

the prominence which its importance demanded.

It was in the beautiful city of ANTIOCH, then the Syrian capital, that the first Gentile Church was formed. In this city, noted for scurrility and wit, the followers of Jesus were first called Christians, a "nickname" which has ever since been gathering glory, and which shall be glorious forever.

Many converts were gained at Antioch, and the work of the Apostle Paul and his fellow-labourers was prospering. The SPIRIT was poured out upon the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The converts were liberal, zealous, loving,—of one heart and one mind. The youthful Church at Antioch occupied a centre of extensive influence, and came into constant contact with the most elegant and fascinating forms of Greek and Roman infidelity, superstition, and Epicurean worldliness.—Suddenly a foe still more formidable and deadly must be encountered. The Gentile Church was, if we may so speak, attacked in the rear. Heathenism, with its licentiousness, its gross superstition, its blind atheism, is in front, colossal and terrible; and rushing to its help, behold legalism, petrified ritualism, a zealous, proselyting formalism!

Pharisees of the strictest sect had crept into the Church of Christ without ceasing to be Pharisees. These men, burning with zeal "came down from Judea," to correct what they regarded as an essential, a fundamental, defect in the teaching of the Apostle Paul. Their doctrine is briefly stated: All must be circumcised; all must observe the Law of Moses—ALL, whether Gentiles or Jews. Faith in Christ is not enough; it is useless without the Law. Christ is the Messiah; but we must receive Christ AND THE LAW OF MOSES.

The Church of Antioch was composed chiefly of Gentile Christians; and Antioch was the centre of missionary work among the Gentiles. Hence the vast importance of the question now to be decided. It was a question of life-and-death for the Church. The sufficiency of Christ as a Saviour was at stake, and this principle to a Christian is everything. Paul and Barnabas at once

resisted the innovators; and no doubt the great majority of the people sympathized with them. There is reason to believe however that a section of the Church received the new doctrine, and that a temporary schism was the result. After much "dissension and contention" it was arranged to refer the case to the Apostles and Elders assembled at Jerusalem.

Paul and Barnabas and "some others" were the delegates of the Church at Antioch. They came up to Jerusalem through Phenice and Samaria, telling everywhere the wonderful progress of the religion of Christ among the Gentiles. The good news gladdened the hearts of the brethren. When they reached Jerusalem they were publicly and honourably received by the Church and they told the same joyful tidings with regard to the progress of the Gospel. This gave occasion to the Christian Pharisees to insist in the presence of the apostles on the error which had caused so much trouble at Antioch: "It is not enough that the Gentiles believe in Jesus, they must be circumcised and commanded to observe the Law of Moses." And now Christianity itself is at stake in the mother-church of Christendom and in presence of the Apostles of Christ.

Then the Apostles and Elders assembled in their judicial capacity, to discuss and decide this grand controversy—to determine whether Christianity should become merely a Jewish school or sect, or should fulfil its beneficent destiny as the Universal Religion. This Apostolic Synod prayed, and debated, deliberated, sought and obtained Divine guidance, just as Synods may and ought to do in the present day. The Apostles acted here in their capacity of Elders, and not as inspired Apostles.

The venerable leaders listened to the "long debate." At length Peter gave utterance to his views in a singularly cogent and logical speech. He appeals to facts familiar to all—he recalls the conversion of Cornelius—he shows that God makes no difference between Jew and Pagan. The gift of the Holy Ghost was a decisive proof that the Gentiles who believed were accepted by God. The Mosaic law he charac-