

A SHORT BIBLE HANDBOOK

By R.T.W. Smalley

THROUGHOUT the western hemisphere the Bible is accepted as the world's greatest book. It is, indeed, the Book of Books, towering above the creations of the human mind, as a mountain towers above the work of men's hands.

You are doubtless familiar with expressions of admiration for the Bible, since they have been uttered by countless great men throughout the centuries. It is not necessary to quote them here. All that we will do is to recall the words of one distinguished Biblical scholar, who, in describing some of the work of translators and commentators, said: " There is yet one thing to do with the Bible, simply to read it."

The notes which follow are designed to encourage the reading of the Bible and to suggest the way in which the reading will give the maximum amount of pleasure and enlightenment.

VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

Bibles are available in cheap editions and there is no difficulty whatever in obtaining one. But since the Bible is the greatest book, you will be well advised to invest in the best edition you can afford. A well-bound Bible will give many years of service, and clear type and good paper add much to the pleasure of reading.

The Authorised Version (King James' Bible) is the most popular and it is worth while buying one with the marginal references. You will probably find this the most satisfactory version for reading throughout; it has found its way into the language of our race and for three hundred years its rich Anglo-Saxon English has been heard throughout the English-speaking world.

Do not, however, be without a Revised Version for reference. This version was published in 1881, and whilst preserving the essential characteristics of the Authorised Version has made numerous corrections and emendations in the text. These are in the main of small import, but where an obscurity appears in the Authorised Version it is as well to have a Revised Version at hand to compare its rendering.

There are many more modern versions, either of the whole Bible or of the New Testament, notably *Moffatt's*, *Weymouth's* and, more recently, the *Revised Standard Version* and the *New English Bible*. These are all interesting and sometimes throw a completely new light upon an old phrase. They should, however, be used not as substitutes for the earlier versions but as supplementary to them.

First of all then buy, if you do not already possess, good editions of the Authorised and Revised Versions.

READING THE BIBLE

The ideal way for studying the Bible is the one which is here recommended. It is to read daily a portion from three different books of the Bible. The three readings will take about half an hour in all and if the plan which is given with these notes is followed, the Old Testament will be read once in each year and the New Testament twice.

ITS PURPOSE AND SCOPE

We shall understand more of the Bible if we acquaint ourselves with some facts about the book which make it unique.

The most important of these has to do with its inspiration, its claim to be the word of God, revealing His will and declaring His purpose. In other words, its origins are not to be found in the genius of man but in the directing Spirit of God. So vital a distinction is made clear by the Apostle Peter who declared: "No prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1, 21, R.V.). All quotations in this booklet are from the Revised version

The evidence to support this claim is considerable and will be referred to later in these notes. The best way, indeed the only way, to verify for oneself the validity of the Bible's claim to be divinely-inspired, is to know the book, to "search the Scriptures", and in so doing to be in a position to assess its merits. It is a mistake to suppose that we can know the Bible by reading about it: we may best appreciate its value by reading the Book itself.

There is a sense of completeness about the Bible. It is an unusual history-that of man's relationship with God, past, present and future. Genesis finds its sequel and its answer in Revelation. These two books (the first and last of the Bible) tell us of the beginning and of the end of the great human experiment, if we may so term it. They are in many ways complementary one to the other. In Genesis we have a picture of man's failure and alienation from God: in Revelation a vision of blessing and reconciliation. Genesis describes the introduction of sin and its consequence-death. Revelation foresees a world purged of evil, and death for ever conquered. Genesis narrates graphically the fall of the first man-Adam; Revelation, the enthronement of man's redeemer-Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Here is the framework upon which is built the whole fabric of God's revelation. Without a knowledge of this general purpose, without a view of the end to which the human drama is moving, the present scene cannot be other than depressing. The whole problem of sin and suffering, of evil and cruelty, must go unsolved without reference to the larger issues which the Bible alone can make clear.

In all there are 66 books in the Bible, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. These books were written at different times (probably 1500 years separate the earliest from the latest writer) and by persons of widely varied character and vocation-kings, lawyers, fishermen, herdsman, taxgatherers and others.

Although so varied, it will be found that these books disclose throughout a unity of purpose, a progressive understanding of God and a developing plan of redemption, which in themselves are a powerful argument for the fact that they were written by men who were "inspired of God".

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The books of the Old Testament may be conveniently divided into three sections:

(1) Historical. (2) Poetical. (3) Prophetical.

The Historical Books

This group consists of the seventeen books from Genesis to Esther. Their scope is from the dawn of human life to the captivity of the Jews under the Babylonians, and their partial return under Cyrus the Persian in the fifth century before Christ. As arranged in the Authorised and Revised versions, these books are only in approximately chronological order.

They are historical books, but it is not a national history or even a general history. It is primarily a record of man's relationship with God, the origins of which are to be found in Genesis.

Perhaps many readers are at first disconcerted because the early part of Genesis does not present the story of Creation in the manner of a scientific text book. Genesis was not written for that purpose. It is more concerned with the facts that lie outside the field of the scientist and yet are most essential for man to know. It deals with the facts of free-will, of sin, of the fall, of the consequent condition of mortality. Scientific research has modified and will continue to modify its picture of early human life on this planet, but several thousand years of human history confirm beyond doubt the reality of the essential facts about man and his beginnings, for evil and death are still with us to remind us of their causes.

But Genesis records not only the beginnings of life, of evil and death, but the early steps towards human redemption.

Through Noah, Abraham, and the early Patriarchs we may follow the course of that redemptive work. The choice of Abraham and the natural line of his descendants, the Israelites, their bondage in Egypt, their long wanderings in the wilderness seeking the promised land, are described in Genesis and Exodus.

Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are the legal books, containing the commandments and statutes given through Moses. These laws were given to the Israelites about 1500 years before the Romans came to Britain and they constitute the code of a highly-civilised community. The worship of One God, the abhorrence of any form of idolatry or witchcraft, the encouragement of justice, and of mercy to man and beast, of truth and kindness, of hospitality, do not belong to a primitive people, but to a people chosen to make manifest their Divine choice.

The books Joshua to Esther inclusive, continue the record of Israel's chequered history for a period of about 1000 years from the time of their conquest of Canaan, through the period of the Kings to their captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians and their partial return in the time of the Medo-Persian power under Cyrus.

In these books are enshrined the unforgettable narratives of Gideon, Jephthah, Samson and Saul, through the golden age of Israel's prosperity under David and Solomon, to the division of the nation and its decline under the decadent kings of Israel and Judah.

The Poetical Books

The five poetical books are found together following Esther. They are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.

Although these books are described as poetical and in the Revised Version are printed as such, they do not contain poetical forms of rhyme or rhythm with which we are familiar in the verse of our own country. True rhyme was almost unknown in Hebrew poetry, nor was there metre as we know it, though some scholars think there was rhythm with a regular number of stresses. What then is the distinguishing mark between Hebrew prose and poetry? It is the existence in poetry of a parallelism in thought and expression. In a verse of Hebrew poetry the idea is expressed twice and sometimes three times, always with a change in the form of words or a change in the figure of speech.

" Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids; Until I find out a place for the LORD, A tabernacle for the mighty One of Jacob " (Psa. 132: 3-5).

The reader will find this parallelism present in varying forms throughout the poetical books, and it will often be found to heighten the power of the expression, as in these words from Psalm 78: 38, 39 :

" But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not:
Yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath,
" And he remembered that they were but flesh; A wind that passeth away, and ometh
not again."

In the Book of Proverbs may be mentioned three distinct uses of this parallelism:

(1) The synonymous Proverbs where there is thought correspondence as already illustrated.

" How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver."

(2) The antithetical Proverbs where two statements are set in contrast.

" A false balance is an abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight."

(3) The epithetic Proverbs where the second line elaborates the thought of the first.

" It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: For the throne is established by righteousness." " By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: And by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil".

Familiar as we are with the use of rhyme in poetry, parallelism may seem to be an unsatisfactory substitute; but to a Hebrew the clink of rhyme instead of a repetition of thought would have seemed just as strange a conception of poetry.

This feature of Hebrew poetry renders its translation singularly successful, for while rhyme and rhythm are lost in translation from one tongue to another, parallelism, residing in the thought and not the idiom, is preserved and may in consequence be appreciated in all modern languages.

Other means, such as assonance, alliteration and a kind of punning, were employed in the Hebrew by which the character of poetry was maintained, but for the most part the significance of these is destroyed in translation. Chief amongst these devices is the acrostic or alphabetical poem, of which Psalm 119 is an example. Here the initial letters of the several sections followed the order of

the alphabet, the sections devoted to each letter being approximately of the same length.

Many of the poetical books were set to music, and at the head of several of the Psalms appear instructions or notes intended for the use of the Chief Musician, while some Psalms are dedicated to the Chief Musician. The Songs of Degrees (Psalms 120-134), or Songs of Ascents as they are styled in the Revised Version, are almost certainly the songs collected for the use of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem at the annual feasts.

Though appearing together, the five books-Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs-are very different in character; they are not the only examples of Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament. The Lamentations of Jeremiah and parts of Isaiah are outstanding examples of Hebrew verse raised to its highest power.

Job is really a philosophical drama, the nearest approach indeed to formal drama found in our Bible.

Proverbs is mainly devoted to the teaching of wisdom enshrined in short cogent utterances. Ecclesiastes is both prose and poetry. The Song of Songs is an idyll of great lyrical charm.

All these books are a treasure house of ever-changing beauty and offer to the reader comfort and inspiration, counsel and guidance, which no amount of re-reading can exhaust.

The Prophetical Books

The last seventeen books of the Old Testament, from Isaiah to Malachi inclusive, make up the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The four longest of these books are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, and have become known as the Major Prophets. Lamentations is an appendix or epilogue to Jeremiah and is poetical rather than prophetic in character. The remaining twelve books are short prophetic works and constitute the "minor" prophets.

Although Biblical prophecy is by many a neglected study, it offers one of the most conclusive proofs of the authority and divine inspiration of the Bible. In Isaiah, God is recorded as appealing to the fulfilment of His word as a guarantee of its truth. "Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf people that have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and show us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth" (Isaiah 43 : 8, 9).

As a guarantee of the authority of the Bible, prophecy is important, but its value goes very much further than that. It is extremely important that we should know where our lives are leading and what the far distance holds for us. Here prophecy is of the utmost value for it tells man what is ahead - what is at the end of the journey, and what are its main stages. The history of the world may be compared to a journey starting at the Creation and ending in the Kingdom of God. Prophecy illumines the principal happenings and makes clear the goal of the journey. While generally it does not predict events in detail, it tells us what will happen to mankind, what is to happen to this earth, and what in time is to happen to us all.

THE JEWS-THE MAIN THEME OF BIBLE PROPHECY

The subjects forming the substance of the prophetic books are many and varied but they may be all related to one central theme- the people of Israel, their punishment and scattering, their redemption, regathering and final glory. Particularly in the major prophecies there are lengthy predictions concerning the fate of nations contemporary with Israel-such as Babylon, Assyria, Egypt and the smaller powers of Tyre, Moab and neighbouring states. These predictions now belong to history, but at the time of their writing centuries had to elapse in some cases before their fulfilment.

FULFILLED PROPHECY

Some 2500 years ago, for instance, when the Empire of Babylon was at the zenith of its power and the city of Babylon on the Euphrates a metropolis of the ancient world, its complete desolation was foretold by Isaiah and Jeremiah. More than its temporary destruction was predicted-its utter and persistent ruin was made clear.

In those days it would have been difficult for the people of Babylon to believe that the time was coming when their city-the " Chaldees' excellency "-would be completely hidden from sight. Yet that is what happened. For hundreds of years the ruins of Babylon lay covered beneath the sand of the desert, and only slowly and by dint of much labour were the ancient ruins brought to light to reveal something of the glory that once belonged to Babylon.

The story of Babylon's fall is a long one, for unlike some other cities, it was not immediately destroyed and laid waste by its conquerors. On the contrary, many efforts were made to restore it to its former greatness, but in vain. For many years its life lingered but finally the desert claimed its own. In a few more centuries it had completed its task and Babylon had disappeared. Is it probable that such a future could have been foreseen for this city by unaided man? Yet Isaiah and Jeremiah both describe that destiny for Babylon in language which cannot be misunderstood. Here are a few passages which suggest the stages of Babylon's downfall-the loss of its throne, the ruin of its magnificent walls and temples, and its final desolation. " Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne " (Isa. 47: 1). " The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly overthrown, and her high gates shall be burned with fire " (Jer. 51: 58). " We would have healed Babylon but she is not healed " (Jer. 51: 9). " It (Babylon) shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there " (Isa. 13: 20).

Yes, in spite of the efforts of the Persians and Greeks to heal Babylon, she " would not be healed " and the complete fulfilment of these and other similar prophecies is a clear proof that the prophets were indeed what they claimed to be-" holy men of God " who spoke " being moved by the Holy Spirit ".

THE JEWS IN PROPHECY

It is, however, when we study the prophetic writings in relation to the Jews themselves that we are best able to see the moving and developing purpose of God. The picture of the Jewish sufferings following upon their disobedience is sombre indeed. These predictions may be found in the Old Testament as far back as Deuteronomy where the results of disobedience were foreseen.

Both the major and minor prophets add their admonitions, but they agree that final redemption awaits the Jews. The restoration of the land and the regathering of her people are made clear. In Joel chapter 2, and Ezekiel chapter 34, there are delightful pictures of a people regathered and prospering in their own land.

We are not to imagine, however, that this idyllic picture is the goal of the Divine purpose. The world-and nothing less-comes within the scope of God's plan and perhaps above all other prophets it is Daniel who brings all nations within the compass of His purpose. In chapter 2 Daniel predicts the ultimate overthrow of man's dominion and the Divine rulership established over a Divine kingdom "which shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever".

For the general reader the prophecies contain many difficulties and obscurities. Prophecy has a symbolism of its own and those unfamiliar with it may be baffled at times by this feature. But one does not have to be expert to recognize clearly enough the broad teaching and purpose of these writings. The more they are studied the more they will yield. But in reading keep always before you the central purpose which they are serving. That purpose is the fulfilment of God's promises, made to the fathers, to bless all nations through the " seed " of Abraham and ultimately to fill the earth with His glory.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are in the New Testament twenty-seven distinct writings. Of these the first four are the Gospel narratives dealing with the life of Jesus, the fifth is an historical book dealing with the work of the Apostles and the founding of the early Christian Churches. There are twenty-one letters or Epistles written by the Apostles, and finally one prophetic book, the Book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse.

The Gospels

Although the four Gospel writers deal with the same central facts it is clear that each book has its own design and its own peculiar characteristics. The Gospels were written in each case for a specific purpose and each reveals something of the writer. Little as we know of the process of Divine Inspiration, it is certain that its effect was not to mechanise the powers of the Evangelists, but to heighten them. Since it was impossible for them to record all that Jesus said and did, they had perforce to select their material. It is precisely in this selection that they reveal points of view, each choosing what appeared most important and rejecting what seemed less essential to his purpose.

The first three Gospels are usually called synoptic because a common outline is followed by the writers and they are, in consequence, capable of fairly detailed comparison, whereas the unique features of the fourth Gospel place it outside any simple comparative scheme. The possible arrangement of the text of Matthew, Mark and Luke into parallel columns, from which their variations and resemblances may be quickly noted, led to the description of these Gospels as "synoptic", that is to say, Gospels able to be read in the form of a synopsis.

Matthew

Matthew, one of the Apostles and a close follower of Jesus, addressed his Gospel primarily to the Jews, and its main purpose was to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah promised in their Scriptures. It has been called the " Gospel of the Kingdom " and its intensely Jewish character is well seen in the linking up of contemporary history with the words of the Psalmist and the Prophets. " The Scriptures " are quoted no fewer than forty times.

Matthew is emphatic that Jesus was the " King of the Jews ". Matthew was himself most probably a Palestinian Jew and his Hebrew training is suggested by the fact that when he quotes from the Old Testament he uses the original Hebrew text and not the popular Greek Septuagint version.

Mark

Mark wrote not so much for the Jews as for the benefit of Gentile readers. Supposed by many now to be the earliest of the Gospels, it supplied a much needed account of the life of Jesus. Most of the early Gentile believers had no first-hand knowledge of Jesus or his teaching. Inaccurate statements and traditional stories began to gain currency and it was to meet the exigencies of this situation that Mark wrote.

First and foremost the Gospel is a clear and straightforward account of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Direct and vigorous in his narration, Mark is concerned with Jesus as a man of action. His accounts of the teaching of the Master are brief; he omits the Sermon on the Mount and records but five of the parables. On the other hand, Mark includes no fewer than eighteen miracles, compared with the twenty-one found in the much longer Gospel of Matthew.

Writing primarily for men and women unacquainted with the Hebrew Scriptures he makes but little reference to the Law of Moses and quotes but rarely from the Old Testament. He passes over the miraculous birth and makes no reference to the boyhood of Jesus. The explanation of this brevity is to be found in the special needs of his readers. From Mark's account the Gentile reader would find it impossible to escape the writer's claim that in Jesus there was a demonstration of Divine authority, nor could early believers reading for the first time an authentic life of Jesus doubt that their faith had been truly placed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Luke

Rather like that of Mark, this Gospel was designed for the Gentile class of reader, though it is fuller and contains much material not found in any of the other Gospels. Luke was a physician and he gives prominence to the healing power of our Lord as well as to his humanity. Many years of his later life were spent with the Apostle Paul.

Peculiar to this Gospel are the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, the Unjust Steward, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the miracles of the raising of the widow's son, the healing of the ten lepers, the draught of fishes, as well as many other incidents.

The writer is clearly an educated man and the accuracy of the historical references has been amply verified. If Matthew was the Gospel for the Jew and Mark for the Greek, Luke may be considered the Gospel for the general reader. His picture of the Lord is one which makes clear his compassion and tenderness. He is, Luke shows us, the Saviour of men of all nations, the healer of the ills of all men.

John

Written most probably after the other three, the fourth Gospel is clearly not designed as a narrative of the life of our Lord. The miracles and the parables, which played such an important part in his life, had already been made widely known. It remained for the Apostle John, the younger son of Zebedee and Salome, to write the inner history of Jesus. The Gospel of John is devoted to the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, in whom we may behold the likeness of the Father. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."

John records most fully the personal discourses of Jesus with his own disciples.

It is remarkable that although this Gospel has less historical design than the synoptic Gospels, yet it has only been possible to reconstruct an historical outline of our Lord's ministry by reference to the feasts mentioned in the Gospel of John.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

This work is from the pen of the author of the third Gospel. In fact, Luke makes it a sequel to his Gospel. He describes, simply yet vividly, the labours of the Apostles in the development of the early church. The larger part of the book is concerned with the life and travels of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Luke was the close companion of Paul throughout many of his journeys and had special qualifications for recording them.

This story of the spread of Christianity is made still more interesting if traced on the maps found at the end of many Bibles, and introduces the reader to cities and countries far beyond the confines of Palestine. Ephesus, Athens, Corinth and Rome are in turn the scene of the labours of the Apostles.

There could be no more appropriate introduction to the letters of the Apostle Paul than this book of the Acts.

THE LETTERS OF PAUL

Of the twenty-one Epistles in the New Testament no fewer than thirteen were the work of the Apostle Paul. Of these it has been declared: "No other letters ever written have begun to have the influence of those produced by Paul of Tarsus as an adjunct of his missionary labours. Paul's literary style was equal to the expression of a great variety of moods, ranging through emotional tenderness, passionate invective, eloquent persuasion, and cool logical reasoning. His rabbinical training is evident in his Scriptural learning and in the argumentative form of his discourses with their frequent use of rhetorical questions, striking antitheses and legal illustrations."

The letters belong to the latter part of the Apostle's ministry, being written between A.D. 50 and A.D. 70. Of the thirteen letters nine were to the Churches, three were Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, and one was a personal note to Philemon, written to intercede for his runaway slave.

The arrangement of the Apostolic letters in the New Testament is not in the order of their writing. The chronology of these letters is approximately as follows: -

A.D. 51.	To the Thessalonians 1
A.D. 51.	To the Thessalonians 2
A.D. 53.	To the Galatians
A.D. 55.	To the Corinthians 1
A.D. 56.	To the Corinthians 2
A.D. 57.	To the Romans
A.D. 62.	To Philemon
A.D. 62.	To the Colossians
A.D. 62.	To the Ephesians
A.D. 62.	To the Philippians
A.D. 63-6.	To Timothy 1
A.D. 63-6.	To Titus
A.D. 67.	To Timothy 2

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

Apart from the nine great Church Epistles, the Apostle wrote three Pastoral letters—two to Timothy and one to Titus. These were not primarily concerned with doctrine but with the governing and training of the Churches. They are full of insight and not only give instructions as to the treatment of individual members of the Church but are also prophetic of the rise of heresy in the Church.

The second letter to Timothy was written from Rome during the Apostle's imprisonment and is probably the last of his extant writings.

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Although often accredited to the Apostle Paul, this letter is thought by some to be the work of another Apostle. This conclusion is based on differences of style and method between Hebrews and the Pauline Epistles. Barnabas, Apollos, Timothy, Silas and Luke have all been considered as possible authors. It is, however, the message which is the important thing, not the author.

The letter is addressed to christianised Jews and its purpose was to make clear that while Judaism was a preparation for Christianity, the highest revelation of God had been given in Jesus Christ, His Son.

" God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son " (Heb. 1: 1).

THE GENERAL EPISTLES

The remaining seven Epistles in the New Testament are often described as general or catholic because they were not addressed to a single Church but to the wider body of believers.

The Epistle of James

Although not one of the twelve disciples, James, " the Lord's brother " and the author of this Epistle, was referred to by Paul as a " pillar " in the Church at Jerusalem. Written from that city about the year A.D. 63 the Epistle, which is vigorous, direct and practical, is a protest against much social injustice and a plea for a return to the principles made clear by our Lord in his Sermon on the Mount. This letter has been described as the most modern work in the Bible because of its impassioned social-mindedness, and its style is one of mingled tenderness and satire.

The Two Epistles of Peter

These letters were written to the " Dispersion ", which was the collective name given to all those descendants of the Twelve Tribes living outside the confines of Palestine. The date is uncertain but it was clearly written when times of persecution were at hand, most probably before the dark period under Nero. In both these letters (in which there are general exhortations and warnings against false teachers) the style and language accord closely with the utterances of the Apostle as they have been recorded in the Acts.

The second letter, in particular, is emphatic on the certainty of the Lord's coming, but makes it clear that evil days must precede this happening. Widespread unbelief and moral degeneration are to be looked for as pre-requisite conditions.

The Three Epistles of John

Written towards the close of the first century-probably around A.D. 90-the first Epistle has much in common both in style and thought with the Gospel of John, and finds its central truth in the revelation that God is love. It is noteworthy that the passage about the "heavenly witnesses" (chapter 5: 7) is not found in the Revised Version and may be dismissed as a spurious interpolation.

The second and third Epistles are addressed to persons-presumably acquaintances of the Apostle-and contain greetings, exhortations and warnings. Although short, they are of historical importance as throwing light upon the condition of the Christian communities at the close of the first century.

The Epistle of Jude

Beyond the fact that Jude describes himself as the brother of James (whom we assume to be James the writer of the General Epistle and the Lord's brother) we know nothing of the writer of this Epistle. This ignorance as to author, combined with certain difficulties in the text, has led to the traditional description of Jude as "obscure."

The contents of the book suggest that it was written about the same time as that of Peter's Second Epistle. It contains a strong condemnation of false teachers, described unforgettably as "hidden rocks" or "spots in your love-feasts, when they feast with you, shepherds that without fear feed themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved for ever."

It is noteworthy that Jude again refers to the Apostolic prophecy of disbelief and scepticism as signs of the last days. Note the short but exquisite doxology.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION, OR THE APOCALYPSE

The first three chapters of this book are devoted to the seven letters written through the Apostle John to the Churches of Asia. The rest are prophetic in substance and symbolical in form, resembling in this respect parts of the Book of Daniel with which it has more than an accidental affinity.

Many expositors, though differing in detailed interpretation, see in this part of the book a picture of the major human events between the two Advents. The reader wishing to make himself acquainted with the meaning of these symbolical representations of history is advised to refer to such works as DR. JOHN THOMAS'S *Eureka*, or shorter treatises as ROBERT ROBERTS' *Thirteen lectures on the Apocalypse*, or *Apocalypse and History* by BOULTON AND BARKER.

Difficult as this book is, and however varied the possible interpretations of this symbolism, there is no escaping its final message-"The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever." That prophecy rings clear throughout the book, as indeed throughout the Bible, and it is therefore appropriate that its concluding words should be a pledge of the second coming: "He which testifieth these things saith, Yea, I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus."