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(Continued.)

IV. CHRISTIAN BENEFICENCE.

When, in the early days of Christianity, Christ crucified was preached in Judea and Samaria and Galilee and to Gentiles in Asia and in Europe, the gospel was chiefly preached to the poor. Not that the gospel had been an esoteric doctrine restricted to an inner circle. No, the gospel was preached to the masses. But the masses were poor in the days of Caligula and Nero. There was wealth in the Roman empire, but it was in the hands of comparatively few, and of these not many entered the ranks led by men who had left all and followed Christ. Some there were, such as the city treasurer of Corinth and the councilman of Athens, and the men and women of honorable estate at Berea. But as has been said before,¹⁾ the masses of the early churches were largely recruited from the lower walks of life, and where they were assembled, the poor had the gospel preached to them. In the writings of the apostles to the churches and their teachers we meet with but few admonitions to the rich, simply because there were but few in these churches to whom such admonitions would apply. St. Paul writes to Timothy: *Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncer-*

1) P. 12 of the present volume.

tain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.¹⁾ For this there was ample opportunity in an age when famines were frequent, when the delay of a merchant fleet from Alexandria might cause bread riots in the cities,²⁾ and a failure of crops, or wars and insurrections would spread destitution through entire provinces, and pestilence would stalk through famine-stricken communities in which hospitals and other institutions of public charity were unknown. In Jerusalem and throughout Palestine, and in the Jewish colonies of Rome and other Gentile cities, to join the sect of the Nazarenes would bring upon the apostate his father's curse, loss of occupation, the life of an outcast. Among the police regulations of Nero there was one which placed the Christians in a line with other dangerous elements of society,³⁾ and after the great conflagration of 64, a "*multitudo ingens*" of them were publicly executed as *odio humani generis convicti*.⁴⁾ Among the Jews they were "the sect that was everywhere spoken against,"⁵⁾ and among the Gentiles they were "spoken against as evildoers;"⁶⁾ they were "reproached for the name of Christ,"⁷⁾ and they were made to "suffer as Christians,"⁸⁾ suffer what murderers and thieves were made to suffer, the death of malefactors,⁹⁾ not only in Rome, but throughout the world,¹⁰⁾ where ever and when ever those who were in power and authority were so inclined. It was but reasonable that people thus stigmatized the world over should find but cold comfort at the hands of their fellowmen when mercy was looked upon as despicable weakness rather than a creditable virtue among men and women alike. Who would keep the wolf from a Christian's door when ten thousand women would *pollice verso* demand a gladiator's death

1) 1 Tim. 6, 17. 18.

2) Tacit. Ann., III, 54.

3) Suetonii Nero, cap. 16 sq.

4) Taciti Ann. XV, 44.

5) Acts 28, 22.

6) 1 Pet. 2, 12; 3, 16.

7) 1 Pet. 4, 14.

8) 1 Pet. 4, 16.

9) 1 Pet. 4, 15.

10) 1 Pet. 5, 9.

on the blood-drenched sand of the arena, or when the torches of Nero, blazing Christians, would delight the hearts of Roman ladies?

Who? We can answer this question. They who were admonished: *Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*¹⁾ *To do good and to communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*²⁾

Beneficence was, in the early days of Christianity, viewed and practiced as a virtue common to all Christians of all stations, not only the wealthy, but also those of slender means, who lived from hand to mouth, earning their livelihood by honest toil. The Christian who labored, working with his hands, was led to regard his labor as the means not only of providing his own bread,³⁾ but also of acquiring what he might give to him that needed.⁴⁾ What the Christian possessed, though it was his property, was at the service of his brethren. In this sense the disciples *had all things common.*⁵⁾

This was not communism in the modern sense of the term. Even the primitive church at Jerusalem was not a communistic society. When Ananias and Sapphira had sold a possession and brought part of the proceeds, their offense in withholding a part was not that of theft, of keeping for themselves what belonged to the community, but of falsehood, of lying to the Holy Ghost.⁶⁾ Not only was the real estate before the sale the rightful private property of Ananias, but also the personal property, the money realized by the transfer, was his own, he having the disposal thereof.⁷⁾ Peter was very careful to state this in explicit and unmistakable terms, lest the punishment which was about to come upon the mendacious couple should be misconstrued.

1) Gal. 6, 9. 10. 2) Hebr. 13, 16. 3) 2 Thess. 3, 12. 4) Eph. 4, 29.
5) Acts 2, 44; 4, 32. 6) Acts 5, 1-4. 7) Acts 5, 4.

The circumstances of the primitive church at Jerusalem were peculiar. Within a few days the number of those who professed their faith in Jesus of Nazareth had grown from a hundred and twenty to upwards of five thousand. Many, probably most of these, were in danger of being excommunicated, ostracised, outlawed, reduced to the condition of outcasts, of Pariahs, with whom kinsmen and former friends would refuse to associate. Before long this state of things had actually set in. The wave of popular favor which had at first borne upon its crest such men as Peter and John, the workers of numerous miracles, had soon eddied away, and in its stead a surge of persecution swept over the church and its leaders. When it came, it did not find the church and its members unprepared. Provident brethren, such men as Barnabas, the Levite of Cyprus,¹⁾ and others,²⁾ had not only set an example of cheerful readiness to leave all for Christ's sake, but had also supplied the means wherewith to meet the wants of the brethren as they arose. Thus from the very beginning those who became members of this household of faith were assured, not by promises held out to them, but by present, actual and substantial proof, that here, *whether one member suffered, all the members would suffer with it.*³⁾ It may safely be assumed that during the early days and weeks of the movement the number of those among the disciples who *were possessors of lands or houses*⁴⁾ was small. That one of them, Barnabas, is particularly mentioned does not seem to point to a great multitude, but rather to comparatively few, who, in the first fervor of their discipleship, were so ready to part with their possessions for the benefit of the needy brethren and sisters, who, from the very beginning, probably far outnumbered those generous benefactors. As the number of the disciples was multiplied, that of the needy also increased. Daily ministrations⁵⁾ had become necessary to such an extent that the time and

1) Acts 4, 36 f.

2) Acts 4, 34 f.

3) 1 Cor. 12, 26.

4) Acts 4, 34; cf. 2, 45.

5) Acts 6, 1.

energies of the ministers were no longer sufficient to the task.¹⁾ The complaint which arose was not, however, of a shortage of means, but of a lack of hands to distribute what was at their disposal. The means had been amply provided by the brethren who had possessed them, so that distribution could be made *unto every man according as he had need,*²⁾ and there was *not any among them that lacked.*³⁾

We are repeatedly told that those who contributed toward these common funds laid their contributions *at the apostles' feet.*⁴⁾ We, furthermore, learn that the distribution of what was thus collected was at first the business of the apostles,⁵⁾ the ministers of the church. And when the apostles found that the satisfactory performance of this duty had begun to exceed their ability, unless they would neglect what was more important than to *serve tables,*⁶⁾ they did not call assistants to their side, but *called the multitude of the disciples,* a meeting of the congregation, and, laying the matter before the church, induced the assembly to act by choosing from among the brethren seven men to whom this part of the work of the ministry might be committed. From all this it appears that this work of Christian beneficence was viewed by all concerned as a business of the church. The benefactors did not organize a Benevolent Society with a President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Executive Committee, of their own. They did not look upon their indigent brethren as their personal beneficiaries living on their bounty. What they gave they gave to the church to be disbursed by the ministers of the church for the benefit of those who were considered beneficiaries of the church; and when complaint was made, because some of these had been neglected, the apostles did not treat the charge as a personal matter, but took it where it belonged, to the congregation. Nor did the congregation refuse or hesitate to act, but the work of Christian beneficence was

1) Acts 6, 1 f.

2) Acts 4, 35.

3) Acts 4, 34.

4) Acts 4, 35. 37; 5, 2.

5) Acts 6, 2 f.

6) Acts 6, 2.

treated as a concern of the church and regulated as the circumstances demanded.

At a later period the same views still prevailed, and when relief was sent from a distance to the brethren in Judea, it was sent *to the elders*¹⁾ of the church *by the hands of Barnabas*, who had himself laid the price of his land at the apostles' feet, *and Saul*, then his fellow minister in the church of Antioch.²⁾ The alms which these delegates bore were also a collection made up of free contributions by the members of a local congregation, but not for the benefit of indigent brethren of their own parish. Christian beneficence was not confined to the narrow limits of the local congregation, but encompassed all those with whom the disciples were united by the bonds of a common faith and hope and brotherly love. In this instance too the brethren manifested that readiness and promptness of the *cheerful giver*.³⁾ No sooner had the famine been predicted by Agabus, than the brethren at Antioch determined to send relief to the stricken brethren in Judea, and no time was lost in carrying into effect what they had agreed to do, *every man according to his ability*.⁴⁾ How long the collection, perhaps by weekly contributions, was in progress, does not appear. But when the dearth was come, in the days of Claudius, probably in the year 46, the church of Antioch was ready to send their delegates with a sum which must have been considerable, since two representatives of the congregation were entrusted with the *δραχμία*⁵⁾ to the brethren dwelling in Judea.

About a decade later we find a collection on a still larger scale in progress throughout nearly the whole Christian church of that time, the churches of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia. This, too, was a work of Christian beneficence, and the beneficiaries were again the needy brethren in Judea. It was probably during a sojourn of

1) Acts 11, 30.

2) Ibid.

3) 2 Cor. 9, 7.

4) Acts 11, 29.

5) Acts 11, 29; 12, 25.

Paul among the churches of Galatia, A. D. 53, that the plan of this great offering was put under way,¹⁾ and the execution of the plan extended through several years. When, in 55, Paul sent his first epistle to Corinth, he wrote to *the church of God which is at Corinth.*²⁾ *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come.*³⁾ From this time on, the great collection figures in all the epistles directed to the churches of Christendom by the apostle of the Gentiles. He praises the *churches of Macedonia, how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality, as to their power, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves.*⁴⁾ Again, to them of Macedonia he boasted that *Achaia was ready a year ago.*⁵⁾ Yet, not feeling quite sure that there might not be some who had delayed their offerings, he sent Titus, who met him at Philippi in the spring of 56, and another assistant, probably Luke, to go before him to Corinth and see to the completion of this work of charity.⁶⁾ In the letter which he sent with the envoys he once more exhorted the brethren to cheerful and bountiful giving.⁷⁾ The importance which he attached to this work further appears from the fact that in the letter which he wrote to the church at Rome briefly before his last departure for Jerusalem he mentions the delivery of the collection as the chief purpose of his perilous expedition, saying, *Now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.*⁸⁾ Yet, while the apostle was at the head of this scheme, thus setting an example to

1) 1 Cor. 16, 1.

2) 1 Cor. 1, 2.

3) 1 Cor. 16, 1. 2.

4) 2 Cor. 8, 1—3.

5) 2 Cor. 9, 2.

6) 2 Cor. 9, 3—5.

7) 2 Cor. 9, 6—15.

8) Rom. 15, 25 f.

the ministry of the churches, he was very careful to have it understood that the collection was properly the work of the churches. To make this all the more conspicuous, especially to lead the beneficiaries to realize to whom their gratitude was due, he caused the appointment of delegates from the various churches to act as their representatives in the final delivery of the collection.¹⁾ Thus Paul was joined by Sopater, of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus, of Thessalonica, Luke, of Philippi, Tychicus and Trophimus, of the Asian churches, and Gaius and Timothy, representing the churches of Galatia.²⁾ The whole delegation met at Troas, from where they set out on Monday, April 25, A. D. 57. They landed at Caesarea about the middle of May, and having spent a number of days with the brethren at that place, arrived at Jerusalem a few days before Pentecost, which fell on the 28th of May. They were received with gladness by the brethren³⁾ to whom they brought a token of the bond of brotherly love which encompassed both Jews and Gentiles united in Christ Jesus.⁴⁾ Thus a work of Christian beneficence, carefully planned and methodically executed,⁵⁾ had come to be the occasion of the first meeting of delegates representing the greater part of the churches of all Christendom within the mother church of New Testament Christianity.

Among the reasons why it was highly appropriate that the churches should be represented in the administration of the collection one should be particularly mentioned. It was this that the contributors were not a number of wealthy or well-to-do Christians, but the rank and file of the congregations. Paul had taken care to engage not only all the churches but all the members of the churches to participate in the work, the wealthy and the poor, each in proportion to his means.⁶⁾ In the church of Corinth there seems to

1) 1 Cor. 16, 3. 2 Cor. 8, 19. 23.

3) Acts 21, 17.

5) 1 Cor. 16, 1—3.

2) Acts 20, 4 f.

4) Acts 21, 19.

6) 2 Cor. 8, 12.

have been a considerable element of freedmen, who were mostly engaged in profitable trade. These the apostle endeavored to stimulate by reminding them that *He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*¹⁾ On the other hand, the poor were not considered exempt from the duty or barred from the privilege of *increasing the fruit of their righteousness,*²⁾ and the apostle, speaking of the churches of Macedonia, says, that *the abundance of their joy and their DEEP POVERTY abounded unto the riches of their liberality; for to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift.*³⁾ It appears that Paul, knowing the circumstances of these poor people, had found occasion rather to subdue than to fan the ardor of their liberality, lest they should unduly deprive their families of necessaries in order to minister to the saints; but they insisted upon being allowed to enjoy the bliss of giving of their want, where others gave of their abundance and needed admonition to do so.⁴⁾ In this as in some other respects the resemblance between the primitive church and that of the twentieth century is remarkable.

Another point of resemblance between then and now is this, that Christian beneficence, as exercised by the church, was likely to be abused by individuals, and that in two ways. There were those who, instead of quietly working and earning their bread, would mind everybody's business but their own, and, being by their own fault continually in want, would be reduced to mendicancy but for the charity of the brethren. Of such the apostle says, *If any would not work, neither should he eat.*⁵⁾ Especially were there young widows who, instead of earning an honest livelihood, would wax wanton on charity, and, idling away their time, would go about gossiping and tattling at other people's expense.⁶⁾

1) 2 Cor. 9, 6; cf. vv. 8—12.

2) 2 Cor. 9, 10.

3) 2 Cor. 8, 1—4.

4) 2 Cor. 8, 7—14.

5) 2 Thess. 3, 10—12.

6) 1 Tim. 5, 13 ff.

Here, too, Paul warns against misplaced charity.¹⁾ Then there were others who, having needy relatives, would shift the burden of providing for them upon the shoulders of the church. Of these the apostle says, *If a widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents.*²⁾ *If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.*³⁾ *If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged.*⁴⁾ Such abuse of charity had the evil effect of a damper upon charity toward its worthy objects. Hence Paul, where he scores those idle busybodies, reminds the brethren that they must not, on their account, *weary in well doing,*⁵⁾ or refuse to *honor widows that are widows indeed.*⁶⁾

On the other hand, the churches of early Christianity differ from many churches of to-day by the total absence of two modern makeshifts for charity, the charity fair and the benevolent society. While pleasures, all manner of entertainments from a game of dice to a naval battle, filled a great part of the lives of rich and poor, and while society was honeycombed with clubs and sodalities for pleasure and mutual aid, especially among the middle and lower classes, throughout the Empire, there is nowhere a vestige of crutches under the arms of Christian beneficence in those early days. There was the pastoral advice and adhortation *by the mercies of God,*⁷⁾ reminding the Christian *of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*⁸⁾ There was the hortatory influence of the example of the brethren brought to the knowledge of those engaged in the same work of sacrificing love. *Your zeal hath provoked very many,* Paul writes to those of Achaia,⁹⁾

1) 1 Tim. 5, 9 ff.

2) 1 Tim. 5, 4.

3) 1 Tim. 5, 8.

4) 1 Tim. 5, 16.

5) 2 Thess. 3, 13.

6) 1 Tim. 5, 3.

7) Rom. 12, 1.

8) 2 Cor. 8, 9.

9) 2 Cor. 9, 2.

and at the same time he reports to them the liberality of the brethren in Macedonia and charges them: *Wherefore shew ye to them and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.*¹⁾ There was also plan and method in the work of charity, the practice of regular contributions²⁾ and of continued cooperation. There was the appointment of special officers for the administration of the collected funds, and this office was considered of no small importance.³⁾ There were also deaconesses,⁴⁾ such as Phebe, *the servant of the church at Cenchrea*, who, in the service of the church, was *a succorer of many*, also of the apostle.⁵⁾ It seems that Gaius, of Corinth, probably a wealthy freedman, was appointed by the congregation to entertain the guests of the church.⁶⁾ So was Phebe recommended to the hospitality of the church at Rome.⁷⁾ Thus was the work of *distributing to the necessity of saints*⁸⁾ considered a duty of every individual Christian, and also practiced as a well-ordered business of the church and of the sisterhood of the churches. It was not viewed as a social function, but as a manifestation of religious life. Hence the propriety of making the day of public worship a day of Christian beneficence as well as of spiritual edification,⁹⁾ and of applying to the collection the term of *προσφορά*, an *offering*, and describing the act of *κοινωνία* as a *sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.*¹⁰⁾

V. CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

The primitive church at Jerusalem is described as τὸ πλῆθος τῶν πιστευόντων, *the multitude of them that believed.*¹¹⁾ Thus also when he wrote to the church of Colosse, Paul

1) 2 Cor. 8, 24.

2) 1 Cor. 16, 2.

3) 1 Tim. 3, 8—13.

4) Plin. Epp. X, 97.: *quae ministrae dicebantur.*

5) Rom. 16, 1 f.

6) Rom. 16, 23.

7) Rom. 16, 2; cf. 12, 13.

8) Rom. 12, 13.

9) 1 Cor. 16, 2.

10) Phil. 4, 15, 18; *vid. supra* pp. 82 sq.

11) Acts 4, 32; cf. 2, 44; 4, 4.

addressed *the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse*;¹⁾ and *the church of God which is at Corinth* was made up of them that were *sanctified in Christ Jesus*.²⁾ The members of the church were simply described as *οἰκεῖοι τῆς πίστεως*, *of the household of faith*.³⁾ But faith was in those days, as it is to-day, in the hearts and minds of men, and *what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?*⁴⁾ Hence, while the Lord knew them that were his,⁵⁾ the church had to take the profession of faith and Christian conduct consistent therewith as the tokens of discipleship, according to the word of the Master, *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed*.⁶⁾ When Simon the sorcerer showed by word and conduct that his heart was not right in the sight of God, he was told that he had *neither part nor lot in this matter*.⁷⁾ The church could not prevent hypocrites from outward communion with the church while they were hypocrites, figuring as Christians while they were unbelievers at heart. But it was only consistent with the general concept of the church and church membership as the fellow citizenship with the saints,⁸⁾ that those whose hypocrisy became manifest, or who openly renounced the unity of faith by word or deed, were, after fruitless admonition, declared outside of the pale of the church. Such was the rule for the government and discipline of the churches. *A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself*, was Paul's instruction to Titus,⁹⁾ and to the church of Corinth the same apostle wrote: *Put away from among yourselves that wicked person*.¹⁰⁾ In his eulogy to the church of Ephesus, the Spirit who says, *I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, continues, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil*.¹¹⁾

1) Col. 1, 2.

2) 1 Cor. 1, 2.

3) Gal. 6, 10.

4) 1 Cor. 2, 11.

5) 2 Tim. 2, 19.

6) John 8, 31.

7) Acts 8, 21.

8) Eph. 2, 19.

9) Tit. 3, 10 f.

10) 1 Cor. 5, 13.

11) Rev. 2, 2.

The terms, *an heretic, that wicked person, them which are evil*, clearly indicate the character of the sins which should bring church discipline upon the sinner. Not sins of weakness. The apostle says, *Him, that is weak in the faith, receive ye;*¹⁾ *comfort the feebleminded; support the weak;*²⁾ *brethren, if a man be overwhelmed in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.*³⁾ But when he says, *that wicked person*, he refers to a man who lived in the sin of incest, having married his father's wife.⁴⁾ And in the preceding context he says, *If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner.*⁵⁾ Here he enumerates *manifest works of the flesh*, of which he says *that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*⁶⁾ Thus it is plain that such sins as would exclude those who persisted in them from the kingdom of God were to expose the sinner to church discipline which must lead either to the sinner's restoration to fraternal recognition subsequent to his earnest repentance, or to his excommunication.

Again, excommunication, by its very nature, presupposes that the object of church discipline must have been, at least outwardly, in communion with the church. The instruction, *Put away from among yourselves*, clearly indicates that the sinner must have been among those who were to put him out of their society. Paul is very explicit on this point. He says, *If any man that is called a BROTHER be a fornicator;*⁷⁾ and in the previous and subsequent context he says, *Not altogether with the fornicators of this world, . . . for what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth.*⁸⁾ Only such as were in professed communion with the church and known to have

1) Rom. 14, 1; cf. Acts 20, 35.

3) Gal. 6, 1.

6) Gal. 5, 19—21.

4) 1 Cor. 5, 1.

7) 1 Cor. 5, 11.

2) 1 Thess. 5, 14.

5) 1 Cor. 5, 11.

8) 1 Cor. 5, 10. 12 f.

fallen into mortal sin were to be subjected to church discipline.

The sin which claimed Paul's attention when he wrote his epistle to the Corinthians was notorious. *"Ὀλως ἀκούεται*, he says, *it is reported commonly.*¹⁾ Three members of the congregation, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus,²⁾ who were probably the bearers of the letter of the congregation to which Paul refers,³⁾ had very naturally supplemented by oral information what the letter contained. The apostle had also learned that the sin was known to the congregation.⁴⁾ Besides, the sin itself was of such a nature that it was before everybody's eyes, since it was not a secret act of adultery, but an open incestuous marriage. In this case, then, there was no need of witnesses. But before his next arrival at Corinth, Paul had, probably through Titus, who met him in Macedonia, learned of other scandalous offenses in the congregation,⁵⁾ which would have to be attended to, and in the letter in which he announced his coming he says, *I told you before, and foretell you, . . . and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare.*⁶⁾ But having his report from one person only, he at the same time announces that *in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.*⁷⁾ This implies that all charges that could not be substantiated by two or three witnesses would fall to the ground. The sins of which he had heard were again such grave offenses as *uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness.*⁸⁾ But church discipline was not to be based upon unsustained rumors or the statements of one person, however trustworthy he might be, but on the evidence of two or three witnesses, persons who by their own observation had knowledge of the facts. On the other hand, the charges were to stand if established by two or

1) 1 Cor. 5, 1.

4) 1 Cor. 5, 2.

7) 2 Cor. 13, 1.

2) 1 Cor. 16, 17.

5) 2 Cor. 12, 21.

8) 2 Cor. 12, 21.

3) 1 Cor. 7, 1.

6) 2 Cor. 13, 2.

three witnesses, even if those who stood accused should deny their guilt.

The proper tribunal before which such cases were to be tried, and by which church discipline should be exercised, was the church. Paul does not write, "I have put away from among you this wicked person." He leaves this act to the congregation.¹⁾ Even where he instructs the Corinthians that the event of the trial, if the sinner should prove obstinately impenitent, cannot be anything short of excommunication, he includes in his proleptic judgment the concurrence of the congregation, in whose assembly he would be present with his spirit.²⁾ That this was the apostle's understanding appears from the sequel. The congregation did not look upon the case as *causa finita* and the sinner as expelled from the church by an apostolic decree, but followed the apostle's earnest and emphatic injunction. Knowing that the aim of church discipline should be the sinner's reform by true repentance, they did now what they ought to have done long ago. They took up the matter as a business of the congregation. The sinner was censured and admonished by *many*.³⁾ Before his arrival at Corinth Paul learned through Titus⁴⁾ that the offender had not been excommunicated, but had repented under the admonition of the brethren,⁵⁾ and the apostle is so far from remonstrating against this course and its result as overriding his excommunication, that he readily concurs in the forgiveness as he had presumed the concurrence of the brethren in the excommunication if it should prove necessary.⁶⁾ It seems that the congregation had adjudicated the matter in a provisional way, subject to a subsequent ratification; and this confirmation, also, Paul does not take into his own hand, but leaves it to the congregation, pleading for the sinner, *I beseech you that ye*

1) 1 Cor. 5, 13.

2) 1 Cor. 5, 3—5.

3) 2 Cor. 2, 6.

4) 2 Cor. 7, 6 f.

5) 2 Cor. 2, 6. 7.

6) 2 Cor. 2, 7. 10.

would confirm your love toward him.¹⁾ There may have been a minority who were of the opinion that the offender had been dealt with too leniently,²⁾ and Paul endeavors to lead the brethren by word and example to absolve the penitent brother with cordial unanimity. For if all should consider him a brother in Christ, it was necessary that their absolution should be unanimous.

This unison of action in church discipline was evidently of great moment in the apostle's mind. While the evil-doer persisted in his sin, he should be made to feel himself morally isolated. His offense should stand universally condemned. The brethren should show him by their conduct that they abhorred and detested his sin as an enormity with which he stood morally contaminated. This was the meaning of the apostle's injunction that the brethren should *not keep company*³⁾ with the offender as if nothing had happened. Thus, also, to the Thessalonians he writes, *We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.*⁴⁾ Here *στέλλεσθαι* is used in the sense in which *ὑποστέλλειν ἑαυτὸν* is employed elsewhere.⁵⁾ There Peter is reported to have withdrawn from, suspended intercourse with, the brethren of the Gentiles at Antioch, and what Peter had done wrongfully, without good and sufficient reason, Paul would have the brethren do rightfully and dutifully in cases of church discipline. This *στέλλεσθαι* and *μὴ συμμίγνυσθαι* is not tantamount to excommunication itself. Nor was it to be enacted only as a consequence of and subsequent to excommunication. Even while the fornicator was still *called a brother*,⁶⁾ fraternal intercourse with him was to be suspended, even to the extent of avoiding his society where friends were entertained at table. It will not do to understand *μηδὲ συνεσθίειν*⁷⁾ as referring only

1) 2 Cor. 2, 8.

2) 2 Cor. 2, 6 f.

3) 1 Cor. 5, 9, 11. 2 Thess. 3, 14.

4) 2 Thess. 3, 6.

5) Gal. 2, 12.

6) 1 Cor. 5, 11.

7) 1 Cor. 5, 11.

to the *agapae*, though these and the Lord's supper are certainly included. Nor can it mean to enjoin a withdrawal of wife and children from the rights and duties of family life.¹⁾ What was to be avoided was the exercise of that cordial intimacy which was fostered among the brethren who *were of one heart and of one soul*²⁾ and which was based upon the unity of faith and hope in which, whether they ate or drank, or whatsoever they did, they did all to the glory of God.³⁾ And while, with certain restrictions and under circumstances which would not permit social intercourse to be unduly misconstrued, a Christian might be the guest of a professed unbeliever,⁴⁾ he was, in view of prevailing circumstances, to refrain from accepting the hospitality of or extending hospitable and sociable invitations to one under church discipline. But in order that this testimony of the brethren should be effective, that the evil-doer should *be ashamed*,⁵⁾ and *that others also might fear*,⁶⁾ it was necessary that all should maintain the same attitude. With great solemnity St. Paul conjures the *brethren*, all of them, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to *withdraw themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly*.⁷⁾ The offense being such that all Christians could be led to understand its gravity, it became the solemn duty of all the brethren to unite in their testimony by word and deed whereby the sinner might be led to the acknowledgment of and repentance over his sin. Where some would perform while others would neglect or set aside this duty, these delinquents would seem to take sides with the offender, who would rather feel himself wronged by some and sustained by others, and, instead of being ashamed under the general rebuke, might resent what would appear as springing from undue rigor or personal rancor, and ease his con-

1) 1 Cor. 7, 13 f.

2) Acts 4, 32.

3) 1 Cor. 10, 31.

4) 1 Cor. 10, 27—29.

5) 2 Thess. 3, 14.

6) 1 Tim. 5, 20.

7) 2 Thess. 3, 6.

science by what might appear as a condonation on the part of his "fair and liberal-minded friends."

With this suspension of intimate fraternal intercourse, earnest fraternal admonition was to go hand in hand.¹⁾ For the intent and purpose of the whole procedure was to be the winning of the sinner from his way of perdition. Absolution and the cordial resumption of fraternal relations were to follow, when the rebuke and admonition administered by the brethren were heeded and their purpose achieved.²⁾ If not, if the offender persisted in his evil way, judgment was to be pronounced by the whole congregation, the *wicked person* was to be put away from among the society of brethren, and the fraternal relations were to be considered as having definitely ceased.³⁾ For one who obstinately persists in mortal sin cannot consistently be regarded as of the holy Christian church, the communion of saints.

But since it was only consistent with its very essence and nature that the church should exercise church discipline, it may appear all the more remarkable that even in the earliest times of Christianity we find churches neglectful of this duty. The churches of Pergamos and of Thyatira had in their midst disgraceful elements,⁴⁾ which they did not expel, as did the church of Ephesus,⁵⁾ and the lukewarmness for which the church of Laodicea is censured probably points in the same direction.⁶⁾ At Corinth church discipline lay woefully neglected,⁷⁾ so that Paul finds cause for severe censure in the same people of whose beneficence he had boasted to those in Macedonia. These churches were not state churches, where every one who was domiciled in the parish would be looked upon as a member of the church, and where political interests and regulations might have interfered with the discipline and government

1) 2 Thess. 3, 15. 2 Cor. 2, 6.

2) 2 Cor. 2, 6 ff.

3) 1 Cor. 5, 13.

4) Rev. 2, 12 ff. 18 ff.

5) Rev. 2, 2. 6.

6) Rev. 3, 14 ff.

7) 1 Cor. 5, 1 ff.; 15, 12. 2 Cor. 13, 1 f.

of the church. On the contrary, the churches were as free to administer their own affairs as they were free to exist, and, especially, their putting a man out of their society was less culpable under heathen institutions than their acquisition of new members, which might expose them to the charge of illegal proselyting.¹⁾ How, then, are we to account for such rapid and far-gone degeneracy in those early churches? But to put the question thus is putting it wrong. In our day, a decadence of church discipline is often a symptom of a decadence of spiritual life in older congregations. But the church of Corinth was not an old congregation. If Paul first came to Corinth in the fall of 51, and wrote his first Epistle to the Corinthians in the autumn of 55, the congregation was then just four years old, and of these the apostle had spent one year and a half in building up and establishing this flourishing church.²⁾ In fact, it was precisely this brevity of its past history which accounts for the shortcomings of this young congregation in point of church discipline. Less than four years ago most of these men and women had been *Gentiles, carried away unto dumb idols.*³⁾ We know in a measure what manner of worship was practiced in and about the temples of these idols. What was a crime for the Roman Vestal was a duty for the Corinthian hierodule. The laxity and licentiousness of sexual relations which had been prevalent among them for generations had so blunted the moral sensibilities of the Greeks, that it required years of continued moral reform to restore the healthy spontaneity of conscience in determining and rating sexual life according to the norm set forth in the divine commandment, *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

Of course, we must not assume that the Corinthian Christians had, after their conversion, sunk beneath the level of moral depravity which they had occupied in the darkness of heathendom. When St. Paul says, *ἦτις οὐδὲ ἐν*

1) Acts 18, 13; 19, 26.

2) Acts 18, 11.

3) 1 Cor. 12, 2.

τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, he does not refer to what was possible, but to what was lawful among the Gentiles according to the supreme law of the realm, which was the Roman law. In earlier days, the law of Rome had prohibited marriage between relatives beyond the Levitical degrees, even marriage between second cousins. In the course of time the legal restrictions were reduced so as to permit marriage between first cousins, and in A. D. 49 marriage with a brother's daughter was legalized with a view of sanctioning the union of Claudius and Agrippina. But at no time did the Roman law permit the marriage of a step-parent with a step-child, and a Roman lawyer, arguing a case and pointing the finger of scorn to a woman who had married her son-in-law, said, "*Nubit genero socrus. . . . O mulieris scelus incredibile, et, praeter hanc unam, in omni vita inauditum!*"¹⁾ i. e., "A mother-in-law marries her son-in-law! . . . Did you ever in all your life hear of a case save this one of a woman committing such an incredible outrage?" Corinth being a Roman *colonia*, Paul could reasonably assume that his Corinthian readers were familiar with the Roman law and accessible to the rebuke which he, the Roman citizen by birth, administered to these colonials by his pithy reference to the humiliating fact that the offense which had occurred among them stood condemned as a heinous crime even before the secular norm of right which, while not everywhere enforced, was nowhere questioned throughout the empire.

Yet, while the church of Corinth and other churches of the apostolic age were sadly deficient in the exercise of church discipline, we do not hear that the apostles on this account disavowed such churches as churches of Christ or called upon any Christian to sever his connection therewith. On the contrary, St. Paul accosts as *the church of God which is at Corinth*²⁾ the same congregation which he

1) Cicero, *pro A. Cluentio*, 5 sq.

2) 1 Cor. 1, 2. 2 Cor. 1, 1.

rebukes, saying, *Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.*¹⁾ *Your glorying is not good.*²⁾ *If I come again, I will not spare.*³⁾ To this congregation he writes, *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ, that in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*⁴⁾ And, far from crying, *Remove out of the midst of Babylon,*⁵⁾ he says to all the members of this church, *I beseech you, brethren, . . . that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*⁶⁾ On the other hand, he does not rest content with the assurance of the congregation's orthodoxy, but spares no endeavors to lead the brethren to know and acknowledge their shortcomings and to *purge out the old leaven;*⁷⁾ for, says he, *this also we wish, even your perfection.*⁸⁾ A. G.

(To be continued.)

1) 1 Cor. 5, 2.

2) 1 Cor. 5, 6.

3) 2 Cor. 13, 2.

4) 1 Cor. 1, 4—8.

5) Jer. 50, 8.

6) 1 Cor. 1, 10.

7) 1 Cor. 5, 7.

8) 2 Cor. 13, 9.
