

Review.



Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. By the Rev. Canon SANDAY and the Rev. W. HEADLAM. T. and T. Clark.

THE kingdom of Christ and the Roman Empire came into connection on the Day of Pentecost. Strangers from Rome are mentioned by St. Luke in the list of those present in Jerusalem on that memorable Whit Sunday when the Spirit was poured upon all flesh. It would have been impossible that from an event so momentous representatives of the imperial city and of the imperial race should have been wholly absent. Yet the mention of them by the sacred writer is so slight and incidental as to suggest that Roman grandeur itself appeared to him to be dim and meagre beside the glory of the Kingdom which should have no end. St. Luke's notice, however, slender as it is, furnishes the natural starting-point for a sketch of the beginnings of Roman Christianity.

It would seem that the Gospel was brought to the great city by private Christians. Their very names are unknown. In all probability they bore no public authority to preach. Almost certainly they were neither Apostles nor men, like Barnabas, of Apostolic rank. It is likely, indeed, that the first evangelists of the "Eternal City" were those strangers of Rome mentioned in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles; but even this is not positively known.

Providence, indeed, has spread over the most fascinating chapter in the history of the early Church an impenetrable veil, and our curiosity to know more is tantalized rather than appeased by the notices of the Roman Church given by St. Luke at the end of the book of the Acts. The earliest tradition, moreover, scarcely adds anything to our knowledge. We know for certain that Christianity reached Rome early, and we know, though not for certain, that they who brought it there were not the Apostles.

One fact is clear amid the general obscurity. St. Paul was the principal agent employed by God in building the spiritual structure of the Roman Church, whose foundations had been laid by hands fortuitous and unknown. Irenæus associates St. Peter with St. Paul in this work, and so happy and noble a companionship is inherently probable, and there appears no sufficient evidence for rejecting the statement. St. Paul, however, is alone named by St. Luke as preaching in Rome; and as the Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, and not St. Peter, addressed the Epistle to the Romans.

During his ministry at Ephesus, lasting from 56 to 58 A.D., the Apostle formed and avowed his purpose to visit Rome, and that purpose was confirmed by a midnight message from the Lord Himself: "As thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness to Me at Rome."

Doubtless the ardent spirit of St. Paul hoped for a quick and easy accomplishment of this sacred design, but a long postponement was decreed, and a mode of fulfilment painful and circuitous. He was arrested at Jerusalem, detained in captivity for two years, and eventually escaped only through an appeal to Cæsar, which released him from Cæsarea to confine him in Rome. At length, "Post varios casus, post tot discrimina rerum," he reached Appii Forum and the Three Taverns. There, as he received the salutations of the Roman brotherhood, the great Apostle of the Gentiles lifted up his heart to God in thanksgiving, and took courage from the past against the future. St. Luke concludes his history by narrating an incident which throws a clear light upon the

state of Christianity in Rome at the time when St. Paul arrived there. After three days' interval the Apostle summoned to his lodgings the local chiefs of Judaism, and explained to them the Gospel. The conference broke up without any satisfactory result. What the Apostle had written four years previously to the Roman Church concerning Israel was once more illustrated; the judicial hardening of Israel was already beginning.

We now turn to trace the inner life of the Church of Rome, and here our information is copious and distinct. The Epistle to the Romans supplies, obliquely, indeed, but abundantly, the materials from which to construct an image of the theology, order, and life of the Roman Christians at the dawn of history.

It is at this point that a commentary on the Epistle becomes valuable; for of the two offices of a commentator the first is to interpret the sacred writing in such a way as to show us what it meant to its first readers. It is no disparagement to Canon Sanday to say that the introduction is, perhaps, the best part of the commentary. One hundred pages, learned, luminous, and profoundly interesting, introduces his reader to the Church and Christianity of Rome, clear the ground and the air, and put us, so to speak, in the best place and posture for understanding the Epistle. This is probably the most important introduction to the Epistle to the Romans in the English language, and every lover of Christian science will thank the Professor for what he has achieved. The Church of Rome contained representatives of the three races which have left the deepest marks on the history of man. In the Latin metropolis the Greek and the Jew were present in large numbers; and the Church of the metropolis comprised them all. Its members were probably drawn at first from the humbler classes; but Dr. Sanday, by a skilful handling of the names contained at the end of the Epistle, shows that there was probably an element of persons of higher rank. Aristobulus may have been the son of Herod, and thus early may the Gospel have penetrated the precincts of royalty. It is not certain whether at this time the Roman Christians met in a single congregation, or whether the three languages and races represented as many places of meeting. The prevailing language was Greek, and accordingly St. Paul wrote to the Church of Rome not a Latin, but a Greek letter. From this we may infer that Greek was the language used when the whole Church met for the purposes of conference or of common worship. From a study of the Epistle we are able to gather what were the spiritual characteristics of the infant Church of Rome. Faith, goodness, simplicity, were renowned throughout the world as their distinctions. Concord prevailed, disturbed only by few and slight dissensions, the result rather of personal than of doctrinal differences.

There is no trace in the Epistle of organization at Rome such as we find at Corinth or at Philippi; no stated ministry is mentioned. The charismatic gifts of the Spirit certainly existed at Rome, but they held a secondary place in the estimation of the Roman believers, who formed in this respect a delightful contrast to the clamorous and licentious community at Corinth. Such is the image of that primitive Church of the Romans to which St. Paul wrote in the year of grace 58.

Two questions rise to the thoughtful mind when studying historically this wonderful document: Why did St. Paul write an Epistle to the Romans? and why did he write to the Romans the Epistle which he did? Various answers have been returned. Commentators like Bauer, who wished to show that Christianity is a product of natural causes, maintained that St. Paul wrote to the Romans to magnify the Gentiles at the expense of the Jews, and to exalt his own office as the Apostle of the Gentiles. Others have said that the Epistle was written to explain the

nature of Christianity, touching only by the way on the rivalries between Israel and the nations.

Dr. Sanday rejects the former theory, and thus opposes his authority to that of Bauer, the most tremendous antagonist of living Christianity in this century. With the second theory Dr. Sanday is in general agreement, but he will not allow us to call the Epistle to the Romans a *summa theologie*. He allows that in the main it is doctrinal, but local and contemporary conditions of the Roman Church were in the Apostle's mind when he wrote, and to some extent consciously shaped and coloured the composition.

His view of the subject may be thus paraphrased. Rome, the metropolis of the Gentile world, had long attracted the gaze of the Apostle to the Gentiles. At Ephesus his desire to visit it ripened into resolve. Only at Rome could the ministry of St. Paul find a fitting consummation; only there could he adequately discharge the debt which he owed to all men. The prospect of a personal visit seemed remote. He must on leaving Asia visit Macedonia and then Judæa, as the almoner of Greece to the Churches of Palestine. At this juncture a trusty messenger was leaving Ephesus for Rome, and by her he despatched his letter. Phœbe conveyed the precious document to the Church of the metropolis. In this view the letter to the Romans was primarily a relief to the pent-up energy and affection of St. Paul, a sort of *avant courier* of the Apostle. The view is no doubt true, but perhaps it is scarcely adequate, for it fails to tell us why St. Paul selected as the subject of his letter the doctrine of Justification by Faith. But if we realize the inspiration which moved and guided the Apostle, we may easily, without upsetting the facts of history, so supplement them as to perceive the naturalness and propriety of the selected theme.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, St. Paul fastened the gaze of his soul upon the city where was seen the triumph and perfection of unredeemed humanity in all its magnificence, in all its misery. By the light of the Spirit the Apostle pierced below the surface and the circumstance to the mischief corrupting the core. Thence his thought travelled to the redemption which grace had begun, and which glory should consummate, and which meantime should effect a remedial and renewing change. The seat and source of that renewal was the justification of man by faith in Jesus Christ. To expound justification became peculiarly natural to St. Paul when writing to the Church of Rome.

It seems somewhat surprising that a writer so cautious and learned as Professor Sanday should start on analyzing St. Paul from a passage of Mr. Matthew Arnold. That polished and ingenious writer seems to me very slenderly equipped as an interpreter of the Epistle to the Romans. Mr. Arnold's mode of examining the Epistle seems, moreover, to be highly capricious. Which parts of the Epistle, asks he, will bear scientific scrutiny, and which parts will not? Those parts which will stand this test are, in the opinion of Mr. Arnold, the parts really valuable; the others are of less value—are, perhaps, of little value. What did Mr. Arnold mean by "scientific"?

It is, however, gratifying to know that Dr. Sanday does not agree with the results determined by Mr. Arnold's scientific analysis. For this method assumes that the Epistle was the result of speculation, profound and religious, indeed, but speculation still not of inspiration; an assumption which Dr. Sanday negatives in firm though temperate terms. Moreover, this method of testing the value of our Epistle is opposed by the integrity, the logic, the coherence, of the composition. Experience and history are behind it all—the experience and the history of the great Apostle, too grand a man, too simple, too holy, to deceive or to be deceived.

If we reflect upon the contents of this Epistle and the circumstances of its composition, we can, I think, scarcely avoid the conclusion that the principal matter in Christianity is the doctrine of justification by faith. There were many other doctrines of which St. Paul might have treated—of which he did treat in other Epistles, but which he passes by in writing to the Christians at Rome: the Incarnation, the Second Advent, the nature of the Christian ministry and of the Christian Sacraments, will readily occur. Why was he reticent on themes so important? Dr. Sanday replies, Because the foundations had been laid at Rome before St. Paul's letter was received. Doubtless this was the case. Without such preliminary grounding, much of his argument would have been unintelligible. Yet, making this admission, we are still compelled to ask, Why did St. Paul insist so exclusively upon Justification, the consequences of that doctrine upon the Jews, and the fruits of it in the Christian life?

I have already tried to show that Rome offered a point of attachment for this doctrine peculiarly fitting. May we go a step further, and say that St. Paul wishing, as Professor Sanday declares, to pay the debt of a whole Christianity at Rome, paid the first instalment of that debt by his letter, and thereby has shown that the larger half of essential Christianity is the doctrine of Justification without the works of the law?

I have thus ventured to draw attention to this commentary in the hope that my words may contribute something to its deserved influence and reputation. The learned and devout authors can desire no higher reward than that their labours may help men better to understand, love, and obey this masterpiece of inspiration, and I venture to offer my humble concurrence in that desire. I may be permitted to offer a very few concluding words on the salient and specific merits of this commentary.

There may be some disadvantages connected with the plan of joint editorship followed by Dr. Sanday and Mr. Headlam. There are, however, some important gains: there is mutual aid and mutual restraint—perhaps, also, a certain enlargement of view. These may not unreasonably be held to compensate for some loss of unity, force of style, and completeness of treatment inseparable from the joint labours of even the best labourers.

The book under review is scarcely equal to the commentaries of Lightfoot, either in lucidity of exposition or in that vivid historical treatment of the sacred past in which the great Bishop of Durham is probably without a peer. Nor, for my own part, do I find here that profound insight, partly intellectual, partly spiritual, into the mind of the great Apostle which seems to me to make the commentary by Tholuck to be the model and masterpiece of Pauline exegesis. Nevertheless, Dr. Sanday and his accomplished fellow worker have brought to the interpretation of St. Paul many distinguished qualifications. Their learning is immense and solid; the extrication of the argument is extremely skilful; it is needless to say that the verbal scholarship is of a very high order.

To a candour circumspect and equitable is united a believing reverence thorough and sincere, and the results of long research and minute investigation are displayed with conspicuous clearness and modesty. Without being strictly apologetic, nor even quite so apologetic as might lawfully be wished, this work will be felt to be a distinct vindication of the historic rights of primitive Christianity.

For nearly a thousand years, from A.D. 400 to the thirteenth century, only five commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans appeared in the Christian Church. The three centuries between the Reformation and our own time have seen the publication of forty commentaries on the same book of Scripture. The contrast between the Middle Ages and the

Protestant centuries with respect to their comparative interest in St. Paul and Justification is startling and instructive. During the former period one commentary on the Romans appeared on an average every two hundred years; during the latter period one commentary on the Romans has appeared every seven or eight years. No better proof could be furnished of the impetus given by the Reformation to the study of the Bible, and no more pungent exposure of the fraudulent absurdity which calls the Middle Ages the Ages of Faith. In the long line of expositors of Holy Scripture no undistinguished place will belong to the learned authors of this Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.

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Short Notices.

The Elector King and Priest. By ANDREW SIMON LAMB. Nisbet. 1898.

THIS is a sequel to "A Briton's Birthright," and is a very forcible vindication of the Protestant character of the Church of England. It would be a valuable little book were it only for the fact that it calls attention to the "Book of Homilies" in the best possible way—viz., by giving large extracts from them in their original wording. The Homilies of our Church are hardly known to the present generation as they should be; yet, amid much questionable matter, there is a vast deal of "wholesome doctrine" to be found in them, extremely "serviceable for these times." Of course, it is to be understood that the authority of these Homilies is not binding upon Churchmen, as, for instance, the Articles are binding (*cf.* Gibson on the Thirty-nine Articles, pp. 723-728).

Daily Steps Heavenward. By MRS. AUGUSTUS A. LYNE. London: Elliot Stock.

This little book contains a text for each day in the year, with an original verse of poetry. The spirit of the latter is unexceptionable, but we must confess that the wording is trite.

Dr. J. L. Phillips. A Biographical Sketch, by his Wife. Edited by W. J. WINTLE. London: The Sunday-School Union.

Dr. James Phillips was himself the son of a Baptist missionary in India, and followed in his father's footsteps. He was educated in the United States, and we may notice in passing that a vivid account is given of the reign of mob law in New York at one time during the Civil War. He qualified as a medical doctor, and on his return to India worked mainly amongst the Santals. But his labours extended over a wide range, and he eventually became secretary of the India Sunday-School Union, dying in 1895. Many an interesting glimpse into Indian life is given us in this very full memoir of a man who was evidently faithful and earnest in no common degree. From the point of view of the general