

THE AUTHENTIC PICTURES OF ST. LUKE.

THE popular story that the Evangelist St. Luke was a painter is traceable to no higher authority than the Byzantine historian Nicephorus. We do not know whence he derived it—possibly only from local legends such as are common in southern Europe to this day, ascribing to St. Luke one or more ancient pictures that had from some cause come to be accounted specially sacred. But it may be worth asking whether the story may not rest on a somewhat better foundation—whether it be not a reproduction, only too literal, of something originally spoken in an ideal sense, which in that ideal sense was perfectly true. Even the local legends and superstitions must have had some origin; it is hardly likely to be an accident that St. Luke was selected, rather than any other saint of the first age, as the patron of Christian art.

For he was the founder of Christian art in a very real sense; though he himself drew with the pen only, not with the pencil,¹ it is from him above all others that Christian painters have derived their inspiration. He is, in the strict and literal sense of the word, the most picturesque of the New Testament writers: not only the greatest artist among them, but the one whose art deals most with figures, groups, or scenes that admit of pictorial reproduction.

Thus we find that, of the favourite subjects of Christian art, the majority are derived from his writings, wholly or in part. Though we have one authentic Gospel of the Infancy besides his, it is really to him that we owe the portrait of the mother of Jesus: St. Matthew would not

¹ "Who with pen and pencil true,
Christ's own awful Mother drew."

--KEBLE: *Lyra Innocentium*.

have enabled us to individualise "the Handmaid of the Lord," who "kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart." It is St. Luke, too, who gives us the first sketch of the *Mater Dolorosa*, though the lifelike picture comes from St. John, who saw her.

Besides this single figure, the central one in the earliest portion of the Gospel, it is to St. Luke that we owe the scenes of the Annunciation, the Salutation, the Nativity of the Baptist, the Nativity of the Saviour and Adoration of the Shepherds, the Presentation in the Temple, and the (unhappily miscalled and misconceived) Dispute with the Doctors; besides the equally beautiful though less often treated subjects of the Appearance of the Angel to Zacharias and to the Shepherds. St. Matthew adds only three pictures to these six or eight—the Adoration of the Magi, the Flight into Egypt, and the Massacre of the Innocents.

As we proceed further in the Gospel history, most of the subjects are common to St. Luke with one or more of his colleagues; e.g. the Baptism, the Temptation, the Feeding of the Multitude, the Transfiguration. The Miraculous Draught of Fishes is hardly to be counted as one of the popular subjects; but it is noticeable that when Raphael wanted to paint the life of St. Peter, it was to St. Luke not to St. Mark that he had to go, even for the period covered by both.

It is indeed somewhat singular, that so few subjects for pictures are taken from the central part of our Lord's life. St. John contributes the Marriage at Cana, and the Woman of Samaria; St. Luke, the Supper in the house of Simon the Pharisee, with the supposed Magdalene; the Woman taken in Adultery is virtually anonymous, but is ascribed to one or other of these.¹ But, while few of our Lord's

¹ I may mention that in Cod. Ev. 624, at Grotta Ferrata, one of the South Italian group of MSS. which place this *Pericope* after St. Luke xxi., a lection is

acts during the three years' ministry have become frequent subjects for painting, some have been supplied by His words. And those parables which have human interest enough to invite the artist are just those which are reported only by St. Luke—the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, perhaps Dives and Lazarus. Above all, the very earliest figure of Christian art, the Shepherd with the Lost Sheep on His shoulders, is due to St. Luke,¹ though its popular title of the Good Shepherd is derived from St. John.

As we approach the period of the Passion, the Raising of Lazarus is St. John's exclusively; the Entry into Jerusalem is common to all the Evangelists, but St. Luke adds the characteristic scene of the Lord weeping over the city. St. Matthew, on the other hand, gives other details—the presence of the she-ass, which few painters are conscientious enough to reproduce, and the figures of the children, in particular, as joining in the shouts of praise. The incident of the Tribute Money, again, is common to three Gospels, almost without variation. But as the details of the Last Supper are due to St. John, though the fact is mentioned by all, so we may say those of the Agony are due to St. Luke—or at least to what is ascribed to him; it is the obelized verses in his Gospel that add the figure of the strengthening angel to that of the praying Sufferer. The Betrayal gets details from each of the Gospels—perhaps fewest from St. Luke; but he contributes the most touching feature to the Denial of St. Peter. He omits, or gives a different version of, the Crowning with Thorns, and has only a hint of the Flagellation. The *Ecce Homo*, of course, is St. John's only. In the *Via Dolorosa*, St. John gives the chief figure of Christ bearing His Cross, but St. Luke

marked as extending from xxi. 37 to the end of the *Pericope*. This suggests that its connexion with St. Luke was liturgical rather than traditional or critical.

¹ St. Matthew relates the Parable, but does not paint the attitude.

adds the Daughters of Jerusalem. Similarly, St. John as an eye-witness paints the central group in the Crucifixion; but it is St. Luke who individualises the figures of the two thieves. The Entombment, and perhaps the Descent from the Cross, owe most to St. John.

The Descent into Hades, though the doctrine comes from St. Peter, owes its pictorial details to the so-called Gospel of Nicodemus, which, perhaps¹ alone among the apocryphal Gospels, is a work of some spiritual insight and imaginative power. The Resurrection is not really painted by any of the Evangelists; artists who have painted it do so by deduction from hints supplied chiefly by St. Matthew. The visit of the Maries to the Sepulchre is common to all the Gospels; the *Noli Me Tangere* is peculiar to St. John. But the journey to Emmaus, and the Supper there, are St. Luke's; and he gives, almost more fully than St. John, the Appearance to the Disciples, though he does not follow it up with the story of the Incredulity of St. Thomas. And St. Luke, and he only, completes the series of the earthly life of the Lord, as in its beginning, so in its end, by the picture of the Ascension in presence of the Disciples.

The true end, however, of the evangelical history is nothing short of the Last Judgment; and the picture of this comes partly from Daniel and St. John's Revelation, partly from St. Matthew—with the addition, in general, of some mythical and variable details. But though St. Luke does not present to us this consummation, he does continue the story “of all that Jesus *began* both to do and to teach, until the day that He was taken up,” by telling us what was done through His Spirit, from that day

¹ Perhaps the vitality, and the adoption into the cycle of subjects for art, of the legends about the Nativity and Infancy of the Blessed Virgin should be taken as evidence that the *Protevangelium Jacobi* has some artistic merit. But it may be only that curiosity about the Virgin's life led to anything being valued that pretended to satisfy it.

onward. And here St. Luke has the field to himself: there is no canonical writer to compete with him, and no apocryphal writer was able to do so. It is therefore superfluous to enumerate the scenes in the Acts, from the Descent of the Holy Ghost onwards, which have been or might be selected as subjects for art. But any notice of St. Luke's pictorial power would be inadequate, which did not include the two sublime groups of the Conversion of St. Paul and the Deliverance of St. Peter.

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