

## CHAPTER I

### Earliest Christianity

**I**F all the New Testament books were lost except one, and that were the earliest epistle written by the Apostle Paul, we would still have convincing proof of the historicity of Christianity and clear evidence for nearly every article of the Apostles' Creed as expressing the faith of primitive Christians. The earliest and therefore oldest book of the New Testament is the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. This is the general consensus of opinion among all critics. "In the case of the first epistle," says Dr. Milligan in the *Standard Bible Dictionary*, "its authenticity which no one even thought of challenging before the nineteenth century is now so generally recognized by critics of all schools, except those who reject the Pauline writings altogether, that it is not necessary to discuss it further here."

The exact date assigned to the epistle depends on the chronology of Paul's life, but all critics are agreed that it was not written later than the year 53 A. D. (some say as early as 49 A. D.), that is, less than twenty years or twenty-two years after the Crucifixion. All critical opinion, therefore, brings us as close as possible to the primitive days of Christianity when those who were eyewitnesses of what Jesus was and did and suffered were still