

"Fulfilled Among Us."

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I SUPPOSE few passages in the Bible are of greater value from an *evidential* point of view, than the first four verses of St. Luke's Gospel. It is indeed surprising to find what a strong argument they afford on many important points. The following is the translation from the Revised Version, which had perhaps better be quoted, as it differs in an important respect from the Authorized :

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus ; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."

I. *The Date of the Gospel.*—In the first place, the words, *which have been fulfilled among us*, imply a *very early* date for the Gospel. They would, I suppose, in modern English, be rendered *which have occurred among us* ; the writer regarding everything that occurred as being a fulfilment of God's purposes, whether expressed in an Old Testament prophecy or not. And though different persons will, of course, differ as to how long after the events such an expression might be used, all will admit that it could scarcely be as long as thirty years. A Parisian, for instance, writing *now* an account of the Siege of Paris and the Commune in 1871, would not speak of them as events *which have occurred among us*. On the other hand, anyone in South Africa, writing an account of the late war, might perhaps use the expression. Now the writer of the Gospel only narrates the events as far as Christ's Ascension (about A.D. 29), and therefore, when he speaks of them as matters *which have been fulfilled among us* (or, which have occurred among us), it makes it probable that he was not writing after A.D. 50, or, at latest, A.D. 60.

2. *Where the Gospel was Written.*—In the next place, the words imply that the Gospel was written *in Palestine*; for anyone writing elsewhere would not have described the events of Christ's life as having occurred *among us*.

3. *The Writer's Personal Knowledge.*—Thirdly, the words imply that the writer himself was present during at least part of the time referred to. This would certainly be their meaning in other cases. No one, for instance, in South Africa, writing an account of the war, would describe it as having occurred *among us*, unless he had been there himself during at least part of the time. In the same way the writer of the Gospel must have been in Palestine during part of Christ's ministry. And he may therefore have been the unnamed companion of Cleopas on the way to Emmaus: which would account for the extremely graphic character of that narrative. He would thus have been one of Christ's disciples himself; though not *from the beginning*, since for this he had to rely on the testimony of others.

4. *The Virgin Birth and Ascension.*—Next, the passage shows that the doctrines of our Lord's Virgin Birth and Ascension, instead of being additions to early Christianity (as is sometimes assumed) were taught to converts from the first. For the writer says that he only wrote his Gospel to assure Theophilus of the things about which he had already been instructed. Clearly, then, the course of instruction must have included what the Gospel included; and this was the whole of Christ's life, from His Virgin Birth to His Ascension. And there is no reason for thinking the case of Theophilus was unlike that of other early converts.

5. *Educated Converts.*—In the next place Theophilus is addressed as *most excellent*, a title which is also applied to the Roman Governors, Felix and Festus, and is something like our term *Right Honourable*. And this shows that one at least among the early converts was a man of education and position; who is not likely to have accepted the religion of the Crucified without the most convincing evidence.

6. *The Authorship of the Gospel.*—Moreover, Theophilus must have known from whom the book came, even if this was

not stated in the superscription. And as there seems no reason why he should have kept it secret, the authorship of the book must have been well known to Christians from the very first. And, therefore, when writers of the second century (such as Irenæus) give the author's name as *Luke*, they were merely recording what must always have been well known.

7. *The Historical Value of the Gospel.*—Lastly, as to the historical value of the Gospel. This will, of course, depend on the writer's qualifications as an historian.

(i.) Was he aware of the value of first-hand evidence—that is to say, of the accounts of *eye-witnesses* of the events referred to?

(ii.) Did he possess such evidence himself for the whole of Christ's life, even *from the beginning*?

(iii.) Were these witnesses not mere casual lookers-on, but persons deeply interested in the events (*Christian ministers*), and such as would remember them carefully?

(iv.) Had he also access to *many* previous narratives, so that he could check them, and compare them, one with another?

(v.) Was he living near the time and place where the events occurred (or were *fulfilled*), so that he could investigate everything on the spot?

(vi.) Were the views he formed about them not peculiar to himself, but the same as those in which persons were *instructed* in still earlier times?

(vii.) Was he a careful, methodical man, who wished to arrange everything *in order*?

(viii.) Was it his object only to record what he actually knew about, so that his readers could rely on the *certainty* of what he wrote?

(ix.) And above all, had he the time and patience to work it out carefully, so as to be able to *trace the course of all things accurately from the first*?

And these few verses answer every one of these questions in the affirmative. And, therefore, unless the writer was a deliberate impostor, a more trustworthy historian can scarcely be imagined.