

DANGERS OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

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Dangers of the Apostolic age by James Moorhouse

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JAMES MOORHOUSE

**DANGERS OF THE
APOSTOLIC AGE**

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OF THE
APOSTOLIC AGE.

BY THE
RIGHT REV. JAMES MOORHOUSE, D.D.,
BISHOP OF MANCHESTER.

NEW YORK:
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2 AND 3, BIBLE HOUSE.
1891.

To

MY DEAR WIFE,

TO WHOSE LOVING AND UNTIRING HELP
I OWE MUCH OF THE LEISURE WHICH I HAVE
EMPLOYED IN THEIR COMPOSITION,
I DEDICATE THESE LECTURES.

P R E F A C E.

THE dangers of the Christian Church in the Apostolic age, as they are revealed to us in the New Testament, seem to me to have been mainly the three following.

(1) The danger that the Church might be narrowed, in its doctrine and practice, by the determination of the Judaizing party within it to insist that all should enter it by the way of circumcision, and that all should hold their right of membership only on condition of observing the whole Law of Moses. This party looked upon the Gospel as a reformed and spiritualized edition of the Law, and upon the Christian Church as a somewhat liberalized form of the ancient Jewish communion. Had these pretensions been admitted, every Gentile, in order to become a Christian, must first practically have become a Jew, and have taken upon himself all the burdensome obligations of the Mosaic law. To such requirements the Gentile world would never have submitted, and the Church would have been strangled in its cradle.

Worst of all, the spiritual freedom of the Gospel would have been first obscured and then destroyed, and the world would have lost its greatest spiritual treasure, before even it knew what it was losing.

To avert calamities so terrible, St. Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians, attacking the nascent error where it had gained greatest acceptance and where it threatened the most fatal consequences.

(2) The second danger by which the Apostolic Church was threatened had a mainly Gentile source. It arose, not from a jealous and exclusive Judaism, but from what thought itself a liberal and enlightened philosophy. The difficulty was keenly felt in the Apostolic age, as it is felt by many still, of reconciling the omnipotence of God with the existence of moral and physical evil. Gnostic thinkers were already endeavouring to minimize this difficulty by interposing between the Divine Source of life and the manifestations therein of pain and sin, a series of secondary beings, to the later and less spiritual of whom, and not to God, the causing of evil might be attributed.

St. Paul attacked this error in the Epistle to the Colossians, claiming therein for God His unimpaired right of universal sovereignty, and pointing for the solution of the terrible problem of evil to a redemption eternally designed, and as universal as the evil which it was wrought to remedy.

PREFACE.

(3) The third danger was one which was rather experienced by the Jewish Christians than caused by them. As the slow years wore on without any visible return of the Son of God in power and great glory, Jewish Christians whose faith had been largely coloured, if not mainly supported, by the expectation of such a return, began to be weary and faint in their minds. If their hope had been deceived in this respect, they asked themselves, could they trust it in any other? Towards the close of the seventh decade of the Christian era, while their minds were in this state of doubt and perplexity, they were stirred to the depth of their souls by the approach of the great Jewish rebellion. Should they take no part in it? Should they leave their brethren unhelped to meet the tremendous shock of the Roman? This question, agitating at any time, was doubly formidable now, when their belief in Christ and in His promises had been rudely shaken. They were tempted accordingly to abandon the faith and the very name of Christian, and as Jews pure and simple, to stand or fall, live or die, with their brethren after the flesh. The danger was of apostasy, and the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to meet it.

I have written the three courses of lectures which follow, in the hope of giving to those who have neither access to many books nor much time for study, as vivid