

**THE RECORDS AND LETTERS OF THE
APOSTOLIC AGE: THE NEW
TESTAMENT, ACTS, EPISTLES, AND
REVELATION IN THE VERSION OF 1881,
ARRANGED FOR HISTORICAL STUDY**

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The Records and Letters of the Apostolic Age: The New Testament, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation in the Version of 1881, Arranged for Historical Study by Ernest de Witt Burton

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ERNEST DE WITT BURTON

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THE APOSTOLIC AGE

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PREFACE.

THE purpose of this book is to promote the historical study of the Apostolic Age. It aims to perform in respect to the early history of the Christian Church a service corresponding to that which the "Harmony of the Gospels," recently put out by Professor William Arnold Stevens and myself, sought to render in respect to the Life of Christ. Like that book, it endeavors, not to indicate the solution of all the historical problems presented by the New Testament documents pertaining to the period under consideration, but to present the material in convenient form for historical study.

The New Testament sources for the history of the Apostolic Age are of three kinds: narrative, epistolary, and apocalyptic.* Of the first class, we have but one work, the book of Acts; of the third also there is but one example, the book of Revelation; the letters are twenty-one in number.

The task undertaken by the present work in reference to this material is threefold. First, it aims to give to each of the several letters and the Revelation a position, in relation to one another and to the narrative of the Acts, corresponding to the point in the history at which each was written. Secondly, it seeks to glean from the letters, and from the speeches in the book of Acts, all the narrative material they contain, and to place this at the points corresponding to the time of the events narrated. Thirdly, it attempts to divide the whole history into its natural periods and divisions.

Each of these portions of the task presents its own difficulties. Respecting the place of the several epistles in the history, there still remain some problems which must be regarded as in process of investigation rather than as already solved. Among the most difficult are those which involve the question of authorship and genuineness, as well as that of date. The plan of this work renders it impossible to avoid assuming some position upon these latter questions, yet it is

*The gospels indeed bear valuable testimony to the currents of thought in this period. But this testimony respecting the Apostolic Age is so veiled and indirect, the reference to the gospel period of New Testament history so direct and obvious, that it has seemed best not to include the text of the gospels in the present work.

no part of its purpose to discuss them; this task belongs to works on New Testament Introduction. For the purposes of this work it is assumed that the epistles of the New Testament and the book of Revelation are genuine writings of the Apostolic Age, and that the claims respecting authorship made in these books themselves are true. This course is indeed the one which is most congenial to my own opinions. While the evidence, or lack of evidence, in a few cases certainly justifies the treatment of the question of genuineness as an open one, such examination and estimation of it as I have been able to make has not led me to a positive conclusion against the genuineness of any of the books with which we here have to do. Yet I have constructed the work on this basis not so much for the purpose of expressing an opinion on each of the points at issue as because, in my judgment, it best adapts the book to the uses for which it is intended. The ordinary student of the Bible, not specially trained in Biblical science, may well make the genuineness of the New Testament books his working hypothesis at least. The mature scholar, if he has reached the conclusion that all the New Testament books here under consideration are genuine, will of course desire them assigned to a place consistent with this conclusion. If he has reached a different conclusion in any case, the plan here adopted will at least furnish him a basis of criticism, in an arrangement whose faultiness he will be able to point out.

The general purpose of the work, to exhibit in a form convenient for study all the material (outside the gospels) furnished by the New Testament for the construction of the history of the Apostolic Age, requires that the general historical framework be based mainly upon the book of Acts, since this alone of our sources is adapted by its narrative character and consecutive arrangement to furnish such a framework. On the other hand, the valuable contributory narrative material furnished by the letters, and the historical statements contained in the speeches preserved in the book of Acts, require also to be brought into relation with the narrative of Acts pertaining to the same period or event, and for practical convenience to be placed before the eye in immediate connection with it. This contributory material from the letters and speeches is in some instances printed at the bottom of the page, its general relation to the matter above being indicated by the use of superior letters. In other cases it is introduced into the body of the section, being printed in parallel columns with the direct narrative in Acts when there is such.

Between those two groups of passages there is no sharp line of distinction in character. In general I have placed the material taken from the speeches and letters above the line, in the body of the section, when such material has a definitely narrative form, so that it constitutes

a distinct account of the event. When the information is conveyed rather incidentally, by way of allusion or reminiscence, I have placed it below the line. The fact that a passage is thus employed twice, once at the point corresponding to the writing of the letter or the utterance of the speech, once in the position corresponding to the time of the event narrated, is indicated, in the latter case, by printing the reference to it (but not the text itself) in brackets, provided the passage stands in the body of the section. If it is printed below the line, the brackets are omitted, the position sufficiently indicating that it is a repeated passage. It should be distinctly observed that placing a passage below the line, or printing the reference to it in brackets, by no means marks it as of secondary importance or of inferior value. For the construction of the history of this period many of these passages, being derived from the indisputably genuine letters of the New Testament, and hence in the strictest sense original sources, are of the highest historical value.

In the division of the material and the history into parts, chapters, and sections, the aim has been to draw the dividing lines at the points of real transition in the history, so far as these can be discovered, and to give each part, chapter, and section a correct descriptive title. In this attempt no more than approximate success is possible. The meagreness of the material for some portions of the history forbids us to speak confidently concerning their real character as periods of Christian history. This is conspicuously true of the later years of the Apostolic Age, where the book of Acts fails us. The only practicable course is to base the division of the history and the titles of the several divisions on the existing material, interpreted in the light of such information as we possess. What, for example, the real character of Christian history in the last thirty years of the first century was, we have little means of knowing. From the point of view of the material which we possess, these years can perhaps hardly be described more exactly than as "the last years of the apostle John." In the determination of the transition points, the division of the narrative as indicated in the book of Acts has been largely influential for the periods covered by that book. Yet in a few instances, especially where the narrative of the Acts is very condensed, it has been necessary to run the line separating sections, and in one instance the dividing line between chapters, through a paragraph of the book of Acts. In these cases a note is added at the end of the section showing where the remainder of the paragraph is to be found. See sections 47 and 48; also 51, 52, and 53. In a few cases it has also seemed necessary to repeat a transition sentence in part or in whole. Words thus repeated are bracketed in the section in which they are detached from the paragraph to which they properly belong. In the foot-notes, however, no attempt has been made to indicate these interruptions of the paragraph

structure, most of these passages being in their nature detached excerpts.

The version of 1881 has been chosen for its manifest superiority to any other English version in common use. Its translation, paragraph divisions, and marginal readings have been retained, not as incapable of improvement, but as on the whole better serving the interests of those who, it is thought, will use this book than any that could be substituted for them.

The notes at the end of the volume are intended to facilitate the use of the book for historical study. Yet they by no means undertake to discuss all the questions necessarily raised by such study or to treat exhaustively those which are considered. Their aim is limited almost wholly to the endeavor to make more clear than can be done by the arrangement of the material upon the page, the relation between the different documents and events which that arrangement is intended to suggest, and to state briefly the reasons for the positions assigned to the several documents.

ERNEST D. BURTON.

CHICAGO, October, 1895.

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