

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jtvi-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php)

JOURNAL OF  
THE TRANSACTIONS  
OF  
The Victoria Institute,  
OR,  
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

---

EDITED BY THE SECRETARY.

---

VOL. XXXIX.



LONDON :

(Published by the Institute, 8, Adelphi Terrace, Charing Cross, W.A.C.)

---

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

1907.

## ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

WAS HELD IN THE ROOMS OF THE INSTITUTE, ON  
MONDAY, APRIL 22ND, 1907.

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR H. L. GEARY, K.C.B., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read and confirmed.

ELECTION :—William A. E. Ussher, Esq., F.G.S., was elected Associate.

The following paper was read by the Author :—

*EXPLORATION OF ASIA MIMOR, AS BEARING ON  
THE HISTORICAL TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE  
NEW TESTAMENT.* By Professor Sir WILLIAM M.  
RAMSAY, D.C.L.

IN ancient history generally, and particularly in the department which forms the subject of this paper, the investigation of Biblical history, many of the greatest difficulties originate in our ignorance. Ignorance produces misconceptions, and from these misconceptions positive inferences are drawn with unbecoming and dangerous confidence; yet the whole structure of inference rests on absolutely no foundation. In nothing is the spirit of the true scholar and historian better shown than in the ability to know what premises are safe, as resting on positive knowledge, and what premises are mere prejudices having no support except ignorance.

I would for a moment call your attention to one example of this general principle, viz., the prejudice that the art of writing was late in origin, known in its early stages only to a small number of persons, and little used except for great and solemn religious or State purposes. This is a mere prejudice—perhaps one ought to say, it was a mere prejudice—only it still survives in practice, though no one now in theory would any longer

maintain it, and its consequences and the inferences founded on it still survive and are quoted and widely believed. The prejudice had no foundation except in the fact that such was the case in mediæval Europe, and it was assumed that what was the case in the Middle Ages must have been still more decidedly the case in ancient times. In other words, this prejudice rests on the preliminary assumption that there has been a continuous development in civilisation and knowledge since ancient times. That, again, is mere prejudice which deceives men by its pseudo-scientific character. We now all are devotees of the theory of development: it has ceased to be a theory and is made the basis and the formative principle in our mind and thoughts. Rightly or wrongly, we must have development everywhere, and in this case it is utterly wrongly, for in religion the human tendency is always towards degeneration, not towards development, and in civilisation there occurred the almost total destruction of the ancient knowledge and the ancient education.

There was, therefore, no ground for the practically universal assumption that writing was not familiarly used in ancient times for ordinary purposes of life. Yet this assumption was made the basis for arguments in literary history, and in particular for arguments against the early date of many old books, such as the books of Moses and of Homer. The preservation of books from the period to which these compositions were traditionally assigned was impossible without writing, and writing was either unknown or practised only in a very narrowly limited way at that period. This argument was, I confess, quite convincing to me when I was studying, under Robertson Smith's guidance before the year 1880, the Hebrew history. The reply to this argument equally assumed the false premise about the rarity of writing and merely pleaded that memory unaided by writing was quite fit for the composition and preservation of great literary works. This reply was hopelessly inadequate. There would be no difficulty in committing to memory the Iliad, for example; personally, I knew that I could easily do so, if there were anything great to gain thereby. But a vast deal more than mere memory is needed before the civilisation is formed in which such a literature can be composed and become a national possession, a power, a Bible. I mention this reply—the only reply then made—merely to show how universal in quite recent times that assumption about the ignorance, or at least extreme rarity, of knowledge of writing was. Homeric and Biblical criticism,

alike destructive and conservative criticism, was based on this false premise, and the consequences still remain to some extent in the criticism of all classes and schools. Ideas which, on being strictly tested, are found to be mere inferences from that assumption, are still prevalent and almost unquestioned. For example, how few would venture to maintain that the Synoptic Gospels are, or might be, based on documents, some written while Christ was still living, some within a few hours or days of his death? *i.e.*, there were such documents in existence, accessible to persons who desired to attain "to know the certainty of those things." I feel no doubt that this was the case, and in a book published more than two years ago I used the words "so far as antecedent probability goes, founded on the general character of preceding and contemporary society, the first Christian account of the circumstances connected with the death of Jesus must be presumed to have been written in the year when Jesus died." I fear that such a statement would find small support in general opinion, and yet it is simply the statement of the known facts, and, unless the followers of Christ had already cut themselves off from the habits and customs of contemporary society, it must be true. In the last few days I have printed an argument that about a sixth part of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which is common to them but is not found in the Gospel of Mark, is taken from a document written before the death of Christ. Such results as these, if they can be established, carry us far forward. A history which ultimately rests partly on contemporary written evidence, partly on the evidence of eye-witnesses and actors in the events, stands on the highest plane of historic certainty.

Can these results, then, be established, and how shall we set about the work of establishing them? They can be established only in the same way in which the early use of writing was made known to us.

That writing was used familiarly and commonly some thousands of years before Christ, that the whole practice of government and law at an early time was based on the rule that everything must be written down at the moment, *e.g.*, that all sales and conveyance of property must be registered in writing,—all this has been revealed in recent years, not on literary evidence, but by finding the actual documents. We know that people wrote at a very early time, because we have the things which they wrote, on stone, on bronze, on pottery, partly incised, partly written in ink. The use of ink is extremely important, because ink was not invented for use on materials of that kind,

but for use on more perishable material like paper, or skins, or parchment; and therefore ink-written pottery implies the use of those more perishable materials. But Egypt is the only country which is dry enough to preserve such materials; and there alone is ancient written paper found; but the wider use of ink furnishes the proof that similar perishable materials were used in other countries besides Egypt.

Mere literary arguments could furnish no revolutionary discovery like this: one can advance only by very short steps with that class of arguments; no great step can ever be taken safely on purely literary reasoning. And by the purely verbal reasoning which has been fashionable in the latter part of the nineteenth century, no real progress can be made. Verbal arguments may afford valuable suggestions, but they must be treated as mere hints and sign-posts, and they must be tested by other kinds of reasoning or by discovery before any trust can be placed in them.

The purely verbal scholars make much parade of their readiness to accept each new discovery as it is made; and for their readiness they deserve all praise. The criticism which one has to make on them is twofold. In the first place, they very quickly forget that any discovery was ever made. They cease to remember the last stage of literary and verbal reasoning as soon as the new basis is attained. In the second place, they are as perfectly confident in the new style of reasoning as they were in the old; and at the next epoch-making discovery they will toss aside their present basis of reasoning and adapt themselves with admirable versatility and absolute confidence to the new conditions; and at each stage they give no sign that their former views and methods were quite different, and that they are indebted to the discoverer of the actual ancient objects for the progress that they are making.

Now I will ask your attention to another example. When the careful and thorough exploration of Asia Minor began in recent times, it is safe to say that the book of the Acts of the Apostles was the most suspected and discredited book in the New Testament. Many even of the most conservative scholars had tacitly abandoned it to its fate: no one, so far as I know, among the leading scholars of any school or tone of thought, ventured to say a word in its favour. The many scholars who were hostile to the historical credibility of the New Testament considered the question with regard to the Acts as closed. No person who valued his reputation among scholars dared to reopen it, for the belief was unchallenged that no one who

deserved the name of scholar could entertain any doubt on the point or hesitate to acquiesce in the practically universal condemnation. The book of the Acts was condemned as a compilation made in the second century from older records; the book was declared, though founded on older sources, to be so interpolated and so strongly coloured as to distort the historical view and to impart an entirely false atmosphere and false suggestion to the facts, even when these facts were in part taken from older written authorities; and many people seemed even to hold that the supposed compiler of the book in the second century had actually invented some of the facts which he stated. The only approach to trustworthiness was where the compiler had failed to change his older written authority, and had left some scrap of earlier writing which could readily be distinguished from his own poor stuff.

The case is now altered. Some considerable parts of the book are now universally admitted to deserve perfect credence, and even to stand on the highest level of historical authority, as written either by a thoroughly well-informed person, or even by an educated eye-witness. At the very least, it is now allowed that most of the second half of the book can be accepted as entirely historical. The more conservative scholars do not now hesitate to champion the whole book as written by one who was an eye-witness or the intimate personal friend of eye-witnesses, a trusted and admiring follower and coadjutor and adviser of the Apostle Paul, and they do not hesitate to accept the book as being what the very old tradition declares it to be, the narrative written by St. Luke, the physician and evangelist. They regard it as being, as it purports to be, the second part of an historical work of which the Third Gospel is the first part: the intention and plan of either part of this great historical work is not to be gathered from itself alone. The entire work in its two parts must be studied together as a single whole; and it is even maintained by some, among whom the present speaker ventures to claim a place, that the work was unfinished. Now, a man who has the genius to conceive the plan of such a work as this, does not, and cannot, abandon it half-finished; he must work at it until he completes it, or until—he dies. If the work of Luke was left unfinished, the sole reason that can be thought of as possible, was his death—and, to all appearance, his premature and unexpected death. That such an event was quite probable, appears from the tone of the book. It looks out over a storm of persecution: it is written by a person who aims at defending Christianity by an

appeal to facts and by a simple narrative of history; its effectiveness depended on the undeniableness of all that it records; and it came to a sudden end, because the author was overwhelmed in the persecution while he was composing this eloquent and yet perfectly simple and unadorned history.

But however this may be, it is a mere matter of interpretation. The important point about which many scholars are now united, is that the book of the Acts, as we have it, was written by Luke. The recent work of Professor Harnack, entitled *Luke the Physician*, is an able argument on this side. The distinguished Berlin Professor, and King's Librarian, fully recognises the impossibility and utter failure of the theories of second-century origin for the book of the Acts: no one has condemned more strongly than he, the uselessness and inadequacy of those theories. He sees the unity of authorship and design throughout the two parts, Third Gospel and Acts; he proves in detail the identity of style throughout both parts, he demonstrates that the two are entirely, from beginning to end, the work of one writer, who impresses his own individuality on both parts; he accepts and summarises the arguments—or I should rather say, the marshalling of the facts, as made by Mr. Hobart, of Trinity College, Dublin—which show that the author of the Third Gospel and of the Acts was a physician, trained to observe medically, to take an interest in medical facts, and to use naturally the terms and language of medical science.

Further, Professor Harnack declares, as the result of a minute examination, that in a considerable part of the Third Gospel, where we possess the older authority which Luke used, the physician made no changes beyond those of a verbal and stylistic kind. He improved the Greek, but he left the facts as they were recorded by his authority; and he carefully and everywhere refrained from inserting anything savouring of the sentiment and thoughts of the later first century, when he was writing.

We can say with confidence that this was Luke's rule and practice, because we have in one case the text of the original authority on which Luke founded one-third of his Gospel, and in another case we can recover from the agreement of Luke and Matthew an outline of another original authority which they both employed, and on which they based about one-sixth of their respective Gospels. These are Professor Harnack's results in the detailed examination, clause by clause, and word by word, of a large part of Luke's Gospel. Such is the opinion that he expresses when he takes facts, weighs them accurately, and



finds his judgment on them. Since in every case where this writer's use of his written authorities can be tested, he is found to employ them carefully, and report them accurately, surely, it would be quite justifiable to generalise the principle, that in other cases where we do not know the original words that Luke had before him, and worked up in his history, he presents an accurate report of their meaning, and that he does not interpolate thoughts and interpretations which belong to his own later period.

Accordingly, in estimating Luke's trustworthiness as an historian, we have to start from these results which Professor Harnack's minute examination furnishes, regarding about half of the Third Gospel. We have to bear in mind that he was for many years in close association with St. Paul, that he had come into personal relation with many of the persons to whom he alludes in the book of the Acts, that he had abundant opportunity of learning all his facts from eye-witnesses, that he was in many cases himself an eye-witness. Then in regard to his qualifications for writing the Gospel, we must take into account that he had travelled in Palestine as early as A.D. 57, and had met the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem, that he was two years in Cesarea in close relations with the Church there, that he had (as he tells us) opportunity of knowing the certainty of those things.

Such are the conditions on which you have to form an opinion as to the historical credibility of Luke now. Is there any historian of ancient time about whose authorities we are better instructed than we are about Luke's original sources of information? Is there any ancient historian who can furnish us with better credentials than these? Certainly, there is none.

In passing, I must for a moment allude to the singular contrast between the results attained by Professor Harnack about the facts of Luke's history, when he is dealing with facts, and the judgment which he expresses about Luke as an historian when he is stating opinions. He finds no words too strong to condemn the looseness, the inaccuracy, and the untrustworthiness of Luke. Luke was, he declares, unable to tell what he had himself seen without misrepresenting it. No authority attaches to his statements; he aimed at historical and literary effect, not at truth.

I find it impossible to reconcile Harnack with Harnack: his opinions in summing up disagree utterly with the facts as he determines them in collecting the evidence. Were I a "Higher Critic" of the fine old-fashioned nineteenth-century kind, I

should find abundant reason to conclude that the book on *Luke the Physician*, attributed to Professor Harnack by universal consent, is really the work of at least two writers, and that their works have been wrongly united into a single composite work by a later author, who took parts out of the two older writers, and combined them regardless of the hopeless and glaring disagreement between them. But I am not a "Higher Critic," merely a common-place historian, whose only aim is to establish facts, and to state the judgment that inevitably and simply springs from the facts. The contrast between facts and judgments in Harnack's recent work is not due to the combination of two authorities into one book; but to the firm resolve of the author to reject much of Luke's work as incredible, and to the necessity of preparing the way for this rejection by finding fault with the culprit.

Let us take one example of the inconsistency between the opinions of Harnack and the admitted facts. He admits, as the facts to start from, that Luke entered into Paul's circle, when Paul had been, and doubtless still was, publishing the Apostolic Decree of the Council of Jerusalem to all his Churches as their rule of conduct. Luke quotes this Decree verbatim, and tells us all about how it was passed and what use Paul made of it. Such are the facts admitted by Harnack; but his conclusion is that the Decree was a free invention of Luke's—mark you, not an improved version of the sense, with slight verbal changes in the Greek, but a pure and absolute fiction, in which Luke conveyed his own ideas as to what ought to have been done.

But now to return from this digression. I have set before you the attitude about Luke's historical credibility taken at the present day, not indeed by all scholars, probably not even by the majority, but still by a considerable number of good scholars. I have asked you to contrast this present-day attitude with that which was characteristic of the period about twenty years ago, when no one seemed willing to say a good word for this great and outstanding historian. What is the reason for this remarkable change, the most marked change that has occurred in respect of any book and any writer in the whole range of the Bible?

The reason originated in this, that people began to observe and study minutely the country about which the second part of Acts mainly treats, and in which the evolution of Christian history had its centre and chief seat in the period that followed after the middle of the first century: viz., Asia Minor. It became clear, and now stands out beyond the reach of denial

from rational persons, that the book of Acts stands in the closest relation with the geography and the situation of Asia Minor, in the first century. The book could not have been written in the second century, as the later nineteenth-century scholars declared it to be, because it is inconsistent with the situation of Asia Minor in the second century; it assumes conditions and relations that ceased to exist before the date when it was declared to have been fabricated, and must have passed out of the consciousness of men; it is a document that is stamped as of the first century on the ordinary canons of criticism, and marked as originating from contemporary record by its vividness, and individuality.

The detail that first caught my attention in this connection was a slight matter in itself, but just the sort of small incidental, unimportant circumstance by which date and knowledge or ignorance are tested. In Acts xiv, 6, Paul and Barnabas are said to have fled from Iconium to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe. No one could speak thus who did not know that the boundary of Lycaonia was so drawn that in going from Iconium to Lystra, Paul crossed the frontier and entered the district of Lycaonia. Now, Iconium was distinct and separate from Lycaonia all through the Roman Imperial time; the frontier lay just a little south of Iconium and north of Lystra during the first century; but in the early second century, Lystra became separated from Lycaonia and closely connected with Iconium, and it formed a part of the division of the Empire to which Iconium belonged. There ceased, then, to be a frontier between Iconium and Lystra; and Acts xiv, 6, could not have been written later. This slight point is one involving much patient research, and requiring a decision on many minute questions of historical and political geography, which have slowly and gradually been solved one by one; hence this small detail, the first to arrest my attention when I was beginning to study Luke as an authority for the geography, has only been solved in its full extent after many years of careful examination. The first discussion which I ventured to publish on this point was incomplete: it was not wrong in any way, because it was confined to the statement of facts and the drawing of the inevitable and undeniable inferences; but there was much more to say, which I cannot here state in full.

This little point is typical. You see how long a time, how much labour, how many journeys, have been required before we have attained sufficient knowledge of the condition of the country in St. Paul's time to understand all that is implied in this slight detail. It is the same with everything in the travel-

narrative of Acts. The narrative springs direct from experience of the localities and districts and boundaries as they were when the journeys were made. Had the scene lain only in the great Province of Asia, with Ephesus as its port and its commercial centre, we could not have got much clear evidence of date, for the bounds and divisions of the Province of Asia remained practically unchanged throughout the first three centuries. In that part of the narrative we can find abundant proofs of vividness in knowledge, but not directly of date. But the scene lies partly in the newer Province Galatia, whose extent, divisions, government and boundaries varied greatly during the first two centuries. In the narrative we are conducted stage by stage in Paul's company; we traverse the districts of the Province and feel the delicate, hardly perceptible indications of bounds as we pass from one district to another; and the districts and limits of this Province that are shown in the Acts are those of the first century. We note that the population of Iconium, a Hellenic city, are called Hellenes; but that the population of Lystra and Pisidian Antioch, two Roman colonies, are styled simply "the multitude," a term used regularly in the inscriptions of this region to translate the Latin term *plebs*. In one detail after another the evidence of truth and minute accuracy accumulates. The more we learn of the country, which was practically a *terra incognita* until quite recently, the better do we appreciate the vividness and the accuracy. There is much yet to learn, and there is no doubt that future discovery will only strengthen and increase the evidence already accumulated in support of the book of the Acts.

But I must conclude, and the conclusion must always be the same, to express the wonder which fills me that it is so difficult to interest the Churches in the discovery of the evidence bearing on this subject. We want to excavate the cities of Palestine and the cities of St. Paul. There lies hid the evidence that will settle numberless Biblical questions and difficulties. Why is it that, if you ask for the cost of excavating a first-rate city of Palestine, you will get a few hundreds, barely a tenth of the money needed; if you ask for money to excavate such a site as Lystra, nothing is given? Is it that they are afraid of the results and shrink from submitting their books to the test of discovery? I do not think that is so, but they are infected too deeply with what has always been the vice and the weakness of the Christian Churches and sects, hatred of one another. That hatred and disunion has always been the main support of their enemies, who can always trust to find allies among some of the

Christians against others. Just as still in Jerusalem in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the anniversary of the Resurrection of the Saviour, it is necessary to have Turkish soldiers on the spot to prevent the rival sects from tearing one another to pieces, so now in Britain, while you can raise fifty or a hundred thousand pounds to fight a rival sect, you would not find it easy to raise a hundred pence from the same class of people to place the history of the New Testament or of the Old on an infinitely higher level of historical attestation. While you can get as many great leaders as you want for any inter-Christian war, you might ask in vain any of those leaders to speak a word in favour of the enterprise which I am now speaking about. In a controversy about education in England, which to a mere Scotchman is an unintelligible and trifling point, a mere question "about words and names and your own law," exaggerated into realities by hot controversialists on both sides, both equally far removed from wisdom and calm judgment, I understand that a certain great demonstration cost as much as would have excavated half a dozen great Bible cities and given priceless knowledge. And in Scotland, for equally trifling differences, invisible to the unaided eye of an Englishman, we spend ten times as much as you spend in England. And so the wordy war goes on in endless succession of years, and we learn nothing, but sacrifice the whole essence and life of Christianity to fight with our brothers and countrymen. This constant warfare is the shame of Christianity, as well as its weakness. A Gallio, if he had to try the case in the year 1907, would not be content to drive them from the judgment seat, he would be strongly inclined, in the interest of peace and order, to hang ten of the principal leaders on each side, stringing them up side by side in alternation. We wonder that the Greek Christian and the Slav Christian loathe one another; we do the same ourselves, but the strong arm of the law and a more law-abiding instinct prevents us from carrying our mutual hatred so far as Slav and Greek carry it.

#### DISCUSSION.

Rev. Canon GIRDLESTONE.—Canon Girdlestone expressed the thanks of the meeting to Sir W. Ramsay, who had bravely fought his way to the truth amid difficulties of many kinds. He had

brought out clearly that St. Luke was a historian of the best type, and that both the Gospel and the Acts were trustworthy documents. The New Testament historians followed the precedent established by those to whom we owe the great historical records contained in the Old Testament. The Church at large owed a great debt to Professor Ramsay, not only for such books as *Paul the Traveller*, but also for the toil and travel endured in Asia Minor, which had made the publication of these books possible.

Mr. MARTIN L. ROUSE.—I congratulate myself upon having, on the strength of an old-time school friendship, invited Sir William Ramsay to read a paper to our Society; since we have thus been able to hear from his own lips one so brimful of delightful learning and overflowing with confirmations of momentous truth.

The destructive critics might all well change their tone, as they see archæology push the art of writing further and further back into the first ages of human history. In 1896 Professor Flinders Petrie gave a public lecture to the British Association, when assembled in Liverpool, entitled "Man before Writing." Treating the hieroglyphs as the earliest sort of writing known to the Egyptians, he proceeded to show that this began with the delineation of objects familiar to them both among plants and animals and among their own buildings and implements, thus proving both the earliness of their artistic skill and of their industrial ingenuity. But at Dover, in 1899, the same eminent explorer read a paper to the same learned body upon an alphabet consisting of "a large series of signs," which was "used in Egypt about 2500 B.C., and which was now shown—by such signs having existed as far back as 5000 B.C.—to be independent of the hieroglyph system or any derivatives of this, while similar signs" found "in Crete showed the system to have extended to the Mediterranean about 2000 B.C."

The Tell Amarna tablets, along with those other cuneiform tablets more recently found in the north of Canaan, prove that as early as the time of Joshua, every Canaanite sheikh was familiar with writing, and probably that many a sheikh's wife was also, since we find in the former collection two letters from a Lady Basmath, who had been forced to flee afar from the invading 'Abiri; while in the Sinaitic mines and their adjoining temples, Professor Petrie, as he reported last year, has found many Semitic inscriptions of the workmen of the Pharaohs contemporary with Moses.

That parchment or papyrus was used as well as stone or clay, and probably more often, for recording events in the flourishing period of the Israelite Kingdoms, is proved by the Siloam inscription; the writing, of which as Sayce has pointed out, is not upright and stiff, but sloped and free like that of a man wont to write with ink upon paper.

Since even that most destructive critic, Harnack, has joined the mass of deep scholars in acknowledging that Acts and Luke are two parts of one author's book, it seems hardly needful to cite the important coincidence discovered by Blass and quoted in Professor Ramsay's book, *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* that the Codex Bezae of the sixth century shows a peculiar spelling of the name of John in Luke and Acts, where, save in three instances only, it occurs as *Joanes*, whereas in the three other Gospels it is almost invariably spelt *Joannes*. [But one might further add that since the name is the Grecized form of the Hebrew *Johanan*, it would be natural for the other gospel writers, who were Hebrews, to spell it with two *n*'s; whereas if the name in a Greek dress had already grown fairly common among the Grecian Jews, it may well have lost one of its *n*'s in practice and been therefore naturally spelt with one by the Macedonian Luke.]

It had long been noticed that Luke correctly gave the peculiar titles of the rulers of particular cities and provinces evangelised by Paul; but it was thought at one time that Cyprus was an exception, inasmuch as a province so small and apparently in full tranquillity would have been governed by a prætor or a proprætor, not by a proconsul. But a Greek inscription was found by General Cesnola at Soloi, a Cyprian town, dated "in the proconsulship of Paulus."

This fact, which Professor Ramsay records in his work *St. Paul the Traveller* (p. 74 and note) is parallel to another, which he himself has been the first to establish. From the discoveries of Kenyon, Grenfell and Hunt, and others, confirmed by his own researches, Professor Ramsay proves that from 22 B.C. down to A.D. 231, at least, there was a census of population held in Egypt and Syria and probably the whole of the Roman Empire once in every fourteen years. This would make one due in Syria (which, of course, included Palestine) in 8 B.C. Again, by comparing the fragment of a monument to Quirinus, found at Tibur, with the records of Suetonius and Strabo, he ascertains that Quirinus not only governed

Syria between A.D. 6 and 9, when he carried out the famous valuation and taxing of property which led to revolt in Judæa, but also held the command-in-chief of the forces and the military governorship of Cilicia and Syria, somewhere between 8 and 5 B.C., during which time he subdued the powerful robber race which dwelt in the mountains between Galatia and Cilicia. The census of Luke II. was thus certainly held in the course of this his first term of office; only Professor Ramsay thinks that, because Herod had seriously offended Augustus in 8 B.C., and had to send two embassies to Rome before the Emperor would be appeased, the census was probably delayed from 8 B.C. to 6 B.C., so that our Lord was born into the world in the last named year.

Rev. ALEXANDER IRVING, D.Sc., expressed the great pleasure he had felt in listening to this paper and his gratitude to Sir William Ramsay for the light which his writings had thrown upon the origin of the New Testament documents. His work, *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170*, was in this respect the most illuminating book he had met with since he read Mommsen's *History of the Provinces of the Empire*. The International Geological Congress had imprinted upon the face of its publications the motto: *Mente et Malleo*, which might be freely translated, "With brains and the hammer." That expressed in a concise phrase the leading principle of geological method, and emphasized *field-work* as the basis of that inductive science. Sir William had in his paper, and in the splendid field-work, on which it was based, brought all serious students to the position which enabled them to see that archæological research (when rightly followed) was reducible to a method which might be characterised by the phrase: *Mente et Spathâ*, "With brains and the spade." The great importance of the application of the inductive method (getting your facts by careful and accurate observation and then reasoning inductively from them), as in this case, to the trustworthiness of ancient documents, could scarcely be doubted. The contrary method of reasoning from negative evidence, and of evolving ideas by mere scholars out of their inner consciousness; ideas which came to be accepted for a time as theories, on account of the authority in the world of scholarship of those who propounded them; ideas which were often characterised by their nebulous origin in the region of what was called "higher criticism"—he had long regarded as thoroughly unscientific.



The speaker was struck with what the Professor had said as to the fallacy of supposing that the intellectual progress of Humanity had been one continued process of evolutionary growth; and thought people often forgot how greatly the intellectual night, which settled upon Europe between the Fall of the Western Empire and the Renaissance of Learning in the West, after the Fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century, was due to the wanton destruction in the fourth and seventh centuries of the libraries and museums of Alexandria, which Mommsen had described as the great and unique university of the Empire in the first three centuries.

As to the widespread use of *writing* of some sort in the time of Moses and earlier, and the fashionable scepticism on this subject for some thirty years after Ewald, he had hoped to hear some remarks from a gentleman in the room, who, among other valuable labours, had given us a translation of the Laws of Amraphel from the cuneiform inscriptions on diorite at Susa.

The abrupt ending of St. Luke's history, as contained in *The Acts*, had often struck him as somewhat extraordinary; and a new light seemed to be thrown on what he might almost call the truncated form of that document by Sir William's suggestion, that the disappearance of St. Luke from the gospel history is to be probably accounted for by his death from persecution or some other cause.

It had always seemed to the speaker a remarkable fact, that St. Luke should bring St. Paul to Rome and tell us that he spent two years there as a state-prisoner, with full liberty to receive his friends and discuss with them "things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ," without indicating any result to the Church and the world. Years ago he read a paper on the Origin of the Epistle to the Hebrews to the Wokingham Clerical Society, in which he propounded the hypothesis (based on such glimpses as we have of the social and intellectual life of the Hebrew colony then in Rome), that the said Epistle might have been based on the notes made at the time by Luke (and perhaps Clement) of those discussions which St. Paul carried on at that period with his own countrymen; a hypothesis which seemed strengthened by certain internal indications. That might account for the Epistle being Paulistic in matter, though not Pauline in form and style; and he now thought that the suggested probability of Luke's unexpected death might go some way to explain its anonymity. He would be glad to know if Sir William's intimate

knowledge of matters incidental to St. Luke and his history gave any countenance to such an idea.

It was refreshing to find Harnack refuted by Harnack, if only to remind us that the "accepted conclusions" of mere critics and scholars (based to a large extent on negative evidence) can have *to the scientific mind nothing of the nature of finality*; and that deductions drawn from them can have no surer value than the nebulous data upon which they too often rest.

Dr. T. G. PINCHES.—I have listened to Professor Ramsay's lecture with much interest, but as it refers to the criticism of the New Testament, whilst my own subject has to do with the antiquities of the Old Testament, I did not expect to be called upon to speak this afternoon. Referring to the antiquity of writing, there can be no doubt whatever as to the testimony of the Babylonian tablets upon that point. Among the most ancient documents may be mentioned the archaic tablets\* published by M. François Thureau-Dangin, of the Museum of the Louvre, in which we seem to see the growth of the sense of the necessity of precision in the matter of dating. Those which seem to be the earliest specimens have no dates, but on some—perhaps later documents—we find names of rulers, sometimes with their titles, but neither month nor day, the necessity for inserting which, however, soon became evident. As time went on, the scribes of Babylonia adopted methods still more precise, indicating the date at first by the event of the year, and finally by giving the regnal year of the king.†

Another point in Professor Ramsay's remarks which struck me was his statement that the use of ink to write on pottery implied of necessity the use of some softer material to receive the inscription. From Babylonia and Assyria we get nothing of the nature of a document on either paper, skin, or parchment, but that something of the kind was used is implied by at least one colophon, written in ink of a reddish colour (possibly originally black) upon a fragment of a clay tablet from Nineveh in the British Museum. This reminds us that there are represented on the Assyrian sculptures, scribes, one with a tablet and the other with something of the

---

\* Estimated date 4500 B.C.

† The Assyrians used the system of dating by the names of officials, which were chosen yearly, the so-called eponyms.

nature of a scroll, writing down the tale of the heads of slain enemies, or lists of the spoil.

But, as I have said, I cannot speak upon the subject now before us. I take this opportunity, however, to express my appreciation of the very interesting lecture which Professor Ramsay has delivered upon a subject of much importance.

Colonel G. MACKINLAY.—I had not intended to make any remarks, but as a previous speaker referred to Sir William Ramsay's excellent book, *Was Christ born in Bethlehem?* and to the date of Quirinus' first tenure of rule in Syria, I should like to ask Sir William, if any known historical fact gives a distinct negation to the date 8 B.C. for the Nativity, a date which is distinctly indicated by a certain line of inference?

I beg to join my thanks with those of others for the very useful and instructive paper which we have just heard.

Professor RAMSAY.—No known fact absolutely prevents this conclusion; but I await with pleasure Colonel Mackinlay's book upon the subject.

The vote of thanks of the meeting having been put from the chair, was carried unanimously; and the meeting separated.