which led to the attack on Paul and his subsequent arrest.

Let us recapitulate. It was suggested to the author of Acts, either by tradition or by some misunderstood reference in his source, that on this journey to Jerusalem Paul had brought an offering of money. Knowing nothing of the Collection, he knows nothing further about the origin, purpose or ultimate use of this sum of money. But believing that Paul was coming to Jerusalem to keep the feast of Pentecost (it may well be that Paul saw a peculiar appropriateness in presenting the collection to the Jewish brethren just at this significant time; the Pentecost reference [20 16] is in the "we-source") and to show himself thereby to be no apostate, he supposes that the money would be the usual "alms and offerings" made by Jewish pilgrims to the feasts, in the temple, "to the nation." He therefore so describes it, so far as he describes it at all. Knowing little of it, he says little, and with the account of how Paul spent it (21 26) he is through with it, save for the one backward reference in 24 17. The "alms" of the latter verse, therefore, have nothing whatever to do with the Collection for the saints in Judea, and there vanishes from Acts the one infinitesimal basis for attributing to that work a "description of the generous help sent by the Gentile churches to the poor brethren."⁸

⁶ So, *inter alios*, Hort: *Judaistic Christianity*, 1894, pp. 109f. Cf. also Maurice Jones: *St. Paul the Orator*, 1910, p. 210.

⁷ Could the use of the two words "alms" and "offerings" possibly be due to the reflection that Paul was bearing the expense of the rite for the four others, and also engaging in the rite himself?

⁸ Cf. M^e Giffert: *Apostolic Age*, 1900, p. 351, note 5. "It looks as if Luke, knowing nothing about the collection, interpreted a reference to

Was the author of Acts entirely ignorant, then, of the great Collection? To all intents and purposes he apparently was. He had not read Paul's letters and while the "we-source" in its complete form may well have mentioned the Collection, there are many indications that he did not have access to this document in complete form. (We do not know, indeed, that it ever existed in "complete form"). We have said: to all intents and purposes. It is possible that the dim tradition of Paul bringing money to Jerusalem had reached him also in a version in which the Christians of that city were thought of as recipients. But it is most unlikely, as the above discussion makes clear, that any such notion plays a part in shaping the statement of 24 17. Much more probable is it, as has often been suggested (e. g. by Carl Clemen: *Paulus*, I, 1904, p. 215) that some such tradition, misdated and misconceived, should lie behind the earlier statement of Acts (11 30), certainly unhistorical where it stands, that Paul, with Barnabas, was sent by the Gentile disciples in Antioch to bring a ministration in time of famine to the poor brethren dwelling in Judaea.

it as applying to the offerings made in connection with the vow which Paul had assumed in Jerusalem".