

**SHORT NOTES ON ST. JOHN'S
GOSPEL, INTENDED FOR THE USE
OF TEACHERS IN PARISH
SCHOOLS, AND OTHER READERS
OF THE ENGLISH VERSION**

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Short Notes on St. John's Gospel, Intended for the Use of Teachers in Parish Schools, and Other Readers of the English Version by Henry Downing

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SHORT NOTES
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ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL,

INTENDED FOR THE USE OF

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

BY

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PREFACE.

THE "Short Notes" on St. John's Gospel are exactly on the same plan as those on the Acts, already published. They seek to explain such difficulties as an intelligent reader of the English Version is likely to meet with, and to afford such explanation of the text as he may require; and it is hoped that to attentive students of the New Testament in English such assistance will be useful and acceptable. They are essentially "Short" Notes, intended in places to be suggestive as well as explanatory. The writer has tried to compress in as small a space as possible as much matter as he could. He hopes, should the two small volumes (on the Acts and St. John) attain the object in view, to put out shortly, on the same plan, two others,—one on St. Matthew's Gospel, another on St. Mark and St. Luke, thus making a connected set of such Short Notes.

KINGSWINFORD,

Sept. 1861.

INTRODUCTION.

ST. JOHN the Evangelist was the son of the Galilean fisherman Zebedee, and of Salome. His parents were probably in easy circumstances of life. We may gather this from certain notices in the Gospels. We read (St. Mark i. 20) of Zebedee's "hired servants;" we find that Salome was one of the women who ministered to our Lord of their substance, (St. Matt. xxvii. 56; comp. St. Luke viii. 3); that St. John, as it appears, owned a house in Jerusalem, (St. John xix. 27,) and was acquainted with the high-priest, (ch. xviii. 15,) which shews he belonged to a rank of life somewhat higher than that of the rest of the disciples. Of school-learning, probably he had received little. He is reckoned, (Acts iv. 13,) with St. Peter, among the class of unlearned men; but his religious character developed itself early. Of his father Zebedee we know little or nothing. He does not appear to have been a disciple of Christ's, and we may conclude he had not, like his sons, the heart to leave all and follow Him. But Salome was a devout follower. From his mother would St. John learn, as so many other saints have

done, the first lessons of the love of God. And so on the first entrance of the Baptist on his mission, St. John attached himself as a disciple, and received baptism from him. He heard the Baptist's witness concerning Christ, (St. John i. 35); this was the means of his being brought to follow Christ. He however returned to Galilee, and to his occupation as fisherman, but was soon afterwards directly called to be a disciple, (see St. Matt. iv. 21; St. Luke v. 1—11,) and chosen an apostle, (St. Luke vi.) Among the apostles, he together with his brother James, St. Andrew, and St. Peter, formed the circle most closely round our Lord. And of the four, he was honoured with especial marks of Christ's love. He is expressly called "the disciple whom Jesus loved," (St. John xiii. 23, also xxi. 20,) and to his care was committed the Blessed Virgin Mother, (ch. xix. 26, 27). After the Ascension, St. John dwelt in Jerusalem. He is mentioned in Acts viii. 14, as undertaking a mission-journey into Samaria. On the occasion of St. Paul's visit (Gal. i. 19) he must have been absent from the city. How long he remained in Jerusalem is uncertain. It is not clear whether, when St. Paul came up to Jerusalem for the last time, he was living there, for he is not mentioned in Acts xxi. 18; yet the argument from this absence of mention is not conclusive.

Later on he took up his abode in Ephesus, (Euseb. H. E. iii. 23,) probably in the year 65. The esteem and reverence in which he was held may be illustrated by an expression which is preserved by Eusebius out of an old writer concerning him, viz. that he "was a priest who bore the sacerdotal plate*."

From Ephesus he was banished to Patmos, in the Egean Sea, where he wrote the Apocalypse; (Rev. i. 9). An old tradition says that he was summoned to Rome in the reign of Domitian, and thrown into a vessel of boiling oil, and miraculously escaped unhurt, and was then carried to Patmos. There is a beautiful story told by Clement of Alexandria, characteristic of the apostle of divine love. He committed the charge of a young convert to a bishop, in the neighbourhood of Ephesus. After a time he pays the bishop a visit, and one of his first inquiries is about his young friend. He learns to his sorrow and consternation that the young man has fallen into habits of vice, in fact, has become a robber, and the cap-

* τὸ πέλαιον is the word in Polycrates here quoted by Eusebius. The LXX so translate the Hebrew word in Exod. xxviii. 36, which properly signifies "a flower," but in our version is rendered "a plate," and afterwards (Exod. xxxix. 30) is called "a plate of the holy crown." "It was a long plate of gold, two fingers, and reached from one ear of the priest to the other," says Maimonides, in his treatise on the Implements of the Sanctuary, ch. ix. sect. 1. The great holiness, the priestly sanctity of St. John, is intended to be shewn by this expression.

tain of a set of bandits. He goes at once to seek the robbers; as soon as the former disciple recognises his master, he runs away and tries to escape. St. John pursues, catches him, and does not leave him until he has brought him back to the fold of the Church. There is another well-known anecdote, illustrative of the same "love of the brethren" which burned so brightly in this apostle: how, when too old to preach, he was carried daily into the Christian assembly, and repeated each time the same words—"Little children, love one another." And when asked why he always said the same thing, he replied, "Because this is the Lord's commandment, and he who has thoroughly learned to practise this, has learned to practise all." St. John died at Ephesus, at a great age, past ninety according to Irenæus, in the reign of the Emperor Trajan.

This Gospel was written at Ephesus. It was composed during the last years of the Apostle's life, after the deaths of St. Paul and St. Peter, and after the destruction of Jerusalem,—probably about the year 80 of the Christian era.

This Gospel differs (as every reader is aware) from the other three in style and manner. It was an opinion of the early Church, (Euseb. iii. 24,) that it was composed in order to supply sayings of our Lord which were omitted by the others, and matters

which did not fall in with the design of their narratives, and that thus the Church might possess a perfect delineation of the life on earth of the Incarnate Word. However that may be, it is certain that St. John is occupied more in recording the sayings than in recounting the doings of Christ. Another peculiarity of this Gospel is the absence of all parables, properly so called. Some miracles are mentioned only by St. John, as that of the water made wine at the marriage-feast in Cana of Galilee, and the raising of Lazarus. The style, again, of this Gospel is remarkable for simplicity. The difficulty of it consists not in understanding the meaning of the words, but in fathoming the depth of what the Apostle says. In this union of simplicity and depth the Evangelist stands alone of all writers. The emblem of his Gospel was the eagle, signifying that the soaring flight and piercing sight of that bird aptly represented the characteristics of the Gospel according to St. John.