

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE EPISTLES.

By oral preaching and teaching the apostles and evangelists gathered men to Jesus Christ and formed them into churches of the saints. The Epistles supplement the oral testimony, survey the condition of the churches, and, with a view to their education and guidance, descant upon Christian doctrine, discipline, and practice. For this reason it is that all persons of religious culture find so much spiritual food in the Epistles. They were composed for the express purpose of feeding the Church, and impressing sacred truth and duty on the followers of the Lamb.

They are twenty-one in number, and thus more numerous than either the historical or prophetic books. Of the twenty-one, thirteen are ascribed to St. Paul, one to St. James, two to St. Peter, three to St. John, one to St. Jude, and one (the Epistle to the Hebrews) is anonymous. This last is usually classed with the letters of St. Paul, and the Epistles are divided into Pauline and general. Inaccurately so, because the Epistles of James and 1st Peter are not general, but have a specific direction, and the second and third Epistles of John are private letters.

In the English Bible, the Epistles of Paul are placed first, such being the order of the Vulgate, and familiar at the time when our translation was made. It is also the order of many Greek manuscripts, but not of the oldest, or of the greatest number; for they place what are called the General epistles after the Book of Acts, and before the letters of Paul.

A point of greater importance is the right ordering of St. Paul's Epistles. We have them placed apparently with some reference to their size and importance and not at all in the order of time in which they were written. The great doctrinal Epistle to the Romans stands first. Then come the two ecclesiastical and admonitory letters to the Greeks; then six to churches in Asia Minor and Macedonia; and lastly, four letters to individuals. In this order we shall consider them, as we have already studied the books of the prophet, though we lose some advantage by not following the natural order of time. Any reader who prefers that order may begin with the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, and end with the Second Epistle to Timothy, arranging the thirteen epistles of St. Paul in three classes as follows.

(1.) Those written before the Apostle's Roman imprisonment, six in number, namely, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans.

(2.) Those written during the Roman imprisonment, of which there are four, namely, 1 Philemon, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians.

(3.) Those written after the Roman imprisonment, of which there are three, the last being produced during the second imprisonment and quite at the close of the Apostle's life, namely, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy.

There is no difficulty in understanding why so large a proportion of the canonical Epistles should have issued from the Apostle Paul. It was he who most abounded in missionary labours, and was the champion of Christianity, not in little Judea, but in the great world. Many churches he planted, others he visited and taught. Over all of them he kept a loving and watchful eye; and there came upon him, in his riper years, a care of all the churches. It appears, too, that he had a most extensive acquaintance with the Christian workers in the cities of Asia, Greece and Italy.

St. Paul was no neophyte, but an experienced Christian teacher, when he began to write the Epistles. He is believed to have been converted A. D. 37, and the earliest of his extant letters were not written till A. D. 53, when he had thought much and suffered much as a Christian, having preached the Word for sixteen eventful years. His whole ministry extended over about thirty years, and his epistles were all composed during the latter half of that ministry, or within the fourteen years preceding his martyrdom.

But, have we all his epistles? It has been strongly maintained we must have them all, on the ground that all the writings of an Apostle were entitled to the rank of Sacred Scriptures, and that no Scripture has been allowed to be lost. But this is a baseless assumption. All the words and works of our blessed Saviour are not found on record, and if sayings of the Son of God which might have been preserved have been allowed

to be lost, why should it be supposed that all the written words of His Apostolic servants must have been saved from hazards of time as necessary to the completeness of Holy Scripture? Enough of St. Paul's correspondence with churches and with Christian brethren is preserved for the information and direction of the universal Church in all time coming. But in the First Epistle to the Corinthians there is an allusion to a previous letter sent to that church; and in the Epistle to the Colossians we read of one sent to Laodicea, which might also be read at Colosse. Possibly the latter of these may be the Epistle to the Ephesians, sent as a circular letter to the congregations in the province of Asia; but the former is surely a lost Epistle. What Calvin has said of it seems to us quite reasonable, "That epistle of which he speaks is not at this day extant, nor is there any doubt that many others have been lost; but it is enough that those remain to us which the Lord foresaw to suffice." If many of St. Paul's letters have been lost, we may infer that letters of the other Apostles are also lost. In course of their ministry they must have had occasion to write many Epistles besides those which kind Providence has preserved for our learning, and which the whole Church receives as canonical and inspired.—*Dr. Donald Fraser.*

NOT FAR.

Not far, not far from the kingdom,
Yet in the shadow of sin,
How many are coming and going,
How few are entering in;

Not far from the golden gate-way,
Where voices whisper and wail,
Feating to enter in boldly,
So lingering still at the gate!

Catching the strain of the music
Floating so sweetly along,
Knowing the song they are singing
Yet joining not in the song;

Seeing the warmth and the beauty,
The white love and the light,
Yet weary, and lonely, and waiting,
Out in the desolate night!

Out in the dark and the danger,
Out in the night and the cold,
Though He is longing to lead them
Tenderly into the fold.

Not far, not far from the kingdom,
'Tis only a little space;
But it may be at last and forever,
Out of the resting place.

—*En. Job Congregationalist.*

VERY SHORT AND VERY LONG.

There are some things very short, and some things very long. God in His word tells us of both of these, and bids us look at them.

1. Life is very short. God speaks of it as a shadow, 1 Chron. xxix. 15; a weaver's shuttle, Job vii. 6; a flower, Psalm ciii. 15; a leaf, Isa. lxi. 6; a hand-breath, Psalm xxxix. 5; a vapour, James iv. 14; a sleep, Psalm xc. 5; a flood, Psalm xc. 5. Is not life, then short? If it be like these it must be short indeed.

2. Time is very short. It is made up of many lives, yet it is short. The time is short, says Paul, 1 Cor. vii. 29; the world passeth away, says John, 1 John ii. 17. A few years will end all.

3. The sinner's joy is short. It is but for a moment, says Job, chap. xx. 5. The fashion of this world passeth away, 1 Cor. vii. 31. He may laugh and dance and be gay, and take his ease and be merry; but his joy soon comes to an end. It fades away, and leaves nothing behind it but grief.

4. The saint's sorrow is short. It is but for a moment, 2 Cor. iv. 17. It may be heavy, and hard to bear, but it is soon over, and it leaves no shadow behind. When it is done all is joy forever.

These are some of the things that are very short. They are spoken of by God, that you may think upon them. Will you not? Look back at the past years of your life, and look onward, and let these things that are so short—so very short—be looked at in view of the past and of the coming time.

But there are other things that are long—very long so long that men cannot count them. They are forever and ever. Let me ask you to think of them also. God bids you think of them.

1. God Himself. He is from everlasting to everlasting, Psalm xc. 2. His life is throughout all eternity, for He is the King eternal and immortal, 1 Tim.

i. 17. How well for us to have this God for our God—to have Him for our portion in such a changing world!

2. God's love. The mercy of the Lord, says David, is from everlasting to everlasting, Psalm ciii. 17. The love of God changes not. His mercy never dies. His grace never grows old.

3. The life to come. It is everlasting life, John iii. 16; there is no death in this life, and no end. He who gets it gets it forever and ever. What must it be to have eternal life!

4. The saint's joy. At God's right hand are pleasures forevermore, Psalm xvi. 11; the joy which the ransomed of the Lord obtain is everlasting joy, Isaiah xxxv. 10. How blessed to have joy like this—joy that shall never end!

5. The sinner's sorrow. It is endless—endless. The fire is everlasting, Isaiah xxxiii. 14; the torment is day and night forever and ever, Rev. xx. 10. The darkness is the blackness of darkness forever, Jude 13. How sad to lie down in such sorrow—to have these everlasting burnings for our home.

God asks you to consider your ways. Will you prefer this world to the world to come? Is sin better than Christ? Are the weeds of the earth sweeter than the flowers of Paradise? Time stays not; do not you, then, stay. Let not sin keep you back from God, and shut you out of heaven. Come and wash in the open fountain. Come and get the white robe. Then, whether your days on earth are few or many, it matters not. When the Lord comes you shall have the joy, and the glory, and the crown.—*H. Bonar, D.D.*

THE MODERN PULPIT AND SCEPTICAL CULTURE.

It becomes, no doubt, a perplexing question in many cases, How ought the gospel preacher to deal with such a state of facts? He cannot but be aware that a large number of those to whom he preaches are more or less brought under the influence of this sceptical culture. And besides, he is aware that he and all who stand fast to "the faith once delivered to the saints" are continually held up before the people as ignorant, dogmatic bigots, whose religious creed of necessity puts them into a position of antagonism towards scientific knowledge and the progress of the age. What, then, is the duty of the preacher in reference to this noisy, rampant, and aggressive scepticism? Can he afford utterly to ignore it? Evidently not. Shall he, then, arm himself with sling and stone, and go forth to meet these Lilliputian Goliaths who defy the armies of the living God? Must he shame the smatterers by going back to the foundation of their infidel systems, and instructing the people in the categories of Kant and the philosophy of Hegel, with their outflowing in the destructive criticism of the Tubingen school? Must he expound and expose the Positive Philosophy, and point out the mistake of Sir William Hamilton in regard to the unconditioned and the unthinkable? Must he discuss with Mr. Herbert Spencer his system of the universe developed from the unknowable, and his new theory of creation under Darwin's law of development? Must he mark out for the people the mistakes of the philosophers concerning that mysterious line which separates between the knowable and thinkable and the unconditioned and unknowable? Must he follow Tyndall and Huxley and Darwin into the *penetrals* of nature, and expose the missing links in their theories of the origin of man and of the universe? Must he trudge with Sir John Lubbock over his immeasurable mud-bank of facts, often falsely so called, or grope his way with Baron Gould through his immeasurable fog-banks of speculation touching the genesis of man and his religions?

Manifestly not. This would be a practical laying aside the duties of his office. And moreover, such is not the true method of meeting error in the popular mind, even philosophically considered. Every minister of intelligence and experience has discovered that the most effective method of destroying the influence of error over the minds of men is not to give chase after it into the wilderness of controversy, but to instil into the minds of the people clear and distinct ideas of the contrary truth. The surest antidote to falsehood is a clear-cut, simple statement of the positive truth which falsehood assails. There is a profound philosophy underlying the instruction given by an inspired apostle to a young friend in the ministry, and one specially appropriate to the young ministry of this day:—"Keep thou that which is committed to