

LECTURES ON THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

RALPH WARDLAW

L E C T U R E S

ON

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES,

BY THE

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EDITED BY HIS SON,

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P R E F A C E .

“BEGUN MAY 16, 1852, AFTER AN INTERVAL OF FORTY-ONE YEARS.” From this memorandum in the Author’s own hand, these Lectures, it appears, were re-composed, from notes of a very early date, during the closing year of his life. Within little more than four months after the last was delivered, the lips which gave it utterance were silent in death: the toils and trials of earth had been exchanged for the rest and felicity of heaven.

These Lectures may therefore be regarded as my father’s final contribution to the cause of divine truth; and as presenting his closing testimony to the power and preciousness, in his own experience, of the great doctrines, which, for more than half a century, it had been his chief aim, as it was his unceasing delight, to illustrate and enforce.

This seems, in itself, a most natural ground for introducing them as the concluding volume of the present series; while they possess such intrinsic excellence, as to warrant their finding a place among the Author’s posthumous works. If his eye had become dim, and his natural force abated, there will be found, I venture

to affirm, in these Lectures, no indication of any obscuring of the mental vision, or any decay of intellectual power.

“What,” some may ask, “has become of the Lectures on the Life of Paul, of which promise was held out—why are they not published?” The answer is simple. It was thought at first that they would also come within the limits of the eight volumes proposed to be issued. This was a mistake: and it is now deemed better to let them form part of a distinct Biographical Series, should such be held desirable. There is ample material from which selection might be made; as there are over three hundred Lectures written *in extenso* on the leading characters of Scripture history.

My task is now completed—a task arduous but pleasant:—for pleasant truly it has been to live amid such hallowed memories of the past as my Editorial labours have called up, and to enjoy so much communion of spirit, day by day, with one so dear to my heart,—one whom to know was to love, and whom to know as I did, was to love with a deep, a fervent, a reverential affection—“Heu! quanto minus est cum reliquis versari quam tui meminisse.”

J. S. W.

LECTURE I.

JAMES I. 1—4.

“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

THIS Epistle is one of seven,—the other six being the two Epistles of Peter, the three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude,—which, from an early period have had the designation of *Catholic*,* or *general* Epistles. Of the meaning of the designation different views have been entertained. Some critics have understood it as signifying their having been *universally acknowledged as canonical*; that is, as genuine, or written by those whose names they bear,—and these apostolic or inspired men.† This interpretation seems to rest on rather an extraordinary ground; namely, that, though five out of the seven were for a time disputed, and only two—the first of Peter and the first of John—received by all the churches from the first, they were all soon after

* *επιστολαι καθολικαι.*

† The canonical authority of this Epistle has been disputed; but on insufficient grounds. “The most decisive proof of its canonical authority,” Horne justly remarks, “is, that it is inserted in the Syriac version of the New Testament executed at the close of the first or early in the second century.” “On any intelligible principles of canonical reception of early writings, we cannot refuse this Epistle a place in the canon.” Such, after a full and elaborate discussion of the point, is Alford’s conclusion.—ED.

so received. I have called this interpretation extraordinary, for two reasons. The first is, that it destroys the very distinction made by Biblical critics between the *disputed* and the *undisputed* books; the latter consisting of such as from the first were universally owned as genuine and canonical, and the former such as for a time were doubtful as to their genuineness and authority, but afterwards came to be so owned. To call *all* of them *Catholic*, therefore, *in this sense*, would have been to convey an untruth and a contradiction; for, although the distinction was but temporary, yet still it *was* a distinction, and *is still* a distinction, between the one class of letters and the other, which the general designation contradicts. The other reason is, that the assigning to these seven Epistles such a designation, in such a sense, would necessarily imply an insinuation regarding the rest of the canonical Epistles, double in number, as if *they* had been all at first held in doubt,—none of them in this sense catholic, or undisputed; which would have been as far as possible from the truth: the Epistle to the Hebrews being the only one of the fourteen ascribed to Paul, about whose authorship there seems ever to have been any question.

A second opinion has been, that *Catholic* means, with reference to the *contents* of these Epistles, that they set forth the *universally received doctrines* of the Christian church: an explanation assuredly still more objectionable than the former, as implying the more serious insinuation that the others were, in this respect, defective, or were even not so clear and full as these in the exposition of the universal faith; whereas, in point of fact, a number of Paul's letters contain a fuller statement of the grand articles of that faith, than any one of the seven that have got the designation,—though all in perfect harmony.

The most likely meaning of the title *Catholic* seems to me to be that which is also the most common, that these Epistles are not, like those of Paul, addressed to particular *churches* or *persons*, but have a more *general* or *catholic* inscription. It is true, that this is not the case with them *all*; there being two of John's addressed to individuals, but which may