

CRITICAL AND HOMILETICAL NOTES.

Verse 21. After these things. The event of this lesson must be studied in the light of the history recorded in Acts 18. 18-19. 20, which Luke summarizes, "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed." The stupendous success of Paul's ministry in Ephesus was due in part (1) to the fact that there had been special preparation for it. His brief visit to the city at the close of his second missionary tour and his promise to return at an early date had awakened expectation. This was sustained by the presence and testimony of Aquila and Priscilla. It was intensified by the providential appearance of a disciple of John the Baptist, Apollos, a man of magnetic eloquence and "mighty in the Scriptures," who readily became a convert to the Gospel. Another thing that contributed to his success (2) was the strongly emotional character of the restless people of the city, and which later on was a marked feature of the church formed there—an element of its strength and also of its weakness. Rev. 2. 4. A third thing was (3) his helpers. In addition to those already named were Timothy, afterward bishop of the church; Erastus (not to be identified with him of Rom. 16. 23, nor 2 Tim. 4. 20); Gaius (not the one of Derbe, 20. 4, nor the Corinthian, 1 Cor. 1. 14); Aristarchus (several times mentioned in Paul's epistles). Meyer and Alford think that Alexander was also a Christian Jew who was put forward by his countrymen to divert the fury of the mob from the unchristian Jews. But the probability is that he is to be identified with the Alexander of 2 Tim. 4. 14. Paul was very dependent on his companions in work. When alone at Athens the results were a practical failure. At Corinth it was not till Timothy and Silas came to him that he rose to the maximum of his strength. God's plan is to make the obscure helper share the strength and reward of the chosen leader in divine work. Another factor of success was (4) the miraculous power by which the sick were healed and evil spirits expelled, verse 12. Over and above all these, and over and above the august personality of Paul himself, was (5) the baptism of the Holy Ghost, 19. 1-6. The teaching of Christ and his truth will not alone make a new life. It may result in a new school, a new community. But that is only another variation of thought and conduct and is essentially "of this world," distinguishable by nothing supernatural. For this reason Jesus commanded his disciples to tarry at Jerusalem until endued with power from on high. When Pentecost came they became resistless witnesses. At every point in this history of the founding of the churches we are referred to the Holy Ghost as the secret of their triumph. The life of the Church is not its doctrines, nor its morality, nor the gifts of its members. Though these may all be correct, as in the church at Ephesus before

the apostle's return, yet there is lacking an essential something which makes the Church a supernatural power in the world. The Church's true life is an inward divinity created by the Holy Ghost.

23. About that way. More properly "the" way, as in the Revised Version. It was a term which the early Christians used to designate the new life in the Gospel, describing it as "the pathway of life." "Mighty" is the term with which St. Luke characterizes it. It was a tremendous spiritual movement which imperiled a lucrative and nefarious traffic, akin to that of the saloon in modern times. The Ephesian traffic in shrines is analogous to the modern traffic in intoxicants (1) in its close relation to the politics of the city, (2) in the wealth it brought to those engaged in it, (3) in its degrading influence on the people, and (4) in the bitterness of its antagonisms.

25. By this craft we have our wealth. Demetrius, who uses his religion to enrich himself, is a fair type of the world mind, and is the exact reverse of the spiritual mind which uses its religion to enrich others. How pious he is when his "craft is in danger."

Demetrius does not charge Paul with openly dishonoring Diana, but argues that his denial of the divinity in the images that the craftsmen had made would ultimately lead to the dishonor of the majesty of the great goddess herself. This, taken with the statement of the town clerk (verse 37), that these men are not "yet blasphemers of your goddess," indicates a feature of the apostle's mode of combating idolatry. He taught the positive doctrine of one God revealed in Jesus Christ, and did not unnecessarily provoke the idolaters' prejudice. In this way, doubtless, he won and retained the friendship of the Asiarchs, or "chiefs of Asia," as they are called in our Authorized Version, verse 31. They were really officers of the sacred rites and games, and the president of their order was styled High Priest. It is hardly probable that they continued to exercise their office while they were secretly Christians.

Thoughts for Young People. Concerning Persecution.

1. Persecution is excited by a growing, aggressive Church. While the Church is dead there is no opposition from the world. Only a living Church will arouse opposition. When Israel is following Baal the Philistines are quiet; but when the altars of idols are forsaken the world rises in enmity. So, to-day, it is sometimes a sign of prosperity when the rumsellers, the small politicians, and the evildoers are angry with the Church.

2. Persecution has generally a selfish motive as its inspiring cause. "Our craft is in danger!" said