

ART. IV.—ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL AND MODERN
CRITICISM.—I.

THE third Gospel appears now to occupy the place at the centre of the fray between contending schools of thought which twenty years ago was tenanted by the Gospel of St. John. The higher criticism of the New Testament has more or less reluctantly accommodated itself to the position that it is the beloved disciple who has given us the fourth Gospel. The fashion now is to disparage and set late the Gospel of St. Luke. The tide has been stemmed to some extent by the labours of Dr. Ramsay, who has satisfactorily solved some of the chief "secular" difficulties in Luke's record—notably that connected with the census of Augustus in ii. 1, 2. Most sober critics now admit that the Acts was written throughout by the author who had previously written the third Gospel, and that this writer is that companion of Paul's missionary journeys who had such exceptional opportunity for compiling both in the two years (*circa* A.D. 58-60) when he was lingering in Palestine during Paul's detention at Cæsarea. But, still, it is deemed necessary to scout the idea that Luke "published" shortly after that time. Why? Partly because of an arbitrary theory that records of Christ's life were not written while the Apostles were still teaching; partly out of deference to great German scholars who deny that Jesus could have uttered detailed prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, such as we find in Luke xix., xxi. Orthodox English writers appear to play with this negative postulate without considering either its full significance or the aspersion it casts on Luke's character as a capable historian. "The greater precision," says Dr. Stanton (in *Hastings' Dictionary, s.v. "Gospels"*), "with which the siege of Jerusalem is referred to than it is in Matthew and Mark (Luke xix. 43, xxi. 24) seems to show that in this Gospel the original form of the prophecy has been somewhat lost owing to the knowledge of the particular circumstances of the event." Not at all—until it is proved *on other grounds* that Luke did write after the event. As a fact, the scene of the detailed prophecy of Luke xix. 41-44 has no parallel in Matthew and Mark. Unless the whole episode is fictitious, it is presumable Christ, when weeping over Jerusalem, spoke as Luke records, and if we accept prophecy at all, we shall scarcely pretend to rule it shall not be "precise." I need not show that insinuations such as this may be given a wide extension by the general reader. Why should not the somewhat precise prediction of John Baptist's future work be equally coloured by the event? May not this florid recorder

of prophecies have similarly embellished his account of Christ's birth and resurrection? Where shall we stop?

Dr. Ramsay has recorded his own complete conversion from the conclusions of Baur, Zeller and Renan, "that Luke was an able and beautiful, but not very well-informed writer, who lived . . . when all actors in those events had died, and when accurate knowledge of facts was difficult." It is much to be regretted that one who has so ably vindicated the accuracy of Luke still makes him publish late what it is admitted he compiled early. In discussing Luke's peculiar mode of dating in chap. iii. 1, Dr. Ramsay appeals to the manner of reckoning prevalent in the time of Titus, who, like Tiberius, had been "associated" with his imperial predecessor. He thinks Luke's unusual computation shows that the Preface at least must have been put—possibly as a finishing touch—when Titus was sole Emperor (A.D. 79-81). Here, at least, we have a good scholarly illustration instead of mere assumptions. But it is unconvincing by itself as an argument against the early date, and its insufficiency for chronological purposes is, in fact, admitted by Mr. Bebb in Hastings' Dictionary, *s.v.* "Luke." No one, indeed, more clearly than Dr. Ramsay connects this Gospel with first witnesses whom Luke might well have found in Palestine in A.D. 58-60, but who after the fall of Jerusalem must, if surviving, have been widely scattered. Thus, of Luke's Preface he says most truly,¹ that "an author who begins with a declaration such as that had either mixed freely with many of the eye-witnesses and actors in the events which he proceeds to record, or he is a thorough impostor." Again, on Luke i. 2 he remarks: "It is plain that the historian either believed his statements to be based on the authority of the Virgin Mary herself, or has deliberately tried to create a false impression that such was the case." I gather, then, Dr. Ramsay admits that Luke was getting the information used in his two books in A.D. 58-60. But surely we may infer also from the Acts that Luke was in those days actually noting down minute occurrences in his journeys, just as a man would who meant to shortly publish his compilations. Now Acts abruptly ends with Paul at Rome "in his own hired dwelling," *circa* A.D. 63. In whatever way we explain its precipitate close, the natural inference is that it came out at that period, and that the Gospel had been published somewhat earlier. We surely need strong proof to make us think Luke delayed giving his compilations to the world for some twenty years.

Professor Sanday has, I think, then, fairly summed up the

¹ Ramsay, "Was Christ born at Bethlehem?" chap. i.

only substantial arguments against the old belief that Luke wrote not long after his two years' stay in Palestine. "There are two objections: (1) That the process described in the Preface implies a longer period than would fall within the year A.D. 63—it is probable that the common basis of our three Synoptic Gospels was itself not committed to writing so early; and (2) that there is a rather strong presumption that the Gospel was written after, and not before, the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70."¹

Of (2) I have said something already. With both (1) and (2) I propose to deal hereafter, noticing at the same time some flimsy subsidiary arguments that are added in Hastings' Dictionary, *s.v.* "Gospels," "Luke." It will be sufficient to say here that the theory of oral Gospels prevailing for some forty years in a land where people could write, appears the most unsatisfactory of all solutions of the Synoptic problem, and that as such data as we find in Matt. i. 1-17, Luke i. 46-55, 68-79, ii. 29-31, must have been found in early literary documents, the records which forms the "common basis" might well have been in writing too at an early date. But I must confine the rest of this paper to a graver matter. Side by side with this idea of late date there have come abroad ideas of Luke's inaccuracy in at least one important Gospel episode. A writer who I had fancied was singularly successful in recovering the exact context of many of our Lord's sayings, and often indicated frankly when he had no chronological data,² is now presented as perpetrating a blunder which even in A.D. 80, I cannot think the Christian Churches would have tolerated. To both Dr. Sanday and Mr. A. Wright, the "first" miraculous Draught of Fishes of which Luke tells us appears fictitious. Both suggest it is a distorted replica of the miracle recorded in John xxi., which Luke has antedated two years or so, and forced into connection with Peter's summons to attend our Lord as an Apostle.³ Luke thus, in fact, stands charged with two delinquencies: (1) Grave misstatement of the circumstances of the final call of the leading Apostles, and (2) utter misapprehension (in A.D. 80) of a manifestation of the Risen Master which appears to have been much discussed (John xxi. 23) in Christian circles.

It is but fair to the Evangelist to say that most of his readers will find such a blunder a thing of unique enormity. Most Christian students find that with the aid of a little

¹ Professor Sanday, "Inspiration." Bampton Lectures, 1893.

² Cf. Luke's expressions, *e.g.*, in v. 16, 27, vi. 1, 12, 17, vii. 1, 18, viii. 1, 22, 26, 28, xi. 1, xiv. 1, xviii. 1, xx. 1.

³ Sanday, "Fourth Gospel"; Wright, "Composition of the Four Gospels."

imagination and common-sense they can attain a sufficiently satisfactory solution of discrepancies in the Evangelists.¹ They, of course, admit in such studies that, whatever one's idea of inspiration, the Gospels cannot be acquitted of occasional inaccuracies. They recognise too, that, in Matthew Christ's utterances are often ranged in view of subject, and not historical sequence. But arbitrary arrangement, and such mistakes in detail as occur in all human narrations, are on a very different footing, one feels, from blunders such as these. But we must be fair to the modern critics too. Dr. Sanday further says that "we might even be tempted to suppose" Matthew's account of Peter's walking on the water is a similar replica of that volatile episode recorded in John xxi.—Peter's actions in Matt. xiv. 28-31 being, in fact, merely an embellishment of his "casting himself into the sea," to go to Jesus, in St. John's story. Both critics, too, tell us that there were not two "cleansings of the Temple" as we had always supposed. Mr. Wright's ideal "oral tradition" had somehow misdated the incident which Christendom has usually associated with the first day of Holy Week. The poor Synoptics in utter indifference to chronology, all three of them, endorsed the mistake. St. John in his Gospel corrected it, but, somehow, without in the least inducing the Church to understand his object. For, says Mr. Wright, "St. John places the cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of the ministry; the Petrine memoirs place it at its close. . . . I maintain St. John is to be followed."

When the writer after this feat magnanimously cedes us the historicity of both the Miracles of Feeding, one cannot help reflecting how much of this "high" criticism depends on the survival or loss of a few accidental words. But for the record of Christ's having casually mentioned two distinct feedings in a certain speech, one may take it for certain this critic would have his neat little theory of conflicting traditions which had again biparted a single incident. In that case he would have been by his own admission wrong.

But I think there will be no need to justify Luke when, as here, he is supposed to blunder in such good company as that of Matthew and Mark. Let us, then, rivet our attention on the charge personal to our Evangelist. I shall try to discuss it as if the Gospels were ordinary literature and the Church any ordinary association of men united for a common object. I set aside for the time all those conceptions of

¹ The incident of Luke vii. 36-50 is, of course, quite distinct from that of John xii. 1-8, and as the difficulties here lie in the accounts of Matthew and Mark, there is no need to touch on them in this paper.

inspiration which, certainly, from the third century onwards coloured the Christian view of the Gospels, and implanted a belief that (whatever their sources were) the Evangelists were guarded by God from serious error. Most of my readers are familiar with the two episodes in question. Dr. Sanday "strongly suspects," and Mr. Wright "thinks it not improbable," that Luke has misplaced and misrepresented that recorded for us by St. John. Both critics try to palliate the gravity of the charge. But I certainly feel that, if their hypothesis be well founded, I can say no more in these papers about the capability of St. Luke. An Evangelist may make what claim he pleases to have "traced the course of all things accurately from the first." The assertion will go for nothing with most men if they find him so inaccurate where his statements can be checked.

Three distinct occasions should be recalled by my readers in considering this hypothesis.

1. Matt. iv. 18-22; Mark i. 16-20: Matthew and Mark have tersely recorded a call of the two pairs of fisher brethren (Simon and Andrew, James and John) from their professional work to be with Christ as fishers of men. Luke says nothing of this call. They leave their work and follow Jesus. From this point let us follow Mark's story (Mark i. 21-34); Matthew's having only some of the incidents, and being diversified by the long section of the Sermon on the Mount. Mark continues, "And they go into Capernaum." He tells how in that town Jesus teaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath, causing astonishment at the "authority" He claimed. In the synagogue Jesus relieves a demoniac of an unclean spirit who recognises His power, and the fame of the deed is widely circulated. He then goes into Peter's house and cures his mother-in-law of a fever. When evening comes the sick and demoniacs are brought to Him and healed, the devils not being allowed to express their recognition of Him.

Now, all these facts Luke, who begins this section, "And *He* came down to Capernaum," relates (in iv. 31-41) in the same order, and with such close *verbal* agreement with Mark that his narrative must have come either from Mark or, as I think is much more probable, from Mark's source. In either case, he must have known that those Apostles were with Jesus. Obviously, too, when he says that Jesus "entered the house of Simon" (iv. 38) he knows of Peter as already an acquaintance of our Lord, and presumably taking Him to his house. The only rational explanation of the omission of the former call, and the altering "they" to "he," amid so much close correspondence, is that it is deliberate. Luke knows that, although these Apostles had been summoned from their work

to attend Jesus, they did not really make their final renunciation of "all things" for His sake till after that visit to Capernaum and on the occasion of the miraculous Draught of Fishes. He chooses, naturally enough, to concentrate our attention on the final and more memorable call, which he is going to give in v. 1-11. Is it an unlikely thing that Jesus should once and again have invited these men to temporary companionship, to test them before they were summoned to leave everything for Him? No one who accepts the fourth Gospel need think so. For John informs us of the fact that these same persons had on a yet earlier occasion gone from John Baptist to Jesus as temporary companions, and had accompanied Him in His Passover visit to Jerusalem (*John i. 37 et seq.*). They had again taken up their vocation as fishermen before Jesus summoned them to keep company with Him on the occasion of the visit to Capernaum. But what decided them finally to become His permanent disciples at the sacrifice of all worldly ties was the day of the miraculous Draught of Fishes. Put in this way, I see no more difficulty in the final call given in Luke v. than in either of the other calls—John i., Mark i. From Luke, in fact, we learn that those fishermen were appealed to, not twice, but thrice, before they made their great sacrifice for the sake of Christ. And why not?

2. Luke v. 1-11: But now for Luke's story in its connection with the miracle. Our Lord had been preaching in the synagogues of Galilee, presumably unattended by these men. He appears on the banks of the lake, and a crowd gathers round and presses to hear Him. He sees two empty boats, and enters the one which is Simon's, and, asking him to thrust out a little way, addresses the people from it. When He has ceased He bids Simon cast for a draught. Simon, remarking that he had fished all night in vain, obeys in deference to Jesus. The draught is so successful that the nets break, and the other boat—that of the partners, James and John—has to be hauled to land the immense haul. Simon Peter, appalled, prostrates himself, crying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" The others share his amazement. Jesus says to Simon: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men alive." The group bring their boats to land, and leave "all things" and follow Jesus.

Observe the departures from that call related by Matthew and Mark, which was evidently known to Luke. That call presented a picture of one boat with the sons of Zebedee in it mending their nets; of Simon and Andrew working a seine net from the shore; of the Master approaching unattended, and saying: "Come ye after Me, and I will make you fishers of men." St. Luke's incident, with its thronging

crowds now incited to hear Jesus, the two empty boats with their owners washing their nets on shore, and Simon summoned to push the boat off that Jesus may preach unmolested, is an entirely different scene. Even the metaphor used by Jesus after the miracle is not quite the same as before, but seems adapted to the peculiar circumstance. For in *ἀνθρώπους ἔση ζωγρῶν* ("It is men whom you shall catch alive") there is surely a reference, not to fishing in the open sea, but rather to Peter's present problem—how to retain two boatloads of *living*, leaping fish. And what of Peter's words? If ever utterance was true to the speaker's temperament, it is that, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" It is just that curious blend of modesty and audacity which we know to be characteristic of the man. It is the terse, brusque way of speaking which we hear again in—"Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not happen to Thee." "Lord, it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles." "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Can we suppose that all this is merely the effect of an "oral" mirage, which reflects features on one side from episode 1, and on the other from the distant episode 3, and yet produces such a lifelike scene?

3. John xxi.: Some two years afterwards Jesus appears in the resurrection body to seven disciples, who, after the first Eastertide, had resumed for a time their vocation on the Sea of Galilee. Andrew, whom we may detect in Luke's group, though his name is not mentioned,¹ is certainly not present now. The hour is that of hazy dawn. In Luke's story it was seemingly evening; at least Peter's aorist, "We toiled all night," taken with the incident of protracted preaching to an unoccupied crowd, suggests that conclusion. An unrecognised Person bids these seven, after another night's fruitless toil, cast the net "on the right side of the boat," and again there is a large haul of fish. The sign convinces John that it is the Lord. And why? Of course, because Jesus had worked a like miracle in his presence under like circumstances in the early days, and because Luke's impugned story is strictly true. Never, in fact, is the repetition of a miracle more intelligible both in purpose and in actual result.

Instead, however, of breaking nets and two boats full of live fish, we have now one² boat, and some of its crew

¹ The omission proves nothing more than in Luke iv. 38. Luke there gives us, "When Jesus was come into Simon's house," for Mark's "They come into the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John."

² John vi. 22-24 shows that there is no distinction in his use between *πλοῖον* and *πλοῖριον*.

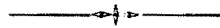
rowing, some tugging at the net; and it is distinctly said that this net was landed on shore with one hundred and fifty-three big fish, and was not broken. After this there is not a shred of resemblance between the two stories. Peter, who on the first occasion had cried, "Depart from me," is seen here leaping into the water to go to Jesus. On the other hand, instead of hailing Him as "Lord," he with the others refrains from all greeting or questioning to corroborate the conviction that it is Jesus. When discourse actually begins, the Saviour does not repeat the former metaphors. Nothing is said about fishing for or capturing men. It is Peter's work of tending the Church in his official capacity that is to be impressed. And so thrice in varied form we have the charge to feed the flock.

Possibly the reader is now satisfied that the historicity of that first Draught of Fishes is likely to survive the strong suspicions of Luke's critics. I shall instance hereafter other cases where this Gospel tells us fresh matter in regard to Peter and John, which the critics have not assailed. They convince me that Luke had access in his travels, not only to John in Palestine, but also to Peter himself, whose presence at Rome in A.D. 61-64 is well attested. Meantime, I venture to point out a kind of consideration which our critics with their microscopic analysis constantly overlook, despite their theory of exclusively oral teaching. As this evangelist wrote—if St. Luke wrote about the year A.D. 80—so must he have been for many years teaching and speaking. Further—assuming John xxi. to be true history—not only St. John, but six others, had during a half-century been telling that Resurrection story which is now preserved in the Fourth Gospel. That it was left to St. John to enshrine it in an authoritative form in no way argues any conspiracy of silence until St. John wrote. We are left in no doubt in this matter. For St. John tells us that the discourse of our Lord on the occasion was talked about among the early Christians, and he corrects a misunderstanding of our Lord's expressions relative to himself (John xxi. 23).

Then, too, there was Peter, who had lived a noteworthy life from the beginning of the Gospel onwards, and been martyred in Rome, probably in the summer of A.D. 64. Were these early Christians quite uninterested in him? On the contrary, much sympathy, degenerating to party feeling, undeniably centred about that great personality in very early times. What follows? Why, if Luke came forward in A.D. 80 with his garbled story about Peter's antecedents, there must have been many who would know better and resent the innovation. If he showed he had antedated the familiar Draught of Fishes

after the Resurrection, a whole generation of Christians would have criticised the gravity of the error. If he stated that the two sons of Zebedee had witnessed that first draught, St. John himself was alive for some years longer, and could hardly have refrained from demanding the elimination of the legend. The critical conception may be that for half a century these early Christians neither knew nor cared whether their Master worked a peculiar miracle before or after His resurrection, or both, or even whether His ministry lasted one year or three. Common-sense, on the other hand, suggests that with the lives both of Jesus and His Apostles they had made themselves familiar, and that the Evangelists wrote for men who they knew could supply a great deal where they were silent.¹ Their omissions and alleged discrepancies are interpreted now as if the Churches had no common historical retrospect, and nurtured their faith merely with a congeries of conflicting traditions. Is it not possible that these features are rather to be judged by an ideal of closely-united communities, who talked about their Master's doings repeatedly, and even critically? That St. John deliberately omits what he knew had been well told before in authoritative form is the explanation of his omissions, and that he corrects one misapprehension in chap. xxi. 23 implies that he would have corrected others if they had obtained credence. That the accounts in the Synoptics differ *inter se* and by comparison with St. John is again and again due to reluctance to describe an episode which the writer had not investigated to its source.

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ART. V.—THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM (MATT. II. 1-17).

THE same old story again! What new ideas is it possible for any to advance on this well-worn subject? Is it capable of affording anything more than the merest conjecture as to what the nature of the phenomenon was? And is our firm belief in the truth of the Divine narrative to be called in question by criticism tending to subvert our ideas of that marvellous apparition?

These are questions which will naturally occur to the minds of most readers, but which may at once be set at rest by an

¹ *E.g.*, Matt. xxiii. 37, Luke xiii. 34 are meaningless, unless these writers know of repeated visits to Jerusalem. Similarly, Luke ix. 9 implies some knowledge of the incidents that brought the imprisoned Baptist to death.