

SHORT NOTES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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HENRY DOWNING

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THE ACTS OF THE
APOSTLES**

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ON THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,

INTENDED FOR THE USE OF

*Teachers in Parish Schools, and other
Readers of the English Version.*

BY

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INCUMBENT OF ST. MARY'S, KINGSWINFORD.

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PREFACE.

THESE "Short Notes on the Acts of the Apostles" originated in a want felt by the author in his own parish school. He was asked by the teachers to recommend a commentary which would help them while preparing to give instruction in this book, then being read by the first class; but he did not know any which would meet their wants. Having in view the requirements of school-teachers especially, he determined to make an effort to supply a commentary which might be useful to the large and increasing body of fairly-educated but unlearned readers.

These notes are meant to be simply exegetical. This is not a devotional commentary, nor even a practical one in the ordinary sense of the word: it aims only at being explanatory. Moreover, although the compiler has given his own best efforts, he has used throughout, to a great extent, the labours of others, especially modern German commentators, adapting their

explanations to the English Version, and to the use of English readers. He is under the greatest obligation to Meyer, Olshausen, Von Gerlach, Baumgarten, and Neander, but especially the first-named.

The view put forth of the teaching of the Acts is (it is hoped) in entire accordance with the doctrines of that branch of Christ's Church of which it is the writer's privilege to be a member. And he trusts that, in its small measure, the present explanation of this portion of Holy Scripture may be permitted to help teachers of schools and others, who have not the opportunity of studying more full and crudite commentaries, to the better understanding of this Book of God's written word.

KINGSWINFORD,
March, 1860.

INTRODUCTION.

THE writer of this book, the acts or doings of the Apostles, was St. Luke the Evangelist. It was addressed to the same person as his Gospel, (Acts i. 1; St. Luke i. 3,) viz. Theophilus, who is thought to have been an Italian of some distinction. The place where St. Luke composed this narrative is uncertain. And the time of its composition can only be conjectured; most likely it was written soon after the Gospel which bears his name, probably after the first captivity of St. Paul in Rome, about A.D. 64.

It is evident that St. Luke was an eye-witness of much which he relates; and it is supposed that he joined St. Paul on his first journey into Europe, (Acts xvi. 10,) and was his companion at least until his release from prison. The Acts of the Apostles supplies to the Church of Christ an invaluable history; it tells us of the beginning and first struggles of the early Church, of the spread of the Gospel, of its general rejection by the Jews, of its offer to the Gentiles. The character of the mis-

sionary efforts of the Apostles affords an example to all ages.

In reading this book reference should be made as much as possible to the letters of St. Paul, as the Epistles and the Acts mutually throw light on each other: and without a careful study of both no correct notion of the character and state of the Apostolic Church can be formed.

Its contents may thus be classed:—

I. The miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, with the preliminary events which took place from our Lord's ascension to that day, ch. i., ii.

II. The doings of the Apostles in Jerusalem and Samaria among those of the circumcision, and the conversion of Saul, ch. iii.—ix., xii.

III. The doings in Casarea, and the reception of the Gentiles, ch. x., xi.

IV. The first preaching among the Gentiles of Barnabas and Paul, ch. xiii., xiv.

V. The council at Jerusalem on the question of the observance of Jewish rites by Gentile converts, ch. xv.

VI. A second journeying of St. Paul, ch. xvi.—xix.

VII. His third journeying until his arrival at Rome, ch. xix. 21—xxviii.

It is a matter of some surprise that this most important book should have received less attentive study at the hands of Christians than the other writings of the New Testament; at least such was the complaint of St. Chrysostom in his day. That eloquent Father wrote fifty-five Homilies on the Acts. Like his other writings, they are full of pious instruction, but are not esteemed equal to his Homilies on St. Matthew and on St. Paul's Epistles. In modern times some greater attention has been paid to the explanation of this history, especially by commentators in Germany. A chronological table of the principal events recorded is added at the end.