

EPISTLES

THIS form did not find much favour with the makers of apocrypha. True, without going into the more destructive theories which would deny St. Paul all but four of the Epistles—or, all the Epistles which go under his name—many critics regard the Pastoral Epistles as, in their present form, not genuine writings of his, and a yet larger consensus is against the authenticity of 2 *Peter*. But, apart from possibilities of this kind, it does appear that the Epistle was on the whole too serious an effort for the forger, more liable to detection, perhaps, as a fraud, and not so likely to gain the desired popularity as a narrative or an Apocalypse. Certain it is that our apocryphal Epistles are few and not impressive. By far the most considerable is that Epistle of the Apostles which has only become known in recent years; and the greater part of this is not an Epistle but a dialogue.

One famous apocryphal Epistle will not be produced here, viz. the Letter of Christ concerning Sunday, extant in almost every European language and in many Oriental versions. It was fabled to have fallen on the altar at Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople—where not?—and is a long, very dull denunciation of what we call Sabbath-breaking, with threats of disaster to the transgressors.

Another, not famous, must also be omitted, viz. the Epistle of Titus, of which something has been said apropos of the fragments of the Acts of John, Peter, and Andrew which it contains. Apart from these quotations and others of the same kind, it is incredibly dull. I believe it to be a Manichaean writing, or possibly Paulician. It has not yet been printed in full.

LETTERS OF CHRIST AND ABGARUS

Our earliest Greek text of these—which are found in many forms—is that given by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* (i. 13), extracted, as he says, by him from the archives of Edessa relating to Abgarus, and translated from Syriac word for word:

A copy of a letter written by Abgarus the toparch to Jesus, and sent to him by means of Ananias the runner, to Jerusalem.

Abgarus Uchama the toparch to Jesus the good Saviour that hath appeared in the parts (place) of Jerusalem, greeting. I have heard concerning thee and thy cures, that they are done of thee without drugs or herbs: for, as the report goes, thou makest blind men to see again, lame to walk, and cleanest lepers, and castest out unclean spirits and devils, and those that are afflicted with long sickness thou healest, and raisest the dead. And having

heard all this of thee, I had determined one of two things, either that thou art God come down from heaven, and so doest these things, or art a Son of God that doest these things. Therefore now have I written and entreated thee to trouble thyself to come to me and heal the affliction which I have. For indeed I have heard that the Jews even murmur against thee and wish to do thee hurt. And I have a very little city but (and) comely (reverend), which is sufficient for us both.

The answer, written by Jesus, sent by Ananias the runner to Abgarus the toparch.

Blessed art thou that hast believed in me, not having seen me. For it is written concerning me that they that have seen me shall not believe in me, and that they that have not seen me shall believe and live. But concerning that which thou hast written to me, to come unto thee; it must needs be that I fulfil all things for the which I was sent here, and after fulfilling them should then be taken up unto him that sent me. And when I am taken up, I will send thee one of my disciples, to heal thine affliction and give life to thee and them that are with thee.

Later texts add a promise that where this letter is, no enemy shall prevail; and so we find the letter copied and used as an amulet. It was regarded naturally as the palladium of Edessa, but was also thought to act as a protection to individuals.

The letters form an integral part of the story of the mission of Thaddaeus and conversion of Edessa, and part of that legend is that Jesus gave the messenger of Abgarus a handkerchief miraculously imprinted with the picture of his face. Into all this we cannot enter.

LETTER OF LENTULUS

(E. von Dobschütz, *Christus-bilder* 318**)

This can hardly be earlier than the thirteenth century: probably it was written in Italy. The texts differ a good deal, especially in the introductory lines. The oldest does not present the document as a letter at all; but begins:

It is read in the annal-books of the Romans that our Lord Jesus Christ, who was called by the Gentiles the prophet of truth, was of stature . . .

Others, however, make a letter of it, with a prefatory note to this effect:

A certain Lentulus, a Roman, being an official for the Romans in the province of Judaea in the time of Tiberius Caesar, upon seeing Christ, and noting his wonderful works, his preaching, his endless miracles, and other amazing things about him, wrote thus to the Roman senate:

There hath appeared in these times, and still is, a man of great