

ART. II.—ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL AND MODERN CRITICISM.—V.

THE other prediction peculiar to Luke is in xix. 41-44. I have before taken exception to the manner in which in Hastings' Dictionary, *s.v.* "Gospels," we are told of "the greater precision with which the siege of Jerusalem is referred to than it is in Matthew and Mark (Luke xix. 43, xxi. 24)." As a fact, Matthew and Mark have nowhere any prophecy of the siege, and the incident of Christ weeping over Jerusalem is only recorded in the third Gospel. Here is the whole passage:

"And when He drew nigh, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If thou hadst known in this thy day, even thou, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee when thine enemies shall cast up a bank about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee: and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.'"

Now, there are really only two points of view from which such a record as the above can be logically treated. Those who accept the continuous teaching of the Church, that our Lord was empowered to utter prophecies, will see nothing to stumble at in His words being afterwards fulfilled by the events of A.D. 70. Those who deny our Lord such power will, of course, find the statement unhistorical, and they will doubtless extend the same criticism to our Lord's speech to the weeping daughters of Jerusalem (xxiii. 28-31) noticed in my third paper. The chasm is insuperable. On our side we shall have the fact that these fulfilled predictions were the support of the faith of the early Church, and that prophecy, like miracle, has ever been regarded as a "sign" of the Divine origin of the Christian revelation. Doubtless we may appeal to-day to proof of a higher moral kind. Nevertheless, there is no escape from the dilemma that either these "signs" were vouchsafed, or the grounds on which the first teachers of Christianity relied were utterly unsound. It is quite immaterial in this connection whether certain great German savants assign a late date to such passages *because* they embody fulfilled predictions. "What think ye of Christ?" is necessarily the question to be first answered. Repudiate the claims which the Church has ever made on His behalf, and there is necessarily an open field for destructive conjecture throughout the whole record of miracle and prophecy. Accept them, and there is none, except where there is reason to suspect the authority of the documentary testimony.

The passage cited above is in all MSS. and versions of a Gospel of whose authority no doubt was entertained. It falls into line with other primitive records of our Saviour's knowledge of the future and its general independence of the bounds of time and place. Thus, we find it distinctly stated in the Gospels that Christ had knowledge of Philip's conversation with Nathanael at a distance, and of the past life of the Samaritan woman; that He foresaw Peter's apostasy, repentance, and martyrdom; that He knew what should happen to Himself; that He foretold His Death, His Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven; that He repeatedly predicted the inclusion of the Gentiles in His kingdom and the exclusion of the once favoured Jewish people; that He told men of His own Second Coming as the Judge of all mankind. Those who accept these powers as inherent in Christ's Personality will probably see little difficulty in believing that He foretold with some detail the siege and overthrow of Jerusalem. On the other hand, those who assume a naturalistic standpoint will logically expound the Church's story on the familiar naturalistic lines. Delusion and illusion will then be continually made the agencies which insured for Apostolic Christianity its successes. Miracles other than faith-healings will, on the most charitable assumption, be ascribed to misunderstanding and faulty records. Prophecies will at best be happy conjectures. If evidently fulfilled in detail in human experience, they must be "suspicious" and their recorder must write after their fulfilment.

These two alternatives are familiar to most of us. It is to be regretted that our modern English critics too frequently fail to distinguish this issue when discussing the dates of the Gospels. In Hastings, *s.v.* "Matthew," *Eschatological Standpoint and Date*, the authenticity of our Lord's predictions is not seriously discussed. The reader's attention is mainly directed to the interesting but not vital phenomenon that language similar to our Lord's occurs in the Apocalypse of Baruch. But as far as possible the date of the Gospel seems to be made to depend on the writer's experience of the things predicted. "Matthew repeats the warnings against being led away by rumours of Messiahs having been seen in various retired places (*cf.* Apoc. Bar., 48³⁴) so showing the topic of the hour when he wrote." [My italics.] "The urgency of the warnings against going after false Messiahs on the felt approach of the great national crisis (conceived of on the lines of Daniel's prophecy of Jerusalem's last trial and in terms of current apocalyptic based thereon) points to the actual occasion which gave it birth." The conclusion is reached that Matthew writes in A.D. 68-69. I fail to see

how this is inferred from Matthew's presumed use of an apocalyptic book, which the critics date A.D. 50-65, and which may well be itself in part an echo of our Lord's eschatological teaching. But that Matthew must have conveniently unearthed such warnings on the approach of the great national crisis does not seem very distinguishable from the cruder German dictum that they were never uttered by Christ. It is apparently by the same considerations that the writer *s.v.* "Mark" is led to set the second Gospel "perhaps early in A.D. 70."¹ (The reader is left to reconcile this chronological scheme with the other. Both writers admit that Mark is the earliest of the Gospels, and the writer *s.v.* "Matthew" constantly assumes that this Evangelist made use of Mark.) Of Luke, as I have already noticed, we are told *s.v.* "Gospels," that the predictions seem 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;* and "somewhere about the year 80" is the date conjectured, *s.v.* "Luke."

I do not understand to what extent the authenticity of our Lord's predictions is acknowledged when thus much is postulated. But there is one which, if admitted, quite fails to square with this method of getting at the date of the recorder from the predictions he records. It is our Lord's prophecy of the fate of the Temple. While the Temple was standing in its splendour, Jesus is said to have warned His hearers that "there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." Matthew and Mark record this as well as Luke, and it is as striking a prediction as can be conceived. Bring the Gospels down even to "early in A.D. 70," and we are still not within range of the probability of its fulfilment. For the fate of the Temple was no natural outcome of the "great national crisis." Even after the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem there was no reason to anticipate its demolition. It was not the Roman practice to destroy such edifices, and Titus was most anxious to save it. The destruction of the cloisters was begun by the Jews themselves. When the Holy Place was endangered by the spread-

¹ The arbitrary character of these modern assignments of date is here illustrated by the comment: "There is no passage which clearly means or certainly implies that the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple was an accomplished fact. If so great a catastrophe in Jewish history had taken place within recent or a comparatively recent period, there would have been indications of it in less obscure forms in the earliest of the Gospels." One is naturally led to remark that the fourth Gospel, which all agree was written after A.D. 70, has not a single "indication" that the Temple lay in ruins at the time of writing.

ing flames, Titus sent troops to extinguish them. Lured, however, by hope of plunder, they deliberately disobeyed his orders. More than this, it might be said that it was not till the time of Hadrian that the prophecy was completely fulfilled. The site of the Holy Place was, at least, at that time recognisable, and it was dedicated to Jupiter Capitolinus in A.D. 136.

Now, the critics do not date Matthew's Gospel after the destruction of the Temple, because in Matt. xxiv. 29 we have the judgment discourse interwoven with the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem in such sort that the fearful signs of the end of the world are regarded as occurring "*immediately* after the tribulation of those days." This misunderstanding on the part of some of our Lord's hearers is of service to us to-day. It is recognised that Matthew could not have written thus after A.D. 70. Here, then, is an event not in the least within men's cognizance, and far more improbable than the rise of false prophets or the siege of Jerusalem and deportation of Jewish captives. If in the one case we take the position that the Evangelist's record is not conditioned by experience, why not in the others? If this striking prophecy of the obliteration of the Temple stands, why should we not believe, as our forefathers did, that Matthew's prediction of the false prophets in no way bears on the date of his Gospel, or Luke's prediction of the siege on the date of his? Indeed, one may go further, and say that, so far from there being any real indication that Matthew writes in an atmosphere of false prophets and profanations of the Temple, his antecedence to the years 68-70 and his inexperience of the occurrence of the events predicted are really on rationalistic lines the best conclusion. For it is extremely improbable that a historian "on the felt approach of the great national crisis" should boldly associate it with a forecast of the "immediate" ending of the world. A Matthew writing in this way in 68-69 must have in two years' time found his interpretation of current events completely falsified, and the more we postulate of such interpretation, the more must the credit of his Gospel have been impaired. From this point of view there is more difficulty in making him write in the midst of the Jewish troubles than before them. I may add that the ecclesiastical note, "let him that readeth understand," attached in both Matthew and Mark to the prediction of the "abomination of desolation" profaning the Temple, seems to give the same chronological indication. As there are no such comments elsewhere in the Gospels, we cannot attribute these words to the Evangelists. They are obviously an ecclesiastical note dating from the period when the prediction was being ful-

filled.¹ They thus bespeak a time when the Gospels had attained a circulation in the Church as recognised authoritative literature. This condition is best satisfied by supposing some years to elapse between the dates of the Gospels and the date of the fulfilment of the prediction.

This is not a paper on prophecy, but it is well, perhaps, to recall the fact that it is impossible to eliminate the prophetic element from the two revelations in our Bible, and that we are inextricably committed to the reality of this "sign" both in the Old Testament and the New. The Church's position on this subject is attested, not by mere *obiter dicta*, but by the Nicene Creed itself. The generations that succeeded the Apostles were, of course, convinced in this matter; and it is interesting to recall how those very predictions in the Gospels which are now so arbitrarily treated as "showing the topic of the hour" when their recorder wrote were used as Christian apologia. I will quote two instances only of this common practice. The prediction above cited in regard to the false prophets is used by Justin Martyr for argumentative purposes thus in his dialogue with Trypho (chap. lxxxii.):

"We know that He foreknew all that would happen to us after His Resurrection from the dead and Ascension into heaven. For He said we would be put to death and hated for His Name's sake. And that many false prophets and false Christs would appear in His Name and deceive many. And so it has come about."

So, again, in the Clementine Homilies (chap. xv.) we have a citation of the predictions of the siege in Luke xix., which, although the writer was probably an Ebionite, is sufficiently illustrative of the universal belief:

"But our Master being a Prophet by an inborn and ever-flowing spirit, and knowing all things at all times, He confidently set forth plainly, as I said before, sufferings, places, appointed times, manners, limits. Accordingly, therefore, prophesying of the Temple, He said: 'See ye these buildings? Verily I say to you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another which shall not be taken away, and this generation shall not pass until the destruction begin. For they shall come and sit here, and shall besiege it, and shall slay your children here.' And in like manner He spoke in plain words the things that were straightway to happen, which we can now see with our eyes, in order that the accomplishment might be among those to whom the word was spoken."

The question to-day is whether this belief of the Early Church, which is repeatedly referred to in after-times² as a confirmation of men's faith, was, after all, unwarranted. Obviously, such arguments lose much of their force if a

¹ See Alford, note on Matt. xxiv. 15.

² Compare, *e.g.*, the use of the prophecies in Luke xix., xxi., in Eusebius, "H. E.," bk. iii., c. 7.

Trypho or other adversary could reply: "But the Evangelists may have embellished these predictions by their experience of the particular circumstances of the event"; or, "They wrote them on the felt approach of the great national crisis . . . in terms of current apocalyptic." Justin, at least, must be credited with much more knowledge of the state of things in Palestine in A.D. 68-70 than our modern critics. How is it no such alternative seems to present itself to the minds of those who thus relied on the predictions presented in our Gospels? Is it likely that an argument which the early Church so confidently pressed could be so easily overturned by a little more attention to the history of the Gospels?

We cannot, I maintain, allow the reality of prophecy in one case and question it in another; cede such a striking prediction as that of the speedy obliteration of the Temple, and argue that the other details of our Lord's prophecies show that the Evangelists who record them must have had experience of their fulfilment. In the case of all three Evangelists, there is really no indication that they did not write some five years before the national crisis of A.D. 68-70; and in Luke's case, as I have shown, there is reason to think that he writes not later than the year 63, and that the Acts followed the Gospel not later than A.D. 68. No argument can be drawn from the predictions. Even if the Evangelists wrote as late as the critics suppose, it would be a large assumption that the predictions remained not recorded in writing until that time, and a quite unwarrantable one that, if the Evangelists found them in writing, they would modify them by their own experiences. I may notice in this connection that Luke elsewhere seems to present predictions uncoloured by facts that were certainly within his knowledge. By his honesty elsewhere his record of Christ's predictions must be estimated if we are to deal fairly. Thus, the predictions of chap. i. indicate only the Baptist's work as Christ's forerunner, but say nothing of his martyrdom. The prediction of Agabus in Acts xi. 38 is quite indefinite in Luke's presentation of it. We are merely told that this prophet "signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine over all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar." More important for my present purpose is that other prediction of this same Agabus in Acts xxi. 11 concerning Paul's own sufferings, and the limited degree of prophetic inspiration attributed to the Apostle himself in Acts xx. 23. Agabus' prediction is confined to the part played by the Jews of Jerusalem who should "bind the man which owneth this girdle, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." In the other passage Paul is informed by the

Holy Spirit only to the degree of knowledge "that in every city bonds and afflictions abide" him. Now, these accounts of prophetic inspiration were written, on the critical assumption, several years after Paul's death. One may fairly argue that, if Luke was the sort of historian to embellish Christ's own prophecies, it is strange that he, writing with a full knowledge of Paul's imprisonments and final martyrdom, presents the subject with such limitations. Indeed, the critical canons with which the Gospel narratives are now approached seem here to be dangerous weapons to handle. To borrow the one I recently quoted: "If so great a catastrophe" as the execution of Luke's chief character "had taken place . . . there would have been indications of it" in the Acts. There are certainly none. On the critics' own principles, then, the Acts, and therefore the third Gospel, too, should be dated before Paul's martyrdom, and consequently before the fall of Jerusalem.

I must now bring this necessarily sketchy presentation of the claims of the third Gospel to a conclusion. From a merely common-sense point of view it would seem highly improbable that a work so early and widely set on a level with the Apostles' own writings was only of secondary authority. It was certainly more easy for the second century than it is for the twentieth to distinguish the claims of this book. Were Luke's position assailable, it is curious that neither then nor in the fourth century, when the limitations of the New Testament Canon were much discussed, is it ever assailed. Contrariwise, Marcion (*circa* A.D. 144), the heretical impugner of the Gospel Canon, attaches particular dignity to the third Gospel. Tatian's "Diatessaron," written before A.D. 170, shows us how widely the equal authority of the four Gospels was recognised. At the beginning of the third century the almost superstitious respect paid to the quaternity of Gospels is expressed in Irenæus' well-known comparison of the four living creatures about the throne of God. It is recognised as part of God's ordering that there should be four, and only four, authoritative Gospels. The Church, however uncritical in her accounts of their origin, is convinced not only that they express the teaching of the Apostles, but that they themselves indicate a special guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This last point of view I have kept out of consideration. I have endeavoured to show what Luke's claims are for one who only postulates, as Godet does, "that the authors of our Gospels were men of good sense and good faith." Prophecy apart, there appears to be nothing in all the minute analysis that the Gospels have sustained to alter our old ideas as to their

dates. On the other hand, the same dividing line between critics will probably be recognised as in Archbishop's Thomson's excellent account of Luke's Gospel in the old "Smith's Dictionary of the Bible," *s.v.* "Luke." "It is painful to remark," he says, "how the opinions of many commentators who refuse to fix the date of this Gospel earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem have been influenced by the determination that nothing like prophecy shall be found in it. Believing that our Lord did really prophesy that event, we have no difficulty in believing that an Evangelist reported the prophecy before it was fulfilled." Much has been claimed as scientific discovery which really only rests upon modifications of this determination. The necessity of reshaping our ideas of ancient Hebrew history by the light of the Higher Criticism has given this mood a certain vantage-ground, it being forgotten that the literary conditions of the Old Testament writings are totally different from those of the New. Chancellor Lias, however, has done good service in showing us in the CHURCHMAN how arbitrary and unauthorized are many of the dicta of the critics even in that less familiar province. Whatever the ultimate verdict there, it is at least worth noticing that the tide of criticism in regard to our New Testament books is, by the confession of Professor Harnack himself, setting "back to tradition." It is no longer deemed honest criticism to assume wherever convenient that Pauline Epistles are forgeries in Paul's name; indeed, there is an increasing tendency to treat the investigation of the authenticity of our Christian literature with the same fairness as is demanded in matters secular. The German dicta for the future will, we are told, be: "It is not the miracles that matter." "Differences are henceforward likely to appear in the interpretation of books rather than in the problems of their date and authenticity."¹ With a caveat in regard to certain dates, we accept the omen, not unmindful of the critical verdicts of thirty years ago. The important fact that the first teachers of Christianity did (wisely or unwisely) *believe* in miracles and prophecy is now unchallenged. One day, perhaps, such post-dating of predictions as I have noticed in these papers will be deemed as palpable a *petitio principii* as the once familiar device of denying Paul the authorship of the Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians because they showed the antiquity of that belief, and so far confirmed the Gospel story.²

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¹ Quotations from Harnack in an article on "New Testament Criticism," *Quarterly Review*, January, 1903.

² In that once popular work, "Supernatural Religion" (1874) we were told that the "Gospel miracles stand upon no other testimony"; "there