

THE BUILDING OF THE THIRD GOSPEL

A HUNDRED years ago Goethe confessed that to enter on an historical and critical examination of the Gospels was like trying to drink up the sea.¹ This discouraging utterance would be still more in place to-day. The number of writings on the genesis and growth of the canonical Gospels which have appeared in the course of the last century is quite beyond computation. In spite of this, however, our knowledge of the facts which underlie the Gospels as we have them has not been greatly advanced. It is impossible that so much careful and reverent study should not have borne fruit ; but the clear gain is less than one might reasonably have anticipated. On this point Dr. Latimer Jackson expresses his judgment : “ If some established results can be reckoned up, they are few in comparison with many open questions. . . . The present state of the Synoptic Problem has been described as chaotic. To a certain extent the description must be allowed. There is nevertheless some warrant for stating the position in more hopeful terms. The goal which for upwards of a century has been kept in view lies still ahead.”²

If we were to search out reasons for this meagre result, we might possibly find these two. In the first place a just value has not always been placed on the direct statements of Scripture, few as these are and brief, but definite ; while literary considerations, which are mainly inferential and present a merely subjective appeal, have been emphasised.³ In the second place, modern Biblical Criticism is apt to build upon the conclusions of some prominent scholar, without that careful probing of the foundation which true science requires.⁴ One has known such cases : a new theory emerges, like Cortez' prospect from a peak in Darien, and a whole army of sympathisers hastens to salute it : within twenty years it has passed under the horizon.

Until quite recently the dominant hypothesis on the formation of the Synoptic Gospels was the “Two Document

¹ Moffatt, *The Historical New Testament*, p. 262.

² *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, pp. 436, 454.

³ “ One reason why these erroneous assumptions have held sway so long is that the Synoptic Problem has been studied merely as a problem of literary criticism apart from a consideration of the historical conditions under which the Gospels were produced.” Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, p. 229.

⁴ Harnack, *Luke the Physician*, p. 7.

Theory." Canon Streeter admits that "all recent discussion of the historical evidence for the Life of Christ has been based upon the assumption that we have only two primary authorities, Mark and Q¹; and since Q is all but confined to discourse, Mark alone is left as a primary authority for the Life."² This view is still held by many; it is tersely stated by Professor Dodd: "Mark and Q are (along with Paul) the pillars of our knowledge of the facts of the life and teaching of Jesus." Accordingly, "the amount of historical fact that emerges . . . is small in bulk, but not negligible."³ If the authentic testimony to the earthly life of the Redeemer shrinks so as to be only "not negligible," the theory which brings us to such an issue ought to be sifted with the most jealous care. Canon Streeter, in emancipating himself from this hypothesis in its rigour, bears witness to the narrowing effect which it exercises on the judgment. He admits that the name, "Two Document Theory" conceals the unconscious assumption that the authors of the First and Third Gospels "used no other documents, or at, least, none of anything like the same value as the 'Big Two.' Hence a quite illusory pre-eminence has been ascribed to the document Q in comparison with the sources for our Lord's teaching made use of by Matthew or by Luke alone. To this illusion I must confess that I have been myself for many years a victim."⁴

At present there appears to be a growing feeling among New Testament scholars that the Two Document Theory does not cover all the facts: "the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." Some German scholars postulate a trilogy of sources; Canon Streeter now maintains a Four Document Hypothesis.

Instead of trying to "drink up the sea," let us endeavour to trace the upbuilding of the Third Gospel in accordance with St. Luke's preface:

"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 eye-witnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately

¹ "Q," the initial letter of the German word for Source (Quelle), is the symbol used by some scholars for an unknown document, the presence of which in the First and Third Gospels is thought to have been inferentially ascertained.

² Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, pp. 221f.

³ *The Authority of the Bible*, p. 230.

⁴ *The Four Gospels*, p. 227.

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 : (Marg., which thou wast taught by word of mouth)." (Luke i. 1-4).

The first impression which these words make upon us is that the writer has done everything in his power to ensure historical accuracy, and that he sends forth his treatise with perfect confidence in its reliability.

The time when one might lightly regard the historical value of St. Luke's work is past. Wendt acknowledges that the Acts of the Apostles is "an historical work of invaluable worth." Sir William M. Ramsay, who once held an entirely different opinion, now asserts as the result of the most careful examination that "Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness." Even Edouard Meyer, who occupies quite another theological zone, acknowledges that St. Luke's history is "one of the most important works which remain to us from antiquity."

If it were necessary for the purpose of this paper, one might freely press the consideration that the writer was one who laboured at his task under the hallowing influences of the Spirit of God, one who had learned from Jesus to love the truth. But for the occasion it will be enough if, with Dr. Godet, we merely assume that "the authors of our Gospels were men of good sense and good faith." St. Luke expressly tells us that he has traced the course of "all things," "accurately" "from the first," "in order"; and that his aim was to convey to Theophilus and all who should read his Gospel a sure knowledge of the facts therein recorded. We have the word of an honest man who assures us that he has, to the best of his power, composed a reliable history. He was careful not merely to reproduce his authorities with exactness; but he sifted his material, determining the relative value of the several sources.¹

I

It is universally conceded that the apostolic testimony underlies our canonical Gospels. It is possible to make too much of this; it is also possible to make too little. Herder and Ewald may have over-emphasised the importance of this source; Zahn and Stanton may have underestimated it. "We have evidence that

¹ Of *παρακολουθεῖν*, in Luke i. 3, Dr. Plummer says: "Here it does not mean that Luke was contemporaneous with the events, but that he had brought himself abreast by careful investigation. . . . He has begun at the beginning and has investigated everything." *I.C.C.*, p. 4.

the Gospel of Mark actually rests on oral teaching," is the conclusion of Dr. Peake, and Sir John Hawkins explains the freedom with which St. Luke makes use of his written sources as due in part to the oral knowledge of the life and saying of Jesus Christ which as learner and as teacher he had previously acquired, and on which he would fall back frequently to the neglect of the documents at his hand.

The burden of witness which the apostles bore was of "those things which have been fulfilled among us." The Twelve were selected by the Lord to be "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word"; that is, to observe and report. From the first those elect disciples understood that their companionship with Jesus involved their giving testimony to the facts of His ministry. On the eve of the great Pentecost Peter stated this plainly: "Of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that He was received up, of these must one become a witness with us of His resurrection." (Acts i. 21, 22).¹

At first, the apostolic witness would be quite unformed. The believers would meet in some upper room, and rehearse among themselves incidents of the Master's life among men. Each would relate something that had specially impressed himself. But the swift inrush of converts into the Jerusalem Church would call for a more carefully organised mode of witness. Those new believers, together with the numerous inquirers who would assemble with them, would desire as full a statement as possible regarding the manner of our Lord's life in the flesh; and the apostles would endeavour to satisfy the demand. We read that the newly-added members of the Church "continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching" (Acts ii. 42). The demand for fuller knowledge of the earthly life of Jesus on the part of the catechumens would become so exacting that others would be set apart, to be "ministers and interpreters" of the apostles. These would convey the instruction of the original witnesses to groups and classes formed from the body of new believers. With this more careful organisation there would come, almost inevitably, a selection of those topics which would most readily minister faith to the hearers. The miracles and parables which would be specially

¹ The early chapters of Acts seem to have been drawn from a Palestinian source, dating perhaps only a year or two after the resurrection of Jesus. But already the phrase "the Apostles teaching" had become a technical term, and the usage a recognised institution in the Church.

chosen for commemoration would be those that gave the clearest illustrations of gospel truth. Consequently, almost everything narrated in the Gospels lends itself to evangelical impression. Even so late as the delivery of the Fourth Gospel this process of selection persisted: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name" (John xx. 30, 31).¹

It did not fall within the witness of the apostles to relate the story of the Saviour's birth and infancy, or to narrate events which belonged to the days of His youth in Nazareth. For them "the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" was His baptism by John. Their distinctive testimony began then, and continued until the ascension withdrew the Lord from outward view. We can understand how the first preachers of the Evangel would not think it fitting to incorporate into their proper witness the story of the Birth in Bethlehem, even though this may have been an open secret in the Church at that early date. This gracious and heart-compelling recital would come most fitly to those who had been already instructed in the heavenly nature of the Lord and rejoiced to think of His mission of mercy from the right hand of power.

Nor on the other hand would those high truths contained in the sacramental meditations recorded by John (chapters xiii-xvii) be adapted to the opening intelligence of new-born babes in Christ. As a first lesson in the school of grace they would be far above the apprehension of the pupils. It is of importance to remember that the Synoptic Gospels grew out of the oral testimony of the apostles addressed to those who were being initiated into the mystery of Christ.

As the Gospel passed into new fields those catechetical classes would become more numerous. First in Palestine, then in the great world-centres—Antioch, Ephesus, Rome—finally in every province of the Empire, these schools of faith would be established. Theophilus, who may have been a magnate of Antioch,

¹ "It must not, however, be supposed that this tendency to preach rather than to write was any drawback to the final completeness of the Apostolic Gospel. . . . It was in fact the very condition and pledge of its completeness. Naturally speaking, the experience of oral teaching was required in order to bring within the reach of writing the vast subject of the Life of Christ The twelve foundations of the wall of the city of God bore the names of the twelve Apostles." Westcott, *The Study of the Gospel*, pp. 169 ff.

had evidently undergone instruction, formally or informally¹: "That thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things which thou wast taught by word of mouth" (Luke i. 4).

The method of instruction would vary.

In Palestine the story to be communicated would be repeated by the teacher, perhaps a number of times; it would then be taken up in recitation by the pupils. Nothing would be written, for a model Hebrew scholar was compared to a cistern which loses not a drop. But when the Gospel came, either to the Hellenists or to the Greeks, writing would naturally be employed. The teacher would read the lesson, and the catechumens would copy upon their tablets the words as they were uttered. Then the scholars would con over the lesson till it was securely fastened in their memory. Perhaps the incident recorded in John vii. 53-viii. 11, may have been a stray lesson from a catechetical instruction which has found its way into the Fourth Gospel. If so, it may be regarded as a sample of other lessons. These would not be long; they might extend perhaps from eight to twelve of our verses, and be confined to a single incident or utterance. We may almost pick out a number of such sections from the Second Gospel, set like bricks in a thin layer of mortar.²

The fact that the apostles remained together in Jerusalem for a number of years (Acts viii. 1), rehearsing unweariedly to generations of pilgrims at the Feasts those incidents in the life of our Lord which had come by instinctive selection to be the substance of the apostles' teaching—doing this under the solemnising sense of their responsibility to the Church for the true narration of the words and doings of the Lord Jesus—would lead to a similarity in the testimony so close as to be nearly identical. The apostolic witness would in this way crystallise into definite form during those years of ministry in Jerusalem.

In this country and in our time we are apt to undervalue the accuracy of memories that have been specially trained, as among the Moslem or the Chinese. But along with the wonderful sameness of the reports there are many minute differences which it is not always easy to account for. Dr. Arthur Wright has a fruitful suggestion with regard to this. "Verbal memory," he says, "is

¹ Zahn will not allow that *κατηχήθη* had acquired the technical meaning it afterwards received (*Introduction to the New Testament*, ii, 42f).

² "The single schemes are often told in a life-like style without unessential additions and reflections, but they stand for the most part as a mere collection of disconnected anecdotes." Wellhausen, *Einleitung in die drei ersten Evangelien*, p. 52.

very much a matter of age. Set a boy of ten to learn a story by heart, and he will reproduce it *verbatim* or not at all. Let a man of forty learn it, and you will have abundance of those minute changes which characterise our Gospels."¹

As the apostolic testimony was borne on into distant lands, and repeated in various Churches, slight differences, which neither confused fact nor altered doctrine, would arise. The witness would not be less reliable because of those slight textual changes which would emerge in the ordinary course of transmission. Such slight variations occur on every page of our Gospels.

II

As soon as the catechetical lessons took written form the impulse to make a collection of them would arise. Probably this was the first stage in the composition of those *digests* which St. Luke speaks of in his preface (verse 1).

One may be permitted to imagine this impulse fulfilling itself—no argument depends upon our view of the process. A catechumen who had been receiving instruction from (let us say) John Mark, Silvanus, or Prochorus, would have collected a full series of incidents or sayings belonging to our Lord's earthly ministry. Possessing these, the catechumen would naturally wish to add to them any additional tradition which might reach him of matters "concerning the Lord Jesus." Of these, some would be at first hand and be altogether worthy of trust, others might be conveyed through a number of intermediaries and be less reliable. The additional matter might be inserted into the catechetical instruction in order of time, so far as that could be ascertained.

St. Luke tells us that many such digests were known to him. Some of them he had, no doubt, examined; he does not say that he is indebted to any. His fine historical sense would flinch at the mingling of careful instruction, grounded on the witness of the apostles, with hearsay, which might have come through diverse channels with meagre authentication. But as there can be no doubt that he drew a very considerable part of his gospel from the accredited teaching of the "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word," he may have derived a portion of this from some of the more careful of these memoranda.

The expression "ministers of the word" may signify those who were engaged in the work of catechetical instruction. St.

¹ St. Luke's Gospel in Greek, xi.

Paul seems to have had such instructors with him in his missionary journeys ; first, John Mark, afterwards Silas, then Timothy. In his fascinating volume on "The Risen Master," Mr. Latham suggests that the parchments which St. Paul charges Timothy to bring with him were "strips of vellum containing the sections which were read by the catechists to their class till they were learned ; these would stand wear, papyri would not." St. Paul proposed to resume teaching, and he specially wanted the parchments that might be handed for that purpose to the catechists.¹ In the same direction Dr. Bartlett offers a hint which meets with the approval of Dr. Vincent Taylor and of Dr. Sanday : "It seems to me a valuable suggestion that 'S was a peculiar form of written memoirs elicited by our Third Evangelist *ad hoc*, not immediately for the literary purpose to which he finally put it, but rather as a permanent record of the most authentic tradition to which it had been his lot to obtain access, for use in his own work as an evangelist or catechist of the oral Gospel.'"²

At this point we may stay to consider a statement which has been frequently repeated. We are assured again and again that for many years after the resurrection the Church had no keen desire to preserve for futurity the memorials of the earthly life of her Lord. This supposed fact is attributed mainly to one or other of two causes. Either that the hope of the speedy return of the Saviour so completely filled the minds of believers that they cast no backward look ; or, that they were so eager to communicate the good news that the purely historical aspects of the life of Christ were pushed out of sight. Neither of these reasons has weight. Both in the anticipation of the advent and in the proclamation of the Gospel it was the Person of Christ that was centrally and supremely present to the thought of the Church, and that Person was never for a moment dissociated from the life-story of Jesus of Nazareth. It was the Person of the Living One, who became dead, and is alive for evermore. The apostolic teaching ranged over the whole of our Lord's earthly ministry, and went not one step beyond, except to draw such inferences as faith might require. And as St. Luke tells us, this witness was reduced to writing at an early date, not by one or two, but by many.

¹ p. 464.

² *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, xx, xxi, 351 ; Taylor, *Behind the Third Gospel*, pp. 15, 19.

III

We may conclude from the fact that there were many who undertook to collect memoranda of Jesus that there was a great mass of tradition concerning the years of the Ministry. Some of this would be in writing, much of it would be oral. But as time went on, the records would be prized above the floating tradition, and the Synoptists would rely mainly on the documentary witness.

It is important to remember that writing was not the rare acquirement of a few learned men, as it was in the days of the Crusades, for example, but lay quite within the reach of ordinary men. Sir W. M. Ramsay reminds us that "The knowledge of writing was far more generally diffused in the east Mediterranean lands in ancient times than it was in medieval Europe. . . . Still it is only in a few countries that the familiar use of writing in everyday life is so widely diffused as it was in the most civilised regions of the Mediterranean world about the time of Christ."¹

At Oxyrhynchus, on the edge of the desert, some fragments of papyrus, with writing apparently of the third century A.D., were unearthed by Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt, in the years 1897 and 1904. When the writing was deciphered it was seen to be part of a collection of miscellaneous "Sayings of Jesus." The presence of these *logia* in the dust-heaps of Ancient Egypt suggests that from an early time collections of the Master's words had been drawn up and sent into circulation. It is thought by many that St. Paul, for example, possessed a copy of our Lord's most distinctive utterances. While there is little direct quotation in the Pauline Epistles, there are frequent, and often subtle, allusions to the words of the Lord; this implies a close and familiar knowledge.²

We know that the knowledge of shorthand was a common accomplishment in business and literary circles in the first century of our era. It is likely enough that Matthew the tax-gatherer would employ an abbreviated script in the Customs' booth at Capernaum. It would be natural therefore for him to record those sayings of Christ which had most deeply impressed himself. Papias points to something of this sort when he says: "Matthew composed the *logia* in the Hebrew dialect, and each one translated

¹ *Luke the Physician*, p. 99.

² See 1 Cor. vii. 10, ix. 14; Rom. xii. 14, 17, xvi. 19; 1 Thess. iv. 15, v. 2; 2 Thess. iii. 3; 1 Tim. v. 18, vi. 13; 2 Tim. ii. 12.

them as he was able." The word *logia* does not require us to think only of sayings (cf. Rom. iii. 2); but perhaps those holy oracles formed the bulk of this treatise. Sir John Hawkins probably expresses the general opinion when he says: "We regard it as meant by Papias to express Sayings of the Lord, together with notices of the occasions which led to their being delivered, when such notices were needed for the full understanding of them."¹ The *logia* of Matthew are sometimes identified with the unknown source Q.

The existence of Q is inferred from an analysis of the non-Markan matter in the First and Third Gospels; the evidence is circumstantial, but, as Canon Streeter says, we are justified in assuming the existence of this source, "so long as we remember that the assumption is one which though highly probable, falls just short of certainty." This source is known under different names—"The Logian Document" (Stanton), "The Oldest Source" (B. Weiss), "The Discourses" (Headlam), "The Lost Common Source" (Ramsay), etc. We owe the generally accepted title "Q" to Wellhausen.

Many reconstructions of this source have been offered, the best known of which is by Harnack. Of this Professor Burkitt says: "It is very doubtful whether his reconstruction can be accepted as anything more than a mass of genuine but detached fragments, and what we want is a picture of Q as a whole."² The character and contents of Q are keenly debated. Most writers judge it to be a document, others take it to be part of the oral tradition. It is generally thought that the Passion-story was not included in Q, but there are those who hold that it was. Some have proposed two recensions of this source, one of which was used by Matthew, the other by Luke. Others are disposed to believe that Q is not one document, but two, or more. The fact that St. Luke had, as he assures us, access to a number of sources, will probably make the exact characterisation of Q an impossibility. But from the discussion one important conclusion may be affirmed—that there existed from an early date a catena of the sayings of Jesus, framed in some cases, no doubt, in their historical settings, and widely disseminated among the Churches. It is probable that St. Luke had access to such a collection of sayings, perhaps to more than one. In the nature of things these

¹ *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, p. 54.

² *The Earliest Sources for the Life of Jesus*, Second edition, pp. 39, 40.

sayings would be recorded as they were uttered, or immediately after. Sir William M. Ramsay, therefore, seems to be justified when he asserts that this Lost Common Source, as he calls it, "cannot be placed later than the time when the disciples began, at the first Pentecost, to understand the true nature of the Gospel, and Peter began to declare it publicly, establishing it on the firm foundation of the sacrifice of Christ's death." He maintains that it "was written while Christ was still living."

IV

It is generally held that Luke was indebted to Mark—either to the Gospel as we have it, or in a form slightly different.¹ Canon Streeter has made an interesting suggestion which commends itself to other scholars, notably to Dr. Vincent Taylor. He points out that if one eliminates from the Third Gospel the Marcan passages, what is left is a unity. This is the work of the evangelist himself, the first sketch of his gospel. After this had been drawn up, St. Luke had the opportunity to consult St. Mark's Gospel. He borrowed freely from it, and the additions were inserted, as far as possible, in their proper place in the scheme of our Lord's ministry according to which St. Luke had planned his book.²

At this point the New Testament history becomes a guide to us.

For some fifteen years after Pentecost John Mark seems to have remained in Jerusalem. He may have been the young man who followed our Lord and His disciples from the upper chamber to the Mount of Olives (Mark xiv. 51); he was, we know, the cousin of Barnabas (Col. iv. 10); during those Jerusalem years he seems to have been on intimate terms with Simon Peter (cf. Acts xii. 12, I Peter v. 13). When Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem to Antioch about the year 46 A.D., they took Mark with them, for the same reason probably that they afterwards invited him to take part with them in the first Missionary Journey—that he might be their "attendant." Dr. Chase

¹ "Mark was known to the two other Synoptists when it was already in the same condition as we now have it, both in form and contents," Wellhausen, *Einleitung*, p. 57. "A copy of Mark in much the same text and extent as we now possess," Ramsay, *Luke the Physician*, p. 39. "The Gospel of St. Mark, pretty nearly, if not quite, as we have it," Sir John Hawkins, *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, p. 29.

² Dr. Headlam makes, I think, an improvement on Canon Streeter's original theory of two editions of the Third Gospel, by suggesting rather that there were "two stages in its composition before it was put into circulation." Dr. Streeter is willing to approve of this modification.

maintains that this word indicates an official position within the synagogue ; but others, with greater probability, suggest that it has an ecclesiastical use, and that Mark may have accompanied the apostolic missionaries with the intention of assisting them in the catechetical instruction of young converts.

We may suppose then that Mark had fulfilled the ministry of instruction in "the beginning of the doctrine of Christ," during some or all of the fifteen years which we presume he spent in Jerusalem with the apostles. When we recall his intimacy with Simon Peter we may easily believe that he acted as "minister of the word" to him whom he regarded as his father in the Gospel (1 Peter v. 13). The words of Papias recorded by Eusebius seem to confirm this opinion : "And John the Presbyter also said this : Mark, being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he wrote he recorded with great accuracy ; but not, however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord : but, as before said, he was in company with Peter, who gave him such instruction as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord's discourses ; wherefore Mark has not erred in anything, by writing some things as he has recorded them ; for he was carefully attentive to one thing, not to pass by anything that he heard, or to state anything falsely in these accounts." The phrase "the interpreter of Peter" has been variously understood. Athanasius explains it thus : that Mark translated the instructions of Peter into Greek for the sake of the Hellenists. It is perhaps simpler to suppose that Mark served as a catechist under the instruction of St. Peter. It is not unlikely that he resumed this pleasant task in Rome towards the close of Peter's life. But in the mid-time, about the year 61, we find him at Rome with St. Paul and his close companion Luke. It is quite certain that Luke had already begun to gather materials for his Gospel ; it is probable indeed that the work of composition was far advanced (cf. Acts i. 1). Luke and Mark were together in Rome perhaps for many months during St. Paul's first Roman imprisonment (Col. iv. 10, Philm. 24), also it may be at a later date (2 Tim. iv. 11). They would doubtless compare recollections. Mark would not borrow from Luke ; Luke certainly would be willing to borrow from Mark. For whereas the one was intent to make his Gospel as full as might be, the other desired only to transmit with careful accuracy all that he had heard his beloved teacher

tell of his companionship with Jesus. On examining the memoranda of Mark (we suppose them to be in writing) Luke would probably find that many of the incidents garnered by himself had been more correctly reported by his friend who had had priceless opportunities of storing up the recollections of Christ's foremost disciple. Luke would therefore in some cases correct his information by that now conveyed to him ; in other cases he would substitute Mark's account for his own. And if we ask an explanation of "the great omission" (Mark vi. 45-vii. 26) we may perhaps suppose that the sheets containing this section were not at hand at the time ; or that, in that precise period of the ministry, there was nothing in St. Luke's reminiscences which called for emendation ; or perhaps, as Sir John Hawkins suggests, that he purposely omitted the matters recorded by Mark in these chapters.

V

We come to sources which were personal to Luke who had "traced the course of all things accurately from the first."

Let us begin with the Birth-narrative.

The first two chapters of Luke's Gospel are found in every manuscript of the Gospels and in every version. Wellhausen, in his Commentary, calmly ignores them, beginning with the third chapter. As C. F. Nolloth says, if this is "scientific criticism" a fresh definition of the term will be required. But these chapters cannot be flung aside after that fashion, for the genealogy, which is part of the Birth narrative, is mortised into the third chapter, and thus is proved to be an integral part of the Gospel history. Immediately after the preface, with its flowing Greek of the classical mode, we find ourselves in a section of the Gospel which has a very definite Semitic colouring. The evangelist seems to be translating with great literality from an Aramaic, or possibly, a Hebrew document.¹ Of this Plummer says : "We have here the earliest documentary evidence respecting the origins of Christianity—evidence which may justly be called contemporary." With Dr. Godet we feel that "a narrative so perfect could have emanated only from the holy sphere within which the mystery was accomplished." It is certain that

¹ Sir William M. Ramsay while acknowledging an Aramaic source for Luke i. and ii., considers that it was oral, not documentary. The general opinion, however, is that we have here a written source.

the contents of this document were derived originally from the mother of Jesus, and there is at least a hint of her authorship in expressions such as occur in i. 29, 39, ii. 19, 51. One may judge also that this document was composed at different times; there seem to be provisional endings in i. 80 and ii. 40, in addition to the formal conclusion of ii. 52. And while we believe that the full doctrine of the Redeemer's Person is conveyed in these inspired words, the outlook is towards the Messiah as He is revealed in the Old Testament: those great truths which were to break upon the Church through the ministry of the Holy Spirit are as yet only dimly discerned; the rejection and the bitter cross are not clearly in view. This writing seems to belong to the silent years in Nazareth before our Lord had entered on His ministry of passion. Dr. Sanday characterises this brief evangel as probably "the oldest evangelical fragment, or document, of the New Testament, and in any case the most archaic thing in the New Testament."

Somewhere about the year 57 A.D. Luke visited Jerusalem in company with Paul: "Paul went in with us," he says, "unto James; and all the elders were present" (Acts xxi. 18). A degree of intimacy with the Holy Family is implied. The mother of Jesus was possibly still alive. If we may receive the witness of Clement of Alexandria, John had at that time no formed intention to write a Gospel. The duty and honour of conveying to the Church the truth regarding the miraculous conception is fitly entrusted to the beloved physician. Dr. Sanday concludes that "the place which the Virgin Birth occupies in Ignatius and in the Creed seems to show that it cannot have been much later than the middle of the (first) century before the knowledge of it made its way to the headquarters of Christianity." Dr. Sanday's date synchronises with St. Luke's visit to James. But the document itself is certainly much earlier. The Canticles are Hebrew psalms, lit up with Messianic hope, but altogether devoid of New Testament Christology. The rejection of the Messiah is seen dimly through the "prospect glass" of prophetic vision. And the work of the wondrous Child is conceived in terms of Israel's troubled history. The narrative comes to us from years far removed from the agony and bloody sweat, recorded by one who scarcely yet perceived the wealth of meaning hidden in the angel's words. For it is to be remembered that the mystery of the Incarnation was uttered only by those pure lips of fire (Matt. i. 20; Luke i. 35). We can imagine the venerable mother

of the Saviour entrusting this brown papyrus leaf to the tender hands of the beloved physician. And we see how punctiliously the evangelist has rendered it in Greek, endeavouring to conserve the lightest turn of expression. This carefulness gives us confidence in his scrupulous accuracy.

Sir John Hawkins has pointed out three limitations to St. Luke's use of St. Mark's Gospel—not to mention some smaller pieces—Luke vi. 20-viii. 3; ix. 51-xviii. 14; xxii. 14-xxiv. 12. These sections may have been derived in part from apostolic tradition, in part from "the Lost Common Source"; but principally from the painstaking researches of the evangelist himself.

A wide field of enquiry must have lain open to Luke. In Antioch he would become acquainted with his namesake Lucius of Cyrene, Simeon called Niger, Manaen, Barnabas, and others. In Jerusalem he would be introduced to many of the apostles, to James the Lord's brother, and perhaps to Mary the mother of Jesus. In Philippi he would meet Silas and Timothy; in Cæsarea Philip and Mnason; in Rome Mark, Aristarchus, Epaphras, Tychicus, Crescens, Eubulus, Pudens, the saints in Cæsar's palace, the household of Aristobulus, and many others. One result of so wide a range of companionships would be the opening of many doors to his careful inquiry into the facts relating to Christ and to the establishment of the Church. In his frequent visits to Palestine, especially perhaps in his prolonged stay at Cæsarea, he would often meet with those who had seen our Lord in the flesh; in search of information he may also, from time to time, have traversed those "holy fields" where the Saviour walked and in which He did His mighty works.

The first of the three sections mentioned above (Luke vi. 20-viii. 3) contains the Sermon on the Plain, the Healing of the Centurion's Servant, the Raising of the Widow's Son at Nain, the Last Message of the Baptist, the Anointing of Jesus in the House of Simon the Pharisee, the Names of some who accompanied the Lord in His second Preaching Tour. "Clearly Luke is not indebted to Mark for any of this."

"The larger interpolation," as it has been called (Luke ix. 51-xviii. 14) Canon Streeter describes as "the centre and core of the Third Gospel." He adds: "It occupies twenty-five out of the eighty pages of Luke in the Greek Testament before me, and contains most of the parables and narratives peculiar to

Luke, as well as about half of the material in Luke which can plausibly be assigned to Q." When we think of such incidents as the Mission of the Seventy, the Visit to Martha and Mary, the Call of Zaccheus ; of such parables as the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Pharisee and the Publican, the Importunate Widow ; of such discourses as that on Prayer, on Trust in God, on Counting the Cost, on Forgiveness and Faith—to mention no more—we may have some conception of the debt we owe to the diligence and labour of search of this evangelist.

The third section (Luke xxii. 14-xxiv. 12) draws freely from the apostolic tradition, perhaps not at all from Q ; it is, however, largely derived from sources laid to the hand of the evangelist. There is literary evidence that many of the particulars which in this section are peculiar to Luke were communicated to him, and by him committed to writing. Dr. Stanton instances the appearance of Jesus before Herod, the story of the Penitent Thief, and large sections of chapter xxiv. Of these and other passages he says : " The Lucan form of the sentences and vocabulary are so strongly marked that here, one feels, the evangelist must be telling the story in his own words."¹

A brief quotation from Mr. Latham's " The Risen Master," with reference to " the Sermon which our Lord preached on the Way to Emmaus " may close this paper : " The conversation here related was carried on in Aramaic, and from the vividness of the narrative I infer that it must have been taken down while the events were fresh in the narrator's mind. From that language clearly came this history which St. Luke has preserved. . . . We have reason to thank the translator into Greek, whoever he was, for having executed his work with fidelity. There is apparently nothing left out, and certainly there is nothing put in with a view to favouring any particular doctrines. Nothing could be more free from bias than this document is. The spokesman from whose lips the Aramaic was taken must have been one of the two travellers to Emmaus, and since writers of that time avoid speaking of themselves by name, I take the narrator to have been the companion of Cleopas rather than Cleopas himself."²

It would take us too far out of our course to discuss the date when the Third Gospel, as we have it now, was sent out into the Church. Certainly it was during the lifetime of Luke the

¹ *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, ii., 239.

² pp. 102f, 113.

companion of Paul. Harnack goes farther, and maintains that it was written during the lifetime of the great apostle¹. Let us leave it there. But we can carry our feeling of assurance back to earlier dates than these. The Birth-story comes from the Nazareth home, before the ministry of Jesus began. The Apostolic Testimony dates from the day of Pentecost. The Collection of our Lord's Discourses was probably compiled during the lifetime of Jesus. And the rest of the material was the carefully sifted testimony of those who had been "eye-witnesses" of those "matters which have been fulfilled among us."

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¹ Date of Acts and Synoptic Gospels, p. 124.