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the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men, with crowns on their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without

intermission, saying, "Holy holy, holy, is the Lord." And after that they shut up the gates; which, when I had seen, I wished myself amongst them. . . . I wished myself amongst them.' ¹

¹ J. S. Holden, *The God-Lit Road*, 311.

Surprises in the Early Church in Rome.

BY THE REVEREND ALBERT G. MACKINNON, D.D., ROME.

THE title which first suggested itself was, 'The Most Interesting Church in History'; but it would have challenged criticism, perhaps aroused resentment. Many of my readers, no doubt, belong to famous congregations, which are doing great things in the world to-day, and which have a membership that would make the Church of St. Paul's time in Rome appear numerically insignificant, therefore I must discard the adjective 'most generous' or 'most influential'; but there is one word I shall not yield, and that is 'most surprising.' When I read with gratification the annual reports of our great city churches, and scan their long membership rolls and subscription lists, I say to myself: 'Well, that is just what I expected. They have done splendidly, but they had it in them. With such a pastor and people they could not do otherwise.'

When, however, I study the first Christian Church in Rome I get a series of shocks. Everything is so unexpected. This Church does not conform to the rules. It surprises you by its lack of conventionality at every turn. It is so different from the pattern of to-day that I am almost tempted to dub St. Paul a Nonconformist! Let us note some of those surprising features which may perhaps make us a little uncomfortable and lessen our pride in things which were our boast.

1. Its founder is unknown. We are accustomed to a big tablet in the vestibule commemorating the name of some great preacher, who had started the cause which had grown into a flourishing congregation, or perhaps that of some generous donor, whose money had laid the foundation-stone. I do not condemn such a custom. There is an inspiration in great names, and they are 'On Fame's eternal bead-roll worthy to be filed.' But this Church in Rome could put up no such tablet; for the person who originated it has not even handed down his name. It was not St. Paul.

He certainly does not claim that honour. With regard to Corinth it was different. He asserted a parental claim over that Church; but with Rome, no. It was not St. Peter, for when he appeared in the city there was already a strong Church established. Who, then, were its originators?

We must search for them amongst the Jewish colony. From the days of Pompey, the Great, this foreign community had steadily increased in size. Julius Cæsar fostered it. On the very day in which he was murdered a great act of Jewish emancipation was passed by the Senate granting them a free administration of their own funds, and a complete jurisdiction over their own members. No wonder that for three days the Jews turned the Forum into a weeping-place and bewailed the Great Cæsar who had proved himself their friend. We read that in 4 B.C., eight thousand Roman Jews met a deputation from Palestine to Augustus. This may be an exaggeration; still, if we put their population at sixty thousand, it was not impossible; and Sejanus, who was their enemy in the time of Tiberius, enrolled four thousand in a foreign legion and sent them to Sardinia to put down the brigands. It was from this colony in the Capital that in A.D. 29, we read, there came to the Feast of Pentecost, 'Sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes.' That is as near as we can get to the founders of the Church. From that group of travellers some came back Christians.

'Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which have come to pass there in these days?' said the two disciples to Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Behind these words lies a suggestive fact. Jerusalem was full of talk about Calvary, and into that babble of tongues came those Jews from Rome. Their curiosity must have been aroused, their interest excited, and in one or two hearts the truth accepted. The meaning of the Cross was seen in its true light,

and when they got back to Rome they told their friends, and so the Church in Rome began and grew, and fulfilled the prediction in the Parable of the Leaven.

2. Its second surprising feature is that its first success was achieved through a disturbance. Church quarrels are the saddest, but even they are often overruled for good. That may seem a poor consolation when a congregation splits; but history, in addition to the famous case of Barnabas and Paul, has many instances when the devil was caught in his own net.

One day in A.D. 52 the Emperor Claudius was looking out of his window on the Palatine. Beneath lay the magnificent arena of the Circus Maximus, but it was not that which attracted his attention. On the other side rose the slopes of the Aventine, and where now stands the church of St. Prisca stood a humble Roman house. It was the home of a Jewish tent-maker called Aquila; but one reading between the lines in the New Testament might fairly conjecture that it was run by his wife Priscilla, as her name is often put first, and the cemetery in Rome to-day where they are buried is called after the wife. She seems to have been the dominating spirit. Whether she had anything, however, to do with the row must be guess-work. It became alarming enough to rivet the Emperor's gaze. A tumult in the streets of Rome had always to be watched. One never knew what it might turn to. The shouts of angry voices carried across the little valley. The crowd increased, blows were following words. The whole of the Aventine seemed in an uproar. Suetonius in his history tells us the cause. He says it was a tumult about one 'Chrestos.' The Jews were arguing in their usual way. Their bark may have been worse than their bite, but how was Claudius to know? The thing must be stopped at once. He dealt with it as one might with a dog-fight in one's house, by kicking both combatants out. He was going to have no more disturbances of that kind, so he passed an edict that all Jews were to be expelled from Rome at once. Of course that included the little Christian community as well, for the authorities looked upon them as a Jewish sect.

At the time this may have seemed a great disaster; but scattering fire often only increases it. Aquila and Priscilla went as far as Corinth, and there they met Paul, and that was a turning-point in the fortunes of the Roman Church. I am convinced that his new friends fanned his desire to visit Rome. In the long nights in Corinth

they talked about it. They would take no refusal. Paul must come to the Eternal City. I think Priscilla was a lady who got her way. She has left her mark on Scripture, and even Paul's will would be bent by hers. She was determined that the Apostle should visit her city. She made him promise, and he kept his word, though it meant five years as a prisoner. That, at least, is my reading of the story.

But that controversy on the Aventine had a more far-reaching result than the cruel temporary expulsion of the Jews from Rome. When Paul eventually came to Rome, he invited the leaders of the Jews, who had now returned, to meet him. They came; but, however hostile most of them felt, they curbed their passions. They could not risk another tumult and another summary expulsion: the memory of Claudius was still too vivid, so they behaved themselves, and Paul had peace. But if it had not been for the former disturbance with its disastrous sequel, they would have imperilled the work and the very life of the Apostle; but the salutary lesson of Claudius had taught them restraint. So the religious dispute of A.D. 52 bore fruit in A.D. 60. Had it not been for that previous tumult about one 'Chrestos,' Paul might never have got a chance in Rome. I do not wish to put a premium on Church disputes, but their sequel is often a surprise.

3. Another matter for astonishment is the lack of central organization. After twenty-eight years of existence, no deacons or presbyters! This takes our breath away to-day. We cannot think of a Church without its framework of intricate organization. From the pastor down to the sub-secretary of the most juvenile society, there is a mass of human machinery which demands an expert to understand. The Roman Church does not seem to have had even a pastor or ruling elder or leading member. Otherwise Paul would not have addressed it as he did. When he writes it a letter, he does not label it as we would expect: 'To the Church of God that is in Rome.' He singles out no bishop or minister. He directs his letter to no central organization, but: 'To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.'

As we read the Epistle, we detect traces of five different congregations in the city. Two of these, as I shall mention presently, may perhaps be considered as one. This would leave four separate centres where the Christians forgathered.

The most prominent was doubtless the home of Aquila and Priscilla on the Aventine. Its site

has been definitely fixed. 'Greet the church that is in their house,' writes the Apostle. Those simple words picture the scene. During the week the atrium of that house would present a busy scene. Aquila was evidently a prosperous tent-maker and able to employ workmen. Their benches and tables would fill the little court; but on Saturday night, Priscilla would take command. There would be what is called in Scotland 'a reddin' up.' The tables would be removed, the place thoroughly scrubbed out, and benches arranged for the coming Lord's Day. Then in twos and threes little groups could be seen climbing the Aventine and wending their way to that hospitable door. How packed it would be later when Paul himself was the preacher! In fact, we are told how he discoursed from morning till night with the Jews, and one may be pretty certain that this was the spot of that historic meeting. In so far as the five distinct congregations had any common centre, I should be inclined to look upon this house as that place. Yet it did not dominate the others to such an extent that Paul should address his letter to it as representing all. The organization at that time was purely congregational.

'Salute them which are of Aristobulus's household'; 'Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus': these messages may refer to the saints in Cæsar's household. As these names have been found on the lists of the Imperial staff, it is just possible they are one and the same, and that their circle constituted the little Church in the Imperial palace. A few weeks ago Professor Bartoli discovered the remains of an early Christian sanctuary under the Villa Mills on the Palatine in the precincts of the palace of Augustus, which he is at present exploring. During the Middle Ages it had been used as a wine-cellar; but he is certain it was a meeting-place for Christians in Cæsar's palace.

'Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.' These words take us out to the recently discovered 'House of Hermes' on the Appian Way. Without doubt this was one of the earliest meeting-places of the Christians. Lying in a hollow, it had the advantage of not being too conspicuous, and, being outside the walls, was more private. It formed a convenient centre for a considerable Christian community in that neighbourhood.

'Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.' In what part of Rome this house was, we cannot say. It was obviously not in the Jewish quarter.

From all this it is clear that Rome, which in later ages was to become a centre of autocracy for the Church, at this time lacked those elements of concentration which were eventually to raise her to the perilous heights of spiritual power and pride. Such organization as she possessed was simpler in form than that of the Churches of Asia.

4. Another surprise awaits us when we examine carefully the roll of that first Church and note the nationality of its members. Born and bred, as they were, amongst the Jews, we should expect their names to predominate. Yet, if the list given is a true sample of the rest, we are amazed to find how few there are of Hebrew origin. All this casts light on the bitterness of that tumult which Claudius witnessed. The Jews did not make an open attack again on the Christians; but they drew apart. Prejudice hardened their hearts. They would have nothing to do with 'Chrestos.' Only five mentioned are clearly Hebrews. Of these three are said to be the kinsmen of Paul: Andronicus, Junias, and Herodion, leaving Aquila and Mary only as the independent representatives of their race, though one might perhaps include Apelles. Priscilla was more than likely a Roman, as her name indicates, and her character too; for there was evidently a good deal of the Roman matron about her!

What about the sixty thousand Jews? Was ever a communion-roll more condemnatory of a race than that which we find in this early Roman Church? What a meaning and emphasis this disclosure gives to Paul's quotation of righteous indignation and disappointment: 'Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive. . . . Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.'

5. A last surprise which I shall mention, is the prominent place women held in that Roman Church. We are apt to think that it is only now that the 'Fair Sex' is coming into its own. Paul showed the way at the very beginning. He honoured woman by trusting her. No man has been so maligned and misunderstood on this score. When he is to send his precious manuscript to Rome, to whom does he commit it? A woman, Phoebe. He commends her as 'our sister,' elevating woman to the dignity of equal brotherhood in Christ. It is Paul who says: 'There is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.'

One-third of the names recorded on that historic

rell are those of women. Imagination might well fill in some scenes of those days. When news reaches Rome that Paul's ship had arrived at Puteoli, we can imagine what a gathering there would be of the Christians to consider how best to welcome him. If I have read the character of Priscilla aright, I feel sure she must have been one of the first on her feet, her warm heart overflowing with enthusiasm, rousing the younger men to

volunteer to go all the way to Appii Forum, and the older ones to The Three Taverns. All aglow with joyous excitement, she would speak up in that meeting, and suggest means for making the hard lot of the prisoner a little more comfortable. Trust her for that. When Paul came a second time to Rome as a prisoner in A.D. 68, we hear of no escort going forth to welcome him. But then Priscilla was not in Rome!

Contributions and Comments.

'The Chaldæans.'

IN the October number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, Mr. Geo. B. Michell passes some criticisms on my article, which appeared in the June issue. These criticisms are less damaging, however, than he appears to think.

Mr. Michell complains that I did not give proof that any of the classes of wise men referred to in Daniel were priests. He would seem not to have noticed that I was replying to the positions of Boutflower; and since it was common ground between us that these wise men were priests, it did not seem necessary to argue the point, especially since Jastrow's authority could be invoked in its support.

Mr. Michell states pontifically that 'the simple fact is that the "Chaldæans" of Daniel were the men who could read and write the ancient Sumerian literature of Chaldæa.' I am grateful for the finality of this judgment. Mr. Michell is clearly the right person to complain of the absence of proofs, since he so singularly dispenses with his own.

He further tells us that the Semitic Akkadian became extinct quite early in history, and was replaced by Aramaic, while he does not believe that Sumerian ever became an extinct language. Earlier, he recognizes that the language of the inscriptions, and the language of law and of official dispatches to other parts of the Empire, was this long-extinct Semitic Akkadian, while, for the existence of the still current Sumerian, which he postulates, he brings forward nothing but his own bare assertion. Perhaps we may be allowed to wait until he has convinced the Assyriologists before we accept this opinion.

He asks what proof there is that the language of

the Chaldæans or of their government was Semitic. The admitted fact that their inscriptions, their legal documents and official dispatches are in a Semitic language would lead quite naturally to this conclusion, in the absence of any evidence of another language of government having been current at the time. Mr. Michell states that the Aramaic dockets prove that the current tongue was not the Semitic Akkadian, and he later says that Aramaic had replaced the Semitic Akkadian. What place, then, would Mr. Michell himself leave for the Sumerian which he believes still to have been current, and to have been the language of the government? If, *ex hypothesi*, Aramaic was the common speech, and all legal documents and official dispatches were in the Semitic Akkadian, what functions of government does he suppose to have been carried on in the Sumerian tongue which he assumes still to have been current? Perhaps Nebuchadrezzar reserved it for his tea-parties.

Mr. Michell's strictures under (3) puzzle me to the point of mirth. Mr. Michell agrees with me that the Book of Daniel represents Daniel as having been a 'Chaldæan,' whatever that term may have denoted. Mr. Michell thinks that a 'Chaldæan' was one who could read and write Sumerian, but since he himself maintains that this is precisely what Daniel was taught to do, it follows that he holds that Daniel was a 'Chaldæan.' Mr. Boutflower holds that the 'Chaldæans' were the priests of Bel, and consisted exclusively of men of the Chaldæan race. But the Book of Daniel represents Daniel, a Hebrew, as having been a 'Chaldæan.' Clearly, then, Boutflower and the Book of Daniel are in disagreement. Mr. Michell is so worried by the word 'order' that he misses the point. In the statement he criticises, I was meeting Bout-