

The Destination of the First Epistle of Peter.

BY THE REV. F. H. DURNFORD, BURRA, S. AUSTRALIA.

'PETER, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.'

The first verse of the first chapter of the First Epistle of Peter consists in the Greek of thirteen words. But behind and in those thirteen words, as in all the words of the New Testament, there is a great deal more than appears at the first reading of them. And here one is led to ask this question, How far are expositions and explanations of the texts of the Bible really needed? What is the real value of the commentary? How much, for instance—to take an example from the thirteen words referred to—need we know about the five places mentioned in the Epistle? How far is it worth the while of the average Biblical reader to know exactly where Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia are?

When the reader of a commentary on a book of the Bible spends much time in learning about such a point, and the author of the commentary still more time, is that time well spent? The answer to that question may be given in the following way.

(1) Of all the sciences which illuminate the text of Holy Scripture few throw greater light on it than the Science of Historical Geography. Works such as G. A. Smith's *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, or C. F. Kent's *Biblical Geography and History*, are of the utmost value for a right interpretation of the Bible.

(2) In the particular case of the five places in question, a more careful inquiry into their history reveals much about the conditions of the times when the First Epistle of Peter and the other books of the New Testament were written.

The words have been, as a matter of fact, commented on by famous scholars.

Ramsay has written the five articles on the places in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*. Bigg in the 'International Critical Commentary' thought it worth while to write special pages about them in his introduction. And Hort, in his famous unfinished work on 1 Peter, wrote a special Excursus on the Provinces of Asia Minor, included

in St. Peter's Address. What a wealth of valuable information about the History and Organization of the Early Church can be obtained from the mass of material contained in those three lots of writings.

(3) All five names occur in other places in the New Testament, which fact alone opens up a wider field to the reader. For one of the best ways of commentating on a word in the Bible is to note where it occurs in different texts, and how often it is used in the Bible as a whole.

(4) If some one should say, 'Other things are more important,' there need not be any fear that other great Church matters like the Cause of Missions, or Social Service at home, will suffer through Christians spending their time in Biblical study.

It is a remarkable fact how zeal for such matters goes hand in hand with scholarship and minute inquiry. Few men have done more for the Anglican Church, whether in Foreign Missions or Social Service at home, than Brooke Foss Westcott—yet it was Westcott who edited the New Testament, and in his commentaries would toil over the most minute detail.

So far then from thinking it not worth while—or getting Biblical study out of proportion to other things—to inquire minutely, the student will find it most profitable to make exhaustive inquiries into Biblical words—even into the names of provinces and islands. To take one instance. It adds more interest to the field which St. Barnabas sold for the benefit of the Church when we know—as Furneaux has pointed out for us in his recent work on the Acts—that Cyprus was a favourite residential spot and the land there was more valuable.

Let us then consider the five districts to which Peter addresses his letter. Pontus and Bithynia go closely together. For in the first century A.D. the Roman province of Bithynia was officially known as Bithynia Pontus. This consisted of the northern part of what is now Asia Minor—forming the southern shore of the Black Sea. Pontus was the ancient kingdom of Mithridates, and on its shores were the ports of Amastris, Sinope, and Amisos.

The river Halys ran through part of the province. Pontus is mentioned in two other places in the New Testament. In Ac 2⁹ it is recorded that dwellers in Pontus were among the devout men from every nation under heaven who were assembled at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Inhabitants, then, of the country to which Peter was addressing his letter, would have already heard Peter in his speech at Jerusalem. This would apply also to the dwellers in the provinces of Cappadocia and Asia who were also at Jerusalem on the occasion of the first Whitsunday. Then Pontus is mentioned again in Ac 18². When 'Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth, he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a man of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome; and because he was of the same trade, he abode with them, and they wrought; for by their trade they were tent-makers.'

Aquila, though in recent times resident in Rome, was a provincial from Pontus, and not one who originally belonged to the city. Ramsay—in an interesting note on the name of Pontus in the New Testament—points out that he was not, as some have thought, a slave from Pontus who had been set free—a Roman freedman—as the edict of Claudius expelling the Jews would not have applied to him if he had been a Roman freedman. Being a Jew by nation, a provincial residing at Rome, he was expelled by the terms of the edict. It is interesting also to know that Pontus was like Cilicia, a district with abundant pasturage for goats, and numbered tent-making among its industries. It may be remarked—though the point is not of great importance—that the name Pontus was used in an official sense, meaning the Roman province of Bithynia Pontus, and also in a geographical and more popular sense, meaning the ancient kingdom of Polemon, and other regions as well. But as Ramsay says: 'In 1 P 1¹ Pontus is clearly the province. Few could doubt this, and Hort has proved it beyond question in his posthumous edition of part of this Epistle.'

The name Galatia is, one need scarcely say, a well-known one in the New Testament, and, as we have seen, dwellers from Cappadocia would have heard St. Peter preach at Pentecost. The Roman province of Asia included all the western part of Asia Minor from Bithynia in the north to

Lycia in the south. It may be noted that a convenient map of these districts is to be found in the Extra Volume of Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.

One other name yet remains to be commented on—and that perhaps the most interesting of all—Bithynia, for it was a word to be afterwards made famous in Pliny's classical letter. Bithynia is mentioned again in Ac 16⁷. Paul and Silas on the second missionary journey went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden of the Holy Ghost to speak the word in Asia. And when they were come over against Mysia they assayed to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not.

This mention of Bithynia is important—for around it centres a question as to the number, state, and condition of the Christians in Asia Minor during the years 58–64, between which dates the Epistle of Peter was most likely written. Why was St. Paul forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia and Bithynia?

'The Holy Ghost,' writes Bigg, 'is Wisdom, and there must have been some reason for this prohibition. The scholar Weiss has this suggestion, that other preachers were already at work' in the forbidden regions, and that it was neither necessary nor desirable that St. Paul should direct his energies thitherwards. It may have been that St. Paul was merely being called to go straight on and cross the sea to Europe as he did; but the conjecture of Weiss is worth considering.

In any case we are met with this intensely interesting and perhaps startling fact, that while Paul had founded and written to various Church congregations in different parts of Asia Minor, there were also scattered all over Asia Minor, in the provinces of Bithynia, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Asia, Church congregations written to by St. Peter as well. Congregations which he calls 'the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion.' That brings us on to a further important question, Who were these 'elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion'? What was the state of Christianity in Asia Minor in the year 60? What was the Church like in these Roman provinces thirty years after the Crucifixion? What kind of people were they to whom Peter's Epistle was originally addressed? The following answer may be given. The word Dispersion was a term used to describe the Jews who had been scattered among the nations

since the time of the Captivity. It comes in four other passages which throw light on the word. James begins his Epistle with a greeting to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion. In St. John's Gospel (7⁸⁵) we are told, 'The Jews therefore said among themselves of Christ, Whither will this man go that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?' In Zephaniah (3¹⁰) we read of the daughter of my dispersed, and in Isaiah (11¹²) of the dispersed in Judah. Now in Asia Minor Jews had been domiciled from an early date. In the fourth century B.C. Aristotle had met a Jew who was Hellenic not in language but in soul. Antiochus the Great had settled 2000 Jewish families from Mesopotamia and Babylon in Phrygia and Lydia. This we learn from Josephus. In 138 B.C. the Roman Senate wrote on behalf of the Jews to the kings of Pergamos and Cappadocia. A reference to this is in the First Book of Maccabees (chap. 15). Agrippa in a letter to Caligula says there were numerous Jewish settlements in Pamphylia and Cilicia. Petronius says that Jews abounded in every city of Asia and Syria. What, therefore, do these facts signify? Surely that the Christian congregations to which Peter writes would be drawn largely from the Jews of the Dispersion in Asia Minor. The privileges which God allowed to the chosen people would pass on in the natural course to the Christian brotherhood. On the other hand some of the primitive Churches may have been exclusively Gentile—composed of

those who had no knowledge of the Old Testament. This in no way minimizes the importance of the distinction between Judaism and Christianity.

The elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion then would mean those, whether Jews or Gentiles, who were called by God to be Christians. Men and women, whether Jews or Gentiles, dwelling in Asia Minor, chosen by Christ to leave their earthly home and become members of the Christian congregation.

One final question may usefully be asked before we end this exposition on the first verse of the Epistle. At what date did the news of the Christian faith find its way into these regions of Asia Minor, such as Pontus? Was there much knowledge of Christ in Asia Minor before, for instance, Paul started on his first missionary journey. No doubt the dwellers in Pontus and Cappadocia, when they returned to their native towns and villages after Pentecost, would spread the Gospel. As Bigg pointedly remarks, 'Among the 3000 souls who received baptism at the time of that great outpouring of the Spirit there must have been many who went home and preached the new faith. Very much good work must have been done by obscure missionaries of whom we have no record at all.'

Pilgrims, chapmen, traders of all kinds, soldiers, and subordinate officials played a part in the dissemination of the gospel, and there was probably no corner of the empire where Christianity had not been heard of within a very few years.

In the Study.

Rizpah.

A STUDY IN MOTHERHOOD.

'And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest upon them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.'—2 S 21¹⁰.

RIZPAH is one of the great tragic figures of the Old Testament narrative. Her story is the last chapter of a blood-feud, such as often went on from one generation to another among the Eastern races of long ago; such indeed as may still be found in lands where men's blood is hot and their

instinct of revenge deep and passionate. There are two elements in the situation, both of which are strange to us.

1. *The judicial death of the innocent.* A modern situation requires that the man who dies shall at least have violated the law. But the sons of Rizpah are perfectly blameless; they die, not because they have broken a law, but in response to a grim and mysterious demand that comes from a dark superstition, victims to the stern and unethical powers which, like the Greek Até and Nemesis, sit and work behind the arras of history.

2. *The refusal of rites of burial.* This was one of the favourite tragic themes of the ancient world.