

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

THE SUCCESSES OF AN UNSUCCESSFUL SERMON.

Text.—"Some men however did join him and believe." (Acts xvii. 34, Moffatt).

[Book of the Month: DAVID SMITH'S ST. PAUL¹ = DS. Other refs. Ramsay's *St. Paul* = R. Plummer's I *Corinthians* = P. Knowling's *Acts* = K. Lightfoot's *Notes on St. Paul's Epistles* = L. Findlay's I *Corinthians* = F. A. S. Peake's *One Vol. Comm.* = ASP. *Dict. of Apost. Ch.* = DAC. *Hastings' Dict. Bible* = DB.]

St. Paul's speech at Athens was undoubtedly disappointing in its results. "It did little or nothing to storm the enemy's citadel" (DAC. I. 110). Partly due to the place, cool and critical. "In Athens he met with opposition and contempt" (P. xiv.). "This attitude continued long after the Apostle's departure. For a century or two Athens was perhaps the chief seat of opposition to the Gospel" (P. xiv.). Perhaps, too, he felt he had been mistaken in method. "Athens was no longer endurable, and there were two special reasons which constrained Paul to take his departure. One was the shame of his ignominious failure, aggravated by bitter self-reproach. In his speech before the Council of the Areiopagos, he had committed what he now recognized as a fatal error. His mind had been 'corrupted from its simplicity toward Christ.' He had forgotten that faith's best array is 'not men's wisdom, but God's power,' and had attempted to meet philosophy with philosophy and win his hearers by 'persuasive words of wisdom.' It had proved a disastrous blunder, and he determined that he would never repeat it. Thenceforward, he would eschew 'lofty speech and wisdom,' and 'announce God's testimony,' 'knowing nothing except Jesus as Christ and that a crucified Christ,' and relying on the 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power.' He would fain quit the scene of his failure, and make a new beginning elsewhere" (DS. 148-9).

¹ *Life and Letters of St. Paul*, by Prof. David Smith. Hodder and Stoughton, 21s. A splendid modern account on the familiar lines of Lewin, Conybeare and Howson, Farrar, etc. Widely read and lucid, as always.

So also " he felt that he had gone as far as was right in the way of presenting his doctrine in a form suited to the current philosophy ; and the result had been little more than naught. When he went on from Athens to Corinth, he no longer spoke in the philosophic style " (R. 252). " The philosophic style in which he had addressed the Athenians is now abandoned " (K. 386, and see " Athens " in DAC). " It is possible that he felt he had made a mistake." Yet the results of the speech at Athens were real and lasting. Three representatives of different classes were touched.

I. THE THINKING CLASS. " His converts were few, but one of them at least was a personage of importance—Dionysius, a member of the Council of the Areiopagos " (DS. 147). " Dionysius was a member of the Council—the words can mean nothing less ; it is evident, therefore, that this convert must have been a man of some distinction, as an Areiopagite would previously have filled the office of Archon " (K. 380). Words like Acts xvii. 23–28 appealed to his philosophic mind.

II. THE THOUGHTLESS CLASS. " Of the others only one is named—a woman called Damaris. The name is apparently a variant of Damalis, which signifies ' a heifer ' ; and since it was the sort of designation which was commonly borne by Athenian courtesans, and women of good fame lived in close seclusion, it is probable that she belonged to that numerous and unhappy order ; and it may be taken as evidence of her subsequent devotion that she was counted worthy of particular mention " (DS. 147). " It was impossible, in Athenian society, for a woman of respectable position and family to have any opportunity of hearing Paul " (R. 252). Verses like xvii. 29–31 would arrest thought.

" Then to their temple Damaris would clamber,
 Stood where an idol in the lifted sky
 Bright in a light and eminent in amber
 Heard not, nor pitied her, nor made reply.

So from the soft air, infinite and pearly,
 Breathed a desire with which she could not cope,
 Could not, methinks, so eager and so early,
 Chant to her loveliness the dirge of hope.

Then I preached Christ : and when she heard the story—
 Oh, is such triumph possible to men ?
 Hardly, my King, had I beheld thy glory,
 Hardly had known Thine excellence till then."

—F. W. Myers.

III. THE INDUSTRIOUS CLASS. One other name should probably be added here, that of Stephanas, the first-fruits of Achaia ; and Athens was in Achaia (1 Cor. xvi. 15). Was he possibly a Corinthian bronze merchant with business connexions in Athens and Ephesus ? Did Acts xvii. 29 move him ?

(a) *Stephanas in Athens.* " It appears that Paul won at Athens another convert who has left an honourable name, though, since he was not an Athenian, it does not appear in the record of the Athenian ministry. Four years later, in his correspondence with the Church at Corinth, he mentions one of its leading members, Stephanas, and terms him and his household ' the first-fruits ' of his labours in the Province of Achaia. Stephanas was a Corinthian, but evidently he had been sojourning at Athens and had there encountered the Apostle and been won for Christ " (DS. 147). " It would seem that Stephanas was an earlier convert even than Crispus (xvi. 15). ' Achaia ' technically included Athens, and Stephanas may himself have been converted there with the ' others ' of Acts xvii. 34 " (P. 15). " About Stephanas (1 Cor. xvi. 15 ; i. 16) we are in doubt whether he was converted and baptized in Athens or in Corinth. He was probably a Gentile ; that he was a Corinthian convert is commonly assumed, but it is by no means certain " (P. xv.). " 1 Corinthians i. 16 is an explanation, not a correction : Stephanas, though a Corinthian, had been baptized at Athens " (DS. 245). " It happened after the departure of Silas and Timothy when Paul was at Athens alone, since he had baptized Stephanas with his own hands—an office which, like the Master, he was not accustomed to discharge. Preaching was his business, and he left the administration of baptism to his colleagues, especially, it seems, to his attendant " (DS. 147-8). Such were Mark and Timothy (Acts xiii. 5). " 1 Corinthians i. 16 was an afterthought. He was, perhaps, reminded of the omission by his amanuensis, who may have been Stephanas himself or one of his household, for they were with him at the time " (L. 156). " On second thoughts, Paul remembers that he had ' baptized the house of Stephanas ' " (F. 766). " Stephanas proved a loyal and generous friend in after years, and it was a merciful Providence which had brought him into the Apostle's life at this juncture " (DS. 148).

(b) *Stephanas in Corinth.* He and all his became a tower of strength in their native place. He welcomed Paul no doubt on his

arrival. "Paul had been exhausted by those eager months of travel and preaching and controversy and alarm, and as he fretted his heart at Athens with anxiety for his converts in Macedonia, he fell sick. It was a recurrence of his chronic malady; and while he languished alone and despised in the gay city, 'in weakness and fear and much trembling,' his thoughts turned to Stephanas, and he resolved to betake himself to Corinth and cast himself on the care of that kindly friend. It was a convenient retreat, no farther remote than Athens from Macedonia, which he still regarded as his appointed sphere, and whence he was eagerly expecting the return of his colleagues" (DS. 149). "The Stephanas family must have been of independent means; for *etaxan heautous* (*they arranged or appointed themselves*, 1 Cor. xvi. 15—made this their business) implies a systematic laying out of themselves for service, such as is possible only to those free to dispose, as they choose, of their persons and their time" (F. 950). "In Clement of Rome's Epistle, chapter xlii., we are told that the apostles, preaching from city to city, and country to country, *appointed their first-fruits*, having tested them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should believe. It would be beside our purpose to discuss the exact meaning of this passage, but it may reasonably be held that Stephanas, and perhaps some members of his household, had been appointed to a position in the nascent church at Corinth, which implied, on the one side ministry (*diakonia*), on the other side some recognition of their authority. If this was not the local ministry, in the later sense of the term, there were here the germs out of which it grew" (DB. iv. 613).

In 1 Corinthians xvi. 15, 16, Stephanas is named as a leader. "The Apostle enjoins spontaneous submission to the direction of those able and disposed to lead in good works" (F. 950). "'The saints' does not mean the poor at Jerusalem, but believers generally—the sick and needy, travellers, etc." (P. 395). "The household of Stephanas seem to have been among the first assistants of the Apostle, outside the inner circle of his chosen companions, and they were specially valuable to the work in Corinth. No doubt their work was a voluntary consecration: there is nothing to indicate an ecclesiastical office" (DAC. 525).

(c) *Stephanas in Ephesus*. In 1 Corinthians xvi. 17, Stephanas has come on a deputation. "Stephanas himself was one of the

deputation and was, therefore, a trusted leader" (DAC. 525). 1 Corinthians xvi. 18, "describes the restful effect of friendly converse and sympathy, realizing that the comfort of heart received by himself will react upon his friends at Corinth: the Corinthians will be cheered to know that their fellowship, in the persons of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, has so greatly cheered him at a time of weariness and heavy trial" (F. 951). "It made up to Paul *for the absence of the Corinthians*, supplying him, representatively, with their desired society" (F. 951). "Of the Church in Athens we hear no more; it is perhaps included in 1 Corinthians i. 2" (ASP. 796). So also K. 382 perhaps "included in 'whole of Achaia' (2 Cor. i. 1).

Yet the names of these three "and others," come down through the ages as a proof that the seed of the Gospel, when sowed on the top of the mountains, yields its handful of corn to go into the sheaf of Christ's first-fruits, even though the mountain be Parnassus or the Acropolis.

And Athens, home of culture, and auditorium of St. Paul's most elaborate evangelistic address, is not left outside when the Lord writes up His people, but says of Dionysius and Damaris and Stephanas—"this one was born there."

CORRESPONDENCE

CHANGES IN THE COMMUNION SERVICE.

To the Editor of the CHURCHMAN.

SIR,—I have just come across an article in your April number by the Bishop of Manchester on the proposed alterations in the Communion Service. In it I find the statement that the Invocation of the Holy Spirit on the elements "is admittedly an innovation which cannot be attested earlier than the middle of the fourth century." The Bishop is doubtless relying on the late Mr. E. Bishop's *Moment of Consecration*, published in 1909. But a discovery has been made since which has completely altered the aspect of the case. The work commonly called the "*Egyptian Church Order*" is now known to have been written by Hippolytus of Rome, and therefore earlier than the year 235. It contains the earliest extant Prayer of Consecration, and in this there is a distinct Invocation of the Holy Ghost on the elements. Hence such an Invocation is at least as early as the first half of the third century, and the title ("*The Apostolic Tradition*") which Hippolytus gave to his work may well lead us to believe that it was no novelty then.

Trusting that you will, in the interests of truth, insert this letter,

Yours faithfully,

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[See Note of the Month on this letter.—ED.]