

LUKE'S AUTHORITIES IN ACTS I.-XII.

II.

PETER is the leader and, so to say, the hero of the first half of the Acts. All others are quite secondary in comparison with him. Stephen, who seemed to be marked out as a great leader, and who was certainly uncompromising and epoch-making, found an early death. The inference which some modern writers have drawn is that in this part of Acts we have a tradition depending on Peter as its ultimate source. Such an inference seems based on a false principle of judging.

Peter and John are mentioned repeatedly as acting in company. But it is Peter who speaks and acts; John is secondary. The inference which those critics draw is that Peter is the original authority for the narrative. They seem to argue from the analogy of young scholars eager to bring themselves before the attention of their Universities and to obtain calls and preferment to official positions in the educational world by drawing attention to their achievements. On the contrary, I would maintain that, if one of the pair of apostles was the ultimate authority for these parts of the history, John and not Peter was the source of information. The man who tells the story hides his own share in the action and brings the work of his companion into prominence: such is the spirit in which the books of the New Testament were written, as might be shown from many examples: but these will readily rise to the memory of all who are interested in the subject.

But I think that neither John nor Peter was the authority upon whom Luke relied. He depended on a spectator, and not on either of the two principals. I see nothing to

suggest the interposition of Peter or of John as authorities in this part of Acts¹; but much to suggest that another person has played an important part in the narrative.

The speeches of Peter in the first ten chapters of the Acts (with the solitary exception of the address to the meeting of the Hundred and Twenty in chapter i.) convey the impression of being reports by an auditor. They are speeches—condensed, doubtless, but real addresses throughout in tone and style. The sentences are sometimes difficult in respect of construction: there are words which have not an evident relation to any verb; but the awkwardness is that of a speaker who, without being a cool and practised orator, plunges into the utterance of his thought without seeing his way clearly to the other side of his sentence—who, in fact, does not speak in sentences, but in detached ideas. Perhaps the most typical of all the speeches is the one addressed to the little company in the house of Cornelius (x. 34-43). The thought here has burst all the bonds of syntax: it pours out hurriedly, in a series of ideas which trip one another up, as they successively struggle forth.

On the other hand, the address to the Hundred and Twenty is not a speech; it is a mixture of address with explanation and narrative (partly even expressed in the third person). Setting it aside for the moment, we must (as I think) regard the speeches of Peter and Stephen in chapters ii.-x. as the most valuable and absolutely trustworthy part of the narrative. They are like contemporary documents enclosed in a history written in a later period: the history may be excellent in character, and founded on first-rate evidence; but it is a later view of the facts, while the written or spoken words give the facts as they appeared at the moment to the actors. The individuality and freshness of these speeches

¹ It is not intended to express any opinion as to whether Luke had enjoyed personal intercourse with either of the two Apostles.

stamp them as Peter's and Stephen's. They could not be invented at a later time by Luke, or by his informant.

Moreover the parts of the narrative which are most closely connected with these speeches are on the whole the best in this part of Acts. Nothing can surpass the naturalness, the verisimilitude, the photographic detail in the surroundings, that mark the story of the lame man in chapter iii., the account of the trials in iv., v., vii., and of the episode of Peter and Cornelius in x. I cannot resist the conviction that these parts rest on the account of an observant and highly competent witness, who listened to the speeches and marked the surroundings with keenest interest and a retentive memory. On the whole they all¹ strike me as proceeding from the evidence of one witness. While it is not unnatural or in itself improbable that the floating tradition in the Church should preserve more precisely the spoken words than it remembered the ordinary facts of history—for such is, if I judge correctly, the character of popular historical memory in the East—yet there is in those scenes and speeches something that differs from the character of the mere Church tradition, as we have it probably in such scenes as that of Ananias and Sapphira.

How shall we explain the contrast between these speeches and the address to the Hundred and Twenty in chapter i. ? The plain and simple explanation is that they were reported by a witness who was not present among the Hundred and Twenty, and who was himself dependent on subsequent fame for his knowledge of that speech. In other words, the witness was one of the converts at Pentecost and thereafter was a member of the Church, one of the public who after the well-known ancient fashion stood in the circle of spectators (*corona adstantium*) and listened to the trial of the apostles and of Stephen, one who was present in Caesareia

¹ Some exceptions will be noticed in the sequel.

at the moment when Peter with his company entered the house of Cornelius. In thus stating the circumstances, we have practically named the witness, so competent, so observant, evidently such an intense admirer of Peter, and so keenly interested in the affair of Cornelius and the admission of the Gentiles into the Church. He was Philip, one of the Seven.

One of the purposes which is set before me in this paper is to give reasons for thinking that Luke, as a rule, names his authority, but that he does so always indirectly, because to name him directly would involve the use of the first person singular, which Luke avoids except in the purely formal introductions to the two books. He does not directly say, "this I learned from so-and-so"; but he indirectly points out in many cases that people who were on the scene were known to him personally. He leads us to believe that Philip was in Caesarea at the time when Peter visited Cornelius (compare viii. 40 with xxi. 8); and he intimates that he himself had been in a position to learn from Philip and Philip's daughters what they knew, though he never says that they spoke to him. But my belief is that Luke has a definite purpose bearing upon his subject in everything which he records and in every name that he mentions. This point will be illustrated later by other examples. At present we are concerned only with the indications which mark out Philip as a natural, probable, and sufficient authority; and as these indications are undeniably present in the book, it seems irrational to doubt that Luke consciously placed them there as a guide to the reader.

If Philip was an authority on whom Luke depended, it may be regarded as beyond question that he was the source of the narrative about the evangelization of Samaria; and we may take this episode as a specimen of his style and his personal character. Now there is one marked difference

between this episode and the general tone of the early chapters. Here a singularly important step is made in the expansion of the Church, and yet the Divine Spirit does not order the advance. "Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed unto them the Christ." His action is not said to have been authorized in any way: there was no previous revelation to him of the will and purpose of God. Almost every other step in the progress of the Church, made by a person that is specially named, springs from or is accompanied by the orders and the guidance of the Spirit. One may say also that emphasis is laid on the incompleteness and imperfection of Philip's work. He did not see through the hollowness of Simon's character, who "being baptized continued with Philip." The Spirit was not communicated to any of Philip's converts. There is a strong contrast drawn between him and the power of Peter and John. Philip could only baptize; but the two apostles "laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." Peter detected and rebuked Simon: Peter foresaw the evil which Simon was destined to work, as a root of bitterness and corruption for the Church into which he had been admitted. The superiority of inspired insight over the juggling of the false prophet is here prominent; but Peter, not Philip, is the man of insight.

Is this consistent with the origin of the narrative from Philip? Would Philip have represented himself as making this great step on his own initiative? At first, to our modern and western view, this seems improbable. We regard it as more presumptuous and pushing to go forth of one's own initiative and make such an important change in the work of the Church. But was that the way in which the men of the first century thought? Are we not in this superficial judgment intruding modern ideas into the first century? It is regarded commonly at the present day as a mark of

humility to place oneself as it were in the hands of God, and to speak of all one's acts as directed by God. But in ancient times and in the East to be guided and inspired by God was the highest privilege and the greatest honour. Paul himself apologized to the Corinthians for his boasting and presumption in speaking of the revelations with which he had been favoured; and he speaks of his Divine authority and Divinely vouchsafed guidance only under compulsion, in order to give emphasis to his message. In the narrative which we regard as originating from Philip, only the humble and unnamed agents who fled before the persecution are not said to have acted under Divine guidance in spreading the Faith. The great agents, Stephen, Peter, Paul, were directed in all their steps by special revelation or accompanied by special Divine grace (as when Stephen's face shone "as it had been the face of an angel").

It was the humility and modesty of Philip that prevented him from claiming Divine direction for his journey to Samaria: and the silence on this point is not to be construed as an assertion that he went there of his own initiative. This silence is a proof of the same modesty that makes him record his own mistake, and emphasize the superiority of Peter's action at Samaria, and omit all reference to himself after Peter appears there, and refrain from mentioning himself in the scene at Caesareia in chapter x.

It may be said that the narrative which lies before us is Luke's, not Philip's; and it may be asked whether Luke would not have set Philip's action before us in its real proportions and on its true plane. To this we must reply that it is in Luke's style always to retain in a remarkable degree the tone and atmosphere of his original source: he treats his source as his own property, making it serve his purpose, and yet with marvellous literary skill he preserves its character, while handling it in some ways with great freedom. I

need only refer here to Professor Harnack's masterly account of Luke's relation to the two sources which are common to him and Matthew, viz., Mark and Q.¹

It forms part of our theory that Philip was not the authority for any part of Luke's narrative after the end of chapter x. The scene then changes to Jerusalem, and does not return to Caesarea until Luke himself arrives at that city in chapter xxi. (the incidental allusion in xviii. 22 forms no real exception to this statement). If there is a change of authority, we may expect that some sign of this change should be perceptible in the style, especially in that of the speeches. Our theory is that the reports in ii.-x. of what Peter said and did are so trustworthy because they are transmitted to Luke through the mouth of one excellent hearer and spectator. But the speeches are condensed, and not verbatim, and therefore they contain something of the expression of the reporter, while retaining much of the individuality of the speaker. Luke regarded this reporter as so competent and so admirable that he treated his accounts with the greatest respect.

The account of the scene in Jerusalem, when Peter's action to Cornelius was challenged, shows some difference in style from those in ii.-x. (amid the general similarity of character that marks Luke's work as a whole). It has been observed by others that there is in the report of Peter's speech at Jerusalem, xi. 4-7 (in which he related to his audience the whole story of what had just happened) a larger element of characteristic Lucan phraseology than in the account of the same incidents as they occurred at Caesarea. To show this I may quote the brief and clear statement given by Mr. Vernon Bartlet: "This speech, re-telling the substance of chapter x., bears more marks of Luke's own style." He quotes the phrase "fastened mine eyes"

¹ Briefly summed up by the present writer in *Luke the Physician*, pp. 47, 71 f., 80 f.

(v. 6), which is peculiarly characteristic of Luke. The non-Greek expression in x. 14, "I have never eaten all that is common and unclean" (which is of Hebraic type and is found also in Luke i. 37, a very Hebraistic passage, and never elsewhere in Luke) is transformed in xi. 8 into the better Greek form "nothing common or unclean hath ever entered into my mouth." This change is very characteristic. Professor Harnack has shown in detail and in perfectly convincing style that Luke very frequently improves the Greek of his authorities, even when he was using a written Source like the Gospel of Mark.¹ In x. 5 and x. 32 Cornelius is merely ordered to send men to Joppa and summon Simon Peter, and his residence is described. In x. 22 the further detail is added that Cornelius would hear words from Peter. In xi. 14 there is a much fuller statement: Peter "shall speak unto thee [Cornelius] words whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house." These variations are very characteristic of the method of abbreviated reports, such as are customary throughout Luke's history: it is never safe to take the shortest report as most authentic, and assume that details added in longer reports are additions made by the historian. One cannot reasonably doubt that some reason was assigned by the messenger in giving orders to Cornelius; that is proved by the fact that his messengers added in x. 22 a brief statement of the reason, for these trusty and devoted household servants were in the last degree unlikely to add anything to the message which they were charged to deliver. The reason is stated in the fullest form in xi. 14, and this form contains a thought that is frequent in Luke: the whole household of Cornelius is to be saved along with himself. One thinks, for example, of Lydia hearing with open heart the things which were spoken by Paul, and being baptized with her household—

¹ Examples are quoted in *Luke the Physician*, p. 38 ff.

and of the jailor to whom Paul and Silas said, " Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house," and who was baptized immediately with all his household. These were events that occurred in Luke's own immediate presence or which would be reported to him by the eye-witnesses within a few minutes or hours after they occurred : he saw Lydia as she listened to Paul ; he probably may have assisted at the baptism of her and her household : he was in the city of Philippi when the jailor came into relations with Paul and Silas, and was doubtless watching with the anxious eyes of love the issue of their imprisonment moment by moment. This thought of the close relations and common feeling which united a whole household, master, mistress and slaves,¹ was evidently one that was deep-seated in Luke's mind ; and he found that the words of xi. 14 were the best expression of the message given by the messenger to Cornelius. One cannot think that this peculiarly Lucan expression was the verbatim message spoken to Cornelius, or that the person who was his authority gave Luke the account in those exact words : but in Luke's free report such was the fair equivalent of what was mentioned to him. Luke gave himself more liberal discretion in chapter xi. than in chapter x. : and this probably, almost certainly, means that his informant in x. was a person in regard to whom he felt more profound respect. Hence he speaks in xi. more as the free historian, even when reporting Peter's speech. The speech is largely a narrative, and Luke assumes that the reader knows the story of

¹ To understand ancient household life rightly, it is necessary always to remember that a man's most faithful and trusted helpers were his slaves, that paid service was always considered untrustworthy and almost degrading, and that close ties bound together master and slaves in the household. The word *familia* includes slaves quite as much as children ; and in fact *famulus* (from which *familia*, *famulia*, is derived) came to mean slaves alone, and *familia* came to be used often where slaves alone were meant.

chapter x., for he makes Peter speak of "the messenger" in v. 13, though his hearers were quite ignorant what messenger he was speaking about, whereas the readers of chapter x. understand at once. Other examples of the markedly Lucan tone of chapter xi. might be mentioned; but they will suggest themselves to any careful reader.

It may be urged against our theory that in viii. 26-40 Philip appears as the prominent figure, and a very different picture of him is there presented. That is so; and there we have a different source, which can, as I think, be identified with practical certainty. It has been already pointed out that even "in regard to any episode we should not assume that Luke confined himself to any one source of information."¹ Especially is this caution necessary where a passage contains two separate episodes.

A specially clear example of this principle is found in the two scenes from the life of Philip. We have noted the self-suppression and humility of the first episode. We have seen that Philip is not represented as guided by Divine power, and that Peter's superior insight and authority are brought prominently before the reader. The tone of viii. 5-25 is that of the early history of the Church as it appears in the Acts. But the tone of viii. 26-40 is markedly different: in the Ethiopian episode Philip stands out alone like an old Hebrew prophet: the style and the details put him on the standard of Elijah and Elisha: he is in constant communication with the Divine power: every movement is the result of a message from God. We have here the picture drawn by an admirer, and not one that comes from Philip himself. The hero-worship shown in this part of the narrative is that of an admiring pupil or a loving woman; and the marked resemblance to the Old Testament narratives about the early prophets reveals the hand and

¹ EXPOSITOR, Feb., 1909, p. 178.

mind to which Luke was indebted. The source is one (or all) of the daughters of Philip, the prophetesses. Luke mentions them in xxi. 9, though they play no ostensible part in the action, and have no apparent effect on the history, because they had exerted a real though hidden part in moulding his narrative.

There is no part of the Acts whose reason for admittance to this highly compressed history is so difficult to understand. The law of the book is that only what was really of outstanding importance is admitted, and that while numberless events, important each in itself, are omitted, a very large space is devoted to the critical steps in the development of the Church. The episode of Cornelius, the Conversion of Paul, are described twice and even three times; the trial of Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea and the progress towards the last stage of the trial in Rome are described at great length. These can all be justified from their comparative importance in the line of development of the Church. The Ethiopian incident, however, lies apart from that line, and affects in no obvious way the main purpose of the book.

So entirely is attention concentrated on Philip in this episode that the religious position of the Ethiopian remains quite uncertain. Was he a native Ethiopian and is this incident recorded as a proof that the Gospel was spreading already at this early period to the outer world? This view seems impossible, unless we understand that he was a proselyte: for the whole plan of Luke's history is to record the steps by which gradually the Church was opened to the Gentiles. The episode of Cornelius loses almost all its importance, and there is no reason why Luke should dwell on it with such emphasis, if a pure Gentile was already baptized on the Divine command by an official of the Church; and the words of xiv. 27 lose all significance, if that were so. Why should Paul and Barnabas regard as the great fact

of their journey that God "had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles," if a Gentile was freely admitted years before ? The Ethiopian, then, must have been at least a proselyte ; and, indeed, the fact that he undertook so long a journey to worship at Jerusalem implies his close connexion with Judaism. But proselytes were already freely admitted even to Church office, vi. 5 ; and the mere admission of one other proselyte was not important enough to call for a detailed narrative of the circumstances in so highly compressed a history as Luke's.

Further, there seems a considerable probability that the Ethiopian was still more closely connected with Judaism, and that he was in fact a devout Jew of the Diaspora, like those Parthians and Elamites and others, who had listened to Peter at Pentecost and had come over in numbers to the new Faith. It is now a fact firmly established on the most indisputable evidence that there was a Jewish colony far up the Nile beside Assuan in the fifth century before Christ, and that this colony had already been settled there long before ; and it is practically certain that they were sprung from the Jews who had migrated to Egypt in the time of Jeremiah. From this colony on the borders of Ethiopia it is perfectly natural and probable that Jewish influence and Jewish men would pass into Ethiopia ; and there is no reason to think it strange that a Jew should be treasurer of Queen Candace. That is precisely the suitable and probable place for a Jew to fill.

Why, then, should Luke record this incident in his history, if it was merely the admission to the Church of a foreign Jew, or even of a proselyte ? We start, of course, with the principle that there was a clear and sufficient reason for regarding this incident as important enough to deserve admission. The reason was partly that the Ethiopian Jew or proselyte, as a eunuch, was not permitted to have the

full privileges of the Jewish congregation (Deut. xxiii. 1). The full admission of the Ethiopian was an advance in the development of the Church because it involved the principle that no man, however maimed and humiliated by the accident of fortune or by the cruelty of man, was excluded from the mercy of God and the grace of Christ. It anticipated in a certain degree the revelation to Peter that he "should not call any man common or unclean." Although this principle was not enunciated expressly to or by Philip, yet it was in a way involved in his action. But the action remained an isolated one: it was not confirmed by the Church, and probably was unknown to it until a later time. It exercised no influence on public opinion or on the course of events in Palestine, for the Ethiopian "went on his way rejoicing," and passed out of the domain of Luke's history.

The only way in which a really important effect on the development of the Church can be assigned to this episode is on the theory that Luke regarded it as a step in the spread of the Church to the south; and, if so, one must proceed to the further supposition that he had this direction of church development before his mind, and, therefore, that the further stages in it formed a possible extension of his historical purpose in the sequel.

Yet even this supposition does not fully explain why the Ethiopian is left so much in the shadow, why his personality remains almost wholly unknown, why he is rather a figure in a chariot than a real man whose position and character stand out before us. In many other cases Luke makes even quite secondary actors in his drama live in their acts and words, though they fill less space in his pages than the eunuch. Moreover what we learn about him is through formal description, and quite an unusual space is occupied in describing his position in the world: his acts

and words reveal little, and are mentioned rather as being the occasion of Philip's action than as manifesting his own individuality.

In short, this figure finds a place in Luke's pages mainly for the purpose of bringing into relief the character and power and influence of Philip, and not as indicating an important direction in the growth of the new Faith towards the south. Such a story was not gathered from Philip himself, but from a warm admirer of Philip. Yet admiration does not affect the representation of the facts. The same limitations are observable here as at Samaria. Philip can only baptize; his influence does not carry with it the gift of the Spirit.

Our view, therefore, is that the Ethiopian episode was included by Luke rather with a view to showing the character of Philip than with the intention of describing a step in the growth of the Church. Luke appreciated the great men who had made the early Church, and was resolved that his readers should appreciate them also. He knew that no impressive view of history can be given or acquired, unless the dominating figures are set in their true light. He was writing for the congregations of the Graeco-Roman world; and one of his main objects was to move them, and to affect their life. To do this it was above all things necessary to put before them in their true colours the great figures Peter, Stephen, Philip and Paul. He had at the same time the Greek sense of historic truth and of proportion: he shows those figures to us in action, and never merely describes them. For example, the scene of the voyage and shipwreck in chapter xxvii. is not directly important in itself for the development of the Church; but it is highly important as illuminating the character of Paul and showing how even as a prisoner and a landsman at sea he became the dominating personage in a great

ship's company as soon as danger threatened; and it also draws the reader's attention to the central and critical importance of the scene towards which it leads up, viz., the trial of Paul in Rome. So, also, the Ethiopian episode places Philip before the reader in a new light. Henceforth we realize his character and his action in a very different way; Philip now rises from the level of a second-rate figure almost to the higher plane on which Peter and Paul move. Even the Samaritan episode assumes a different character, when it is read in the light of the Ethiopian incident.

Such seems to be the intention of Luke, when he gives the story of the Ethiopian eunuch a place in his history. He heard it, not from Philip himself, but from the prophetesses his daughters, one or all. It was they who imparted the spirit of the Old Testament to the story, regarding their father after the fashion of an old Hebrew prophet, who went forth into the wilderness, to whom the messenger of the Lord spoke, who was caught away by the Spirit when he had done what he was ordered to do. The narrative impressed the imagination of Luke, and has been recorded by him in the same tone in which he heard it. It shows us how Philip impressed those among whom he lived; and we recognize in him a person who was fitted to write the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹ He was a great admirer of Peter, and yet he had the freedom of mind that fitted him to appreciate Paul. The self-suppression that characterizes the part of the Acts in which Luke depends on him is also evident in the Epistle, where the writer never mentions himself, and where the first person singular appears only as a literary form.² The personality

¹ The writer's view on this subject is stated in a paper in *Luke the Physician*, pp. 301-328.

² See *Luke the Physician*, p. 324.

of this leader may yet be recovered in a much completer fashion by a careful comparison of the Epistle and the portions of the Acts that we have been discussing in a general way.

It has been stated that Luke has always a definite purpose in mentioning any individual—a purpose bearing on the plan of his history, and not a mere desire for literary effect. The case of the slave-girl Rhoda in chapter xii. may seem to [be an exception. It may be thought that the incident in which she appears is recorded only for its picturesque and literary value. While Luke was certainly perfectly sensible of this value, he has another purpose in view. He knows the very inmost feelings in Rhoda's mind, her joy as she heard the voice of Peter, her fluttering eagerness which defeated her own desire by leaving Peter in the street in danger of discovery while she ran into the inner house to tell the news, her confidence that she was right while the others disbelieved her and thought she was mad. This is the way in which Luke intimates to us that he had himself talked to Rhoda, and had her own evidence to go upon. Only from her, or from some one who took a warm personal interest in her, could he have learned these details; and there was no one who was likely to have interested himself in the slave-girl and to have treasured up such information in his memory to retail to Luke. We have here personal recollection, narrated to Luke by the maid herself, and caught by his sympathetic and appreciative mind.

Incidentally, we notice here the close and friendly relation between the slave-girl and the family and family-friends. Rhoda knows Peter's voice, is full of joy at hearing it, forgets in her joy her duty as a servant, and runs in to impart the glad news to the family as a friend. She is in the most real sense a part of the household, fully sharing

in the anxieties and the joys of the family, knowing the family's friends as her own friends. As has been said above, it is impossible to judge ancient society and life from the proper point of view, unless this fact is fully appreciated.

The story of Peter's release from prison is palpitating with life. There is nothing quite so picturesque, after a certain fashion, in the whole of Luke's work as this scene: but the fashion is not exactly that of Luke's pictures generally. This scene stands apart by itself, just as the Ethiopian scene also stands alone. Some special authority was followed by Luke in each case for one scene and no more. The ultimate authority for the facts of Peter's escape was, necessarily, himself. No other had seen the facts. No other person could tell what thoughts, and what confusion, filled Peter's mind. No one heard his soliloquy, when the angel left him in the street. But the description of the scene was not got by Luke from Peter's lips; it has all the character of a narrative by a spectator, who was present in Mary's house and listened with eager interest and retentive memory to his hurried account of his deliverance. The listener's attention, of course, was concentrated on Peter; and the Apostle's narrative was brief and confined to the facts which were most important in his hearers' estimation and his own. He had already lost valuable minutes at the door, while Rhoda was talking with the incredulous people inside and maintaining that Peter himself was at the door. His escape might be noticed at any moment, an alarm raised, and strict search made for the fugitive. Hence neither does Peter tell, nor do the hearers ask, what the two soldiers watching in his cell were doing, what the two sets of sentinels on guard outside the cell—"the first and the second ward"—were doing, whether all were asleep. We gather later that the escape was not discovered until the

next morning. As Peter had been roused from sound sleep by a blow on his side, and was as in a dream throughout the whole escape, and only awoke to full consciousness after he was clear of the prison and the angel had left him, his account would naturally take little notice of surrounding circumstances, and be restricted to the facts that had most strongly impressed him ; he saw nothing else, and was conscious only of those urgent facts, and that in a dim and half-dreamy fashion. No questions were put to him by any of his hearers on those other circumstances, or, if put (which is extremely improbable), they were not answered :¹ although information about them might be useful in view of his escape from Jerusalem and the chances of immediate pursuit. It was sufficient for the little crowd of listeners to have a clear conception of the really important factors in the situation—the distress of the Church in the prospect of losing its most influential and guiding spirit :² the earnest prayers of its members : the wonderful deliverance by “ a messenger of the Lord ” at the very moment when those prayers were being made most insistently and distressfully in the last night before the execution. These are the features set clearly and strongly before the reader in the whole narrative, and only one of them belongs to Peter himself or could originate from him. His story is, in the strictest sense, only subsidiary to the greater story, that of the Church’s need ; and it is placed before us from that point of view. In short, as has been said, we have here the authority of a Christian who listened to Peter, and had

¹ Implying that Peter either had no information to give or no desire to give it. But, considering the character of the Oriental audience, I should feel very confident that no questions were asked, and that the description of the scene is perfect and complete in all essentials..

² James was now evidently regarded as the head of the Church in Jerusalem ; but that was probably due to the frequent absence of Peter on external duty (viii. 14, 25, ix. 32, Gal. ii.).

prayed for Peter. But the circumstances were such as to impress Peter's words indelibly on the memory of his hearers : we have the scene before us in all its intensity and anxiety, yet in every stage deliberate and unhurried. Even Peter's dressing is described point by point ; he and his guide move on in the light, but the light shines in darkness, and all that does not concern their acts from moment to moment is shrouded in the darkness.

The narrator was Rhoda. Luke had listened to her. He had doubtless heard the tale from others, e.g., from John Mark, perhaps, when they were together in Rome¹ or elsewhere. Probably he heard Rhoda tell the story in the house of Mary, and in the presence of other witnesses who could corroborate or correct her. But she needed no correction. It was the great event of her life, and she told it in that striking fashion in which we read it. Luke recognized that her narrative gave the true spirit of the scene ; and he used the narratives of others only as subsidiary.

If we be right in this interpretation of the source, the story of Peter's deliverance lies before us almost in his very words and certainly in the exact details of the facts, as they were described within an hour after they occurred by the one man who knew them. This has a most important bearing on the trustworthiness of the Acts. There is no room here for invention or for the growth of legend. People were too eager : the need was too great : no one could do anything except under the overpowering urgency of the danger. All the persons who played a part in the scene were compelled by the circumstances to be themselves for the moment, and to strip off all pretence and regard to outward appearance. *Eripitur persona : manet res.*

That this interpretation is the true one must be felt by

¹ Colossians iv. ; Philemon.

every one who has the literary and the historic sense for reality. Luke, according to his custom,¹ gives the story of his informants with an added touch of literary skill, but never such a touch as to disturb the simplicity and the vivid rush and hurry of the original ; and Rhoda is the main authority.

Now, given this tale, based on this supremely excellent testimony, related to Luke thirteen years after the event, and, doubtless, often related in the interval, what are we to make of it ? We have here a test case of the worth of the class of evidence on which (as I believe) ultimately the whole three Synoptic Gospels rest, as well as much of Acts : the evidence is that of eye-witnesses, and absolutely honest truthful witnesses. What is its value ? what are its defects ? It is obvious, on the surface, that we in one sense do not know exactly what happened in the prison, but that much is enveloped in obscurity, and observed almost in a dream ; and that in another sense we know on the very best evidence all the really important and critical facts of the case.

(To be continued.)

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¹ As demonstrated by Harnack ; see footnote above, p. 268.