

ON THE LUCAN INTERPRETATION OF
CHRIST'S DEATH.

DANTE, in his *De Monarchiâ* (Bk. i. 16), describes St. Luke as the writer of the story of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ," and the description is fully justified by the contents of the Third Gospel. By no other of the Synop- tists is the winning and persuasive character of Christ's Person more attractively set before us, or the gracious character of His saving mission more strongly emphasized. Thus it is very significant that the Evangelist who, in the early part of his Gospel at any rate, follows closely the order of St. Mark, in one signal instance departs from it, and *antedates* Christ's preaching in the Synagogue at Nazareth, that in "the words of grace" there spoken he may have a fitting frontispiece for his whole Gospel (Luke iv. 16 ff.; comp. Mark vi. 1 ff.). For in recounting the scene he is not content, as are St. Matthew and St. Mark, with the mere mention of the fact of Christ's preaching, and the wonder which it aroused among His former fellow-townsmen, but in a long section peculiar to himself he shows how Christ on that occasion sketched as it were in outline His whole Messianic programme. He was come, as the Scripture had foretold that the Messiah would come, to preach good tidings to the poor, and to proclaim release to the captives and the bruised; and not only so, but His mission was a universal mission; embracing all in its wide scope, Gentile as well as Jew. In keeping with this introductory scene we are not, therefore, surprised to discover that it is to St. Luke we owe the preservation of such stories as those of the Woman that was a Sinner (vii. 36-50), of Zaccheus (xix. 1-10), and of the Penitent Thief (xxiii. 39-43), and of such parables as the Good Samaritan (x. 25-37), the Phari- see and the Publican (xviii. 10-14), and the Lost Son (xv. 11-32); and further, that of the six miracles, which he

alone records, five are miracles of healing (vii. 11-17; xiii. 11-17; xiv. 1-6; xvii. 12-19; xxii. 50, 51). Nor is it without significance in this connection to notice that, while in St. Matthew perfection is represented as the distinguishing attribute of God (v. 48), in St. Luke it is mercy (vi. 36); and that in addition to the special stress laid upon the office of the Holy Spirit, the Divine love and forgiveness, and man's consequent duties of faith and repentance, are brought before us in a manner that strongly recalls the teaching of the Pauline Epistles.

It is indeed to the influence exerted over the writer by St. Paul, an influence clearly recognised in tradition, that we owe many of the distinctive features of St. Luke's Gospel. Of direct literary borrowing, indeed, there seems to be little or no trace,¹ but in the general tone and character of the Gospel it is impossible not to recognise how largely St. Luke was *illuminated* by St. Paul.² How, indeed, could it have been otherwise? If, as seems certain both on external and internal grounds, the St. Luke of the Third Gospel is to be identified with the beloved physician and fellow-traveller of St. Paul, it would have been strange indeed if the great Apostle had not left some mark of his fresh and independent mode of thinking upon the future Evangelist, and stamped upon his mind that particular aspect of the Saviour's work which it was to be afterwards his privilege to illustrate. To this extent a *tendency* underlying St. Luke's writing may fairly be conceded, and his Gospel claimed as a Pauline Gospel in the sense that in a more marked degree than its predecessors it exhibits "the liberal and spiritual nature of Christianity."

¹ Perhaps the most interesting point of contact, "which is without doubt something more than a chance coincidence" (Sanday, *Book by Book*, p. 399), is the special notice of the appearance of the Risen Lord to St. Peter (Luke xxiv. 34 compared with 1 Cor. xv. 5)—a notice almost sufficient in itself to dispose of the charge of "anti-petrinism" sometimes made against St. Luke.

² "Ipse [Paulus] illuminator Lucæ" (Tertull. *adv. Marc.*, iv. 2).

The more clearly, however, this is recognised, the more are we struck by one very surprising feature of St. Luke's Gospel. Would it not be natural to expect that in a Gospel where Christ is distinctively held up before us as the Son of man, who "came to seek and to save that which was lost" (xix. 10), special stress would be laid upon the atoning significance of the death by which this was accomplished? Would we not, in fact, be justified in looking confidently to St. Luke to supplement the admittedly very scanty records of the other Evangelists in this respect, and to supply us with fresh links for connecting the later theological teaching of the Church with the historical representations of the Saviour's words and works? And yet, at first sight at least, the very opposite seems to be the case. For though, as we shall see afterwards, St. Luke has light of the most valuable kind to throw upon the inner meaning of Christ's death, it is not in the same way as the other Synoptists, and he appears rather deliberately to avoid the special teaching we owe to them.

For how does the case stand? Apart from the three occasions on which Jesus pointed forward to His death as the fulfilment of prophecy, and which are carefully preserved by all the three Evangelists,¹ there are only two distinct passages in St. Matthew and St. Mark in which our Lord Himself gives us a clue to the theological interpretation of His death. The first of these is found in Mark x. 45, and the literal closeness with which the words are reproduced in the First Gospel (Matt. xx. 28) shows the importance which St. Matthew attached to them—"For verily the Son of man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many." The second occurs in the account of the Last Supper: "This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many" (Mark xiv. 24), words which St.

¹ Matt. xvi. 21, Mark viii. 31, Luke ix. 22, Matt. xvii. 22, 23, Mark ix. 30, 31, Luke ix. 44, Matt. xx. 18, 19, Mark x. 33, 34, Luke xviii. 31-33.

Matthew again reproduces with the significant addition, apparently a comment of the Evangelist's own, "unto remission of sins" (Matt. xxvi. 28). But both these passages are wanting in the true text of St. Luke,¹ nor does he give us any direct equivalents for them.

Their omission is unquestionably surprising. Can we find any explanation for it? It is, of course, always possible to argue that St. Luke omitted the words simply because he did not find them in any of his sources. And had they occurred only in St. Matthew, with which in its present form it is an open question how far St. Luke was acquainted, there would have been some plausibility in the contention. But occurring as they do also in St. Mark, and forming part, apparently, of the original tradition, it seems impossible to doubt that St. Luke was acquainted with them, and that therefore some other explanation of their omission must be sought.

One such explanation has been offered by the late Prof. Bruce in his volume of studies on the Synoptic Gospels entitled *With Open Face*, where he connects St. Luke's reticence in this particular with the same writer's account of our Lord's "Agony" in the Garden at Gethsemane.² The question is here again somewhat complicated by uncertainty regarding the exact text; but if, as seems on every ground most probable, *vv.* 43, 44 are to be omitted from the Lucan account in chapter xxii.,³ then it is undoubted that

¹ The textual evidence is not perfectly clear in the case of the second passage, but the words are placed in double brackets by Westcott and Hort, who in their *App.* come to the conclusion that there is "no moral doubt" that the words (Luke xxii. 19b, 20) "were absent from the original text of Lc." (ii. p. 64).

² p. 63 f.; p. 283 ff. The paper in which the fact of the omissions was drawn attention to was originally published in the *EXPOSITOR*, 1896, i. p. 207; but the explanation there promised first appears in the collected volume.

³ Like Luke xxii. 19b, 20, they are retained by the Revisers, but placed in double brackets by Westcott and Hort, who, however, while denying them a place in the original text of St. Luke, regard them as embodying a true evangelic tradition (*App.* ii. p. 67).

St. Luke's account of the scene in the Garden is a somewhat "subdued" report, and does not lay the same stress as do St. Matthew and St. Mark upon the intensity of the Saviour's sufferings in view of His approaching death. And the reason of this, according to Prof. Bruce, is a certain deferring on the writer's part to "a tone of feeling" in the early Church, according to which "it would have appeared unfit that Jesus should be represented as afraid to die, or as passionately recoiling from the awful ordeal through which He was about to pass" (p. 303). But the adequacy or inadequacy of this explanation we need not stay at present to discuss, for whether it be accepted with regard to the account of Gethsemane or not, it does not meet the difficulty with regard to the omission of either of the passages already spoken of, for in neither of them is there any sign of shrinking on Christ's part from the death He saw to be awaiting Him, but rather a calm, confident statement of the nature of the work He was by that death to accomplish.

We must look, therefore, elsewhere for an explanation of St. Luke's omission of two passages which seem so well adapted to the whole scope of his Gospel. And though he is by no means confident that his own explanation covers the whole ground, it is at least to be sought, so it seems to the present writer, not in "local exigencies," but in the particular light under which St. Luke himself had come to regard the fact and bearing of Christ's death. What that light was one or two striking expressions which he is singular among the Evangelists in applying to it make sufficiently clear.

The first of these occurs in the account of the Transfiguration, where St. Luke represents Moses and Elias as speaking with Jesus of His decease (*ἔλεγον τὴν ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ*, ix. 31) which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem, where the term *ἔξοδος* seems specially chosen to embrace not only Christ's Death, but His consequent Resurrection

and Ascension.¹ While much to the same effect, a little later in the same chapter, we are told that when Jesus steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem in the full consciousness of what awaited Him there, it was because "the days were being fulfilled" not merely that He should be put to death, but "that He should be received up" (*ἐν τῇ συμπληροῦσθαι τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ἀναλήψεως*, ix. 51), where the word used is the substantive form of the regular Biblical expression for ascending to Heaven.²

So, too, in xiii. 32, Christ's own word, which occurs only here, "Behold, I cast out devils and perform cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I am perfected" (*τελειοῦμαι*), cannot be taken as referring only to the close of His earthly life (as Godet), still less to the finishing of His Galilean ministry (as Bleek), or of the cures He had been working (as Meyer); but undoubtedly carries us forward to the goal of His whole mission, when, the sorrows and trials of earth left behind, He returned to the glory of the Father. Then only, according to the definite teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where alone in the New Testament outside this passage this verb is applied to Christ, did Christ reach the state in which He could become "unto all them that obey Him the Author of eternal salvation."³

If, then, we take St. Luke's use of these three significant words and combine them with the fact that he represents Jesus on the Cross as uttering no cry of desertion, as in St. Matthew (xxvii. 46) and St. Mark (xv. 34), but rather as calmly commending His spirit into the hands of God,⁴ and

¹ "Vocabulum valde grave, quo continetur Passio, Crux, Mors, Resurrectio, Adscensio" (Bengel).

² The substantive *ἀνάληψις* is not found elsewhere in the New Testament or LXX.: but for the corresponding verb see Mark xvi. 19; Acts i. 2, 11, 22; x. 6; 1 Tim. iii. 16: comp. 1 Macc. ii. 58; Eccles. xlviii. 9, xlix. 14; 2 Kings ii. 11 (Plummer, *in loco*).

³ Heb. v. 9. Comp. ii. 10, vii. 28; and for the meaning of the three passages the present writer's *Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 80 ff.

⁴ Luke xxiii. 46. "It is the first effect of the completion of redemption, the glorious prelude of the resurrection" (Godet).

the further facts that in his Gospel the risen Jesus appears as standing in a peculiarly close relation to His disciples, and as ascending from them in blessing—it seems impossible to escape the conclusion that it is particularly in the light of His present glory that St. Luke contemplates the necessity of the Saviour's sufferings. It is not that he denies the sacrificial or vicarious character of these—a thought which in some form must underlie the words of the other Evangelists which he omits—but that he passes beyond the offering of death to that of life, and thinks principally of the restored communion with God which Christ by His one offering of Himself has effected.¹

Nor in this again does St. Luke really depart, as might at first seem to be the case, from the standpoint of his "companion Paul"; for it is becoming increasingly realized that in the Pauline theology the Resurrection of Christ is not merely the attestation of His saving work, but itself an integral part of it, and that "if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved in His life" (Rom. v. 10).

It is no part, however, of the present paper to follow out this line of thought. All that we have been concerned to try to show is that, if there are omissions in St. Luke's narrative of Christ's teachings regarding His death, these are more than compensated for by the pregnant hints that he throws out regarding the true place of that death in the great scheme of Divine salvation.

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¹ This is in complete harmony with the more "advanced" Christology, which it is usual to associate with St. Luke, and which leads him to emphasize the miraculous beginning and the miraculous ending, between which the earthly life of Jesus falls. Jesus is for him above all else *ὁ κύριος*, a designation which always carries with it the thought of the Redeemer's present heavenly glory.