THE DATES OF THE PASTORAL EPISTLES: TWO ESSAYS

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TWO ESSAYS

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THESE two essays were contributed to the "Record" newspaper some eighteen months ago.

Though the usual view of those who accept the Pastoral Epistles as the work of St. Paul is to date them between the two Roman imprisonments, yet there have, of course, been some who, while agreeing as to their genuineness, have preferred an earlier date. But the exact chronological setting given them in these papers has not, so far as I am aware, been previously suggested.

I.

THE Pastoral Epistles are usually dated, by those who accept them as St. Paul's, as subsequent to the first Roman imprisonment. Indeed, it has been claimed for this date that it alone supplies a satisfactory basis of defence against the denial of the Pauline authorship, and the consequent assertion that they are either wholly, or very largely, barefaced and scandalous forgeries. "It may be safely predicted," says the late Bishop of Durham, "that the alternative of placing them at the close of the Apostle's life, or of abandoning the Pauline authorship, will be accepted by both impugners and defenders alike as common ground."[1] The prophecy does, indeed, date from the year 1862, but it may be inferred that those who are responsible for the posthumous *Biblical Essays* would not have allowed any statement to pass which they had reason to suspect was contrary to the Bishop's later mind, and the words may

[1] *Biblical Essays*, p. 400.

therefore be taken as representing his continuous view. But it is none the less allowable to suggest that this trend of opinion, in favour of a very late date, among the apologists of the genuineness and canonicity of these Epistles is not supported by a sufficient balance of argument to justify it, and that the theories of an earlier composition are not, after all, to be sacrificed too readily.

That in any event these three letters are Pauline is a supposition which has behind it a large weight of evidence. They are classed by Eusebius among the undisputed books, and it is easy to trace Christian opinion about them back for a previous hundred years and more, and to show that, before the end of the second century, their position as part of the canon of Scripture, and as the handiwork of the Apostle whose name they bear, was no less assured than in the days of the famous historian. Even the linguistic peculiarities, of which they are undoubtedly full—though it is easy to exaggerate their number and character—really point to St. Paul as the fountain from which they come. For a forger would have been at pains to keep as closely

as possible to the admitted style of the writer whose name he was fraudulently assuming, and would not have launched out into what is to some extent a new vocabulary. Much less would he have succeeded in combining with this verbal unfaithfulness extraordinary fidelity to the Pauline spirit. To his success in reproducing what the Apostle's mind would have been under such circumstances, even Renan bears witness: "Nous usons de cette épître comme d'une sorte de roman historique, fait avec un sentiment très juste de la situation de Paul en ses derniers temps."[1] But this just appreciation of the Apostle's circumstances would surely have gone hand in hand with a certain measure of capacity for imitating the Apostle's literary style, and it is difficult to reconcile, as the theory of forgery requires us to do, the great skill in the one respect with the serious blundering in the other. The forger might have caught the Apostle's style, but have missed the inner nature. Is it easy to believe that he was clever enough to master the inner nature, but not clever enough to copy

[1] *L'Antechrist*, 103, qu. in Salmon's Introd., 397.

the externalities of literary manner? Such a passage, too, as 1 Timothy i. 15, 16, is not easily associated by an unprejudiced mind with a forger's pen,[1] while such a chapter as 2 Timothy iv. bears genuineness written on its face. It is inconceivable that such depth and beauty of feeling are simulated. It is equally inconceivable that the details, such as the cloak at Troas, are fictitious. The frequent allusions, too, to individuals—"with the exception of the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans there is no part of the New Testament so rich in personal details as these Epistles"[2]—point the same way. Even the change of attitude towards marriage (*cf.* 1 Cor. vii. 40; or 1 Cor. vii. 34, with 1 Tim. v. 14)—though it is not

[1] Davidson (Introd. to N. T.), suggests that 1 Timothy i. 13, 15, are marks of spuriousness, on the ground of an allusion in Barnabas, ch. v. to the extreme sinfulness of the Apostles before their call. The allusion is as follows:—"But when He chose His own Apostles, who were to preach His Gospel [He did so from among those] who were sinners above all sin, that He might show He came 'not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.'" It seems but a poor reason for seeing a trace of forgery where most see only the remorse, which usually was kept under such strict control and reserve, breaking out in a letter to an intimate disciple.

[2] Salmon's Introd., 410.