

THE TENDENCIES AND HISTORICITY OF
THE BOOK OF ACTS.

(Continued from First Page.)

If we were to pick up the book of Acts as a particular volume, for full consideration, we should want to know who wrote it, when it was written, why it was written—for pleasure or with a purpose—if the subject-matter were original or historical, and if the latter, if it were a narration of events personally followed or a formulation from collected data; we might also wonder if all the episodes were true to fact or embellished by fancy or literary fads of the time. We may learn of the acts of the apostles without using any of these side lights, but we should miss the keen pleasure of stepping into sandals worn hundreds of years ago and creeping into a mind laid open to us by its expressed thought.

It is generally conceded that Luke wrote this book, culling his material from various sources, and the date is placed in the latter part of the first century or the second century. In following the text it will be noticed that some portions have about them more of a personal ring than have others, particularly these four passages descriptive of Paul's journey 1st. from Troas to Philippi, 2nd. from Philippi to Miletus, 3rd. from Miletus to Jerusalem, 4th. from Caesarea to Rome, these having the fresh touch, the detailed knowledge, and the use of the personal pronoun "we" which one would expect to find on the pages of a diary. These "we" records are held to be unquestionably the work of a companion of Paul; and if the text bore out the supposition that the sections not "we" were from as reliable sources, the book would be an historical guide; but much is omitted or meagerly noted in Acts which is brought out in Paul's own epistles, which fact debars "Acts" from the right to be called an authentic history of either the early church or of the apostles or of Paul's missionary work. There being no positive proof that Luke wrote the "we" sections, the conclusion is that comparatively old documents yielded him his data, among these being extracts of the diarized journey record, which extracts were inserted in their place in the narrative without changing the pronoun. It is conceivable that he made use of articles on Peter, on Paul, and on different aspects of the primitive church, composed by persons more or less well-informed and more or less prejudiced, but affording the fullest information within his reach; and also, that he accepted much tradition in default of document; which diversity of source will account for any apparent leaning away from historical accuracy, or omission. Whatever his material—content of old pages, or oral story—he moulded the whole in the light of his own reverent conviction regarding conditions, of necessity leaving the parts not particularized in the document sparse in the treatise, while the fuller portions retain their compactness; but over and through all is apparent the touch of one great artist.

We find no order of chronology in Acts. In the more detailed portions we can feel the passage of certain lengths of time, but again we face gaps which may have swallowed few or many days and any amount of unnoted episode—for which, of course, vague sources will account. It sufficed the author that the outstanding events were rays to the situation and that his hearers would grasp them as such, and accordingly we get them without date or comment or drawing of moral.

One wonders at the similarity about the speeches of Paul, Peter and Stephen, these men differing in make-up, point of culture, and supposedly in mode of expression, although animated by like faith and earnestness. We can imagine that the manuscript which came to Luke's hand may have noted the making of speeches by these men without giving them verbatim; or Luke may have thought an harangue enlightening in his idea of certain episodes and straightway took the stand as he supposed them to have taken it, expressing the thoughts which in his mind the occasions demanded. This was no unusual proceeding with early writers, in fact, many of the best historians put into the mouths of their characters speeches which the originals possibly could never have made, and this really was no detraction from the trustworthiness of the history, but a simplification, and a touch of grace to the narrative.

In chapters XXII. and XXVI. we find speeches attributed to Paul in which we get apparently contradictory views of the vision on the way to Damascus. In the one, Paul's followers are said to have seen the light, but to have heard no voice; and on this occasion Paul received his commission through Ananias after he had been in the city some time. In the other chapter, all beheld the light and fell to the ground, but the divine commission was given direct. Still another account of this incident, not given in a speech, says the men with him "stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no man," and on this occasion Ananias was the interpreter. It is hard to account for these inaccuracies unless we accept the substance of chapter IX. as Luke's foundation for fact—probably not an extract of a document, but the story as told with the popular Oriental embellishment—and view the others in the light of his graphic

speech making. If Luke were a true artist, he would paint into the speech before Agrippa Paul's possible attitude toward one learned like himself, but who had nothing of the Jew or Gentile bias; which attitude would naturally call out his most terse reasoning and best oratorical powers to lead up to and impress the central fact that the revealed will of God had cut into his life in a miraculous way and remodeled it. He was offering a defence, but at the same time he was doing missionary work, aiming to impress his message upon the king through the most likely channel, the responsiveness of a cultured mind to one equally cultured, and the consequent openness to the underlying truth, the warp of the fabric of which the beautiful woof would naturally attract Agrippa. [Here creeps in a little thought that a certain order of mind which turns from an apparently dull-hued Bible and in so doing misses truth, might, by expounded views of its literary excellence, be attracted by the tone, and in the handling come to a knowledge of the firmness and durability of the texture.] In like manner in the address from the steps of the castle in Jerusalem, Luke shows Paul's possible measurement of the minds of his hearers. Here again, while apparently speaking for himself against the Jews, he is giving his thoughts the form most likely to appeal to the order of mind listening to him. This speech really takes up the thread of the narrative for while Paul makes no mention of the immediate circumstances leading up to that particular point, it seems to me Luke has painted into his mind a remembrance that he had been enjoined to impress upon the Jews a conviction of his keeping of the letter of their law—whence his presence in the temple and his consequent rough treatment—for in apparently incidental sequence he brings to their notice the part played by "Ananias a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt at Damascus," who told him that the God of their fathers had appointed him to work among the Gentiles. This speech seems more highly coloured than that to Agrippa and the inconsistency between the two accounts really lies in this oriental dye, this touching up of the vision in the manner of story telling to which the easterners were accustomed, just as we are accustomed in our reading to metaphor which is only plain fact dressed up; but on getting beneath the word, although the teaching of both is identical, this speech has not the scholarly ring which characterizes the other; whence my conclusion that Luke, the artist, the highly cultured writer, gives us, besides the teaching expounded to Agrippa and the Jews a view of the diplomatic mind of that superb man, Paul, his hero. There are throughout the book several instances of discrepancy which conscientious digging will show up to be attributable to either of three things, to sources possibly vague and not strictly reliable, to Luke's great mind painting, or to the free handling of his completed treatise during the second century. There was abroad at that time a spirit of research regarding the facts recorded in the gospel of Luke and in Acts and it was nothing unusual to note additional details pertaining to particular passages in the margin against these portions. It is not improbable that in a revision of the text these jottings may have been taken as omissions and copied in with the main narrative.

The subject matter of Acts has four almost equal divisions, chapters I-VII. giving the history of the church at Jerusalem from the ascension of Christ until the death of Stephen A. D. 30-35; chapters VIII.-XIV. the spread of christianity through Phillip, Peter, Paul and Barnabas embracing the period from the death of Stephen until the sending out of missionaries from Antioch 35-46 A. D.; chapters XV.-XXI. Paul's missionary career 46-58; chapters XXII.-XXVIII. the last years of Paul 58-65 A. D.

In a close reading of the book with a view to the trend of thought the shuttle carrying the author's threads of idea stray through the fabric and we find we have threads to disentangle. In some instances we find an unmistakable ecclesiastical tendency and in following this we face flat contradictions. There is such a crossing and recrossing of different lines of thought on the same point, the particular niche filled by the apostles that we can only add like to like on the side of source, on the one hand, and of tendency on the other, and between the two evolve a cognizable and workable theory. In some portions of the book there is held out to us the idea that the apostles were supreme in their sway of the church, not only at Jerusalem, the seat of authority, but in all its branches. After the first missionary journey, certain men from Judaea having gone down to Antioch presenting the claims of the Mosaic rite of circumcision as opposed to Paul's practical religion, the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas and certain

other of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question, which they did, with the result that a letter such as this was sent down to Antioch, "For as much as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words subverting your souls, to whom we gave no commandment, it seemed good unto us, having come to one accord, to choose out men and send them unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul. . . . For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things, that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols . . . from which if ye keep yourselves it shall be well with you." In the epistle to the Galatians, Paul says he went up to Jerusalem on this occasion "by revelation" which would seem to repudiate the idea of his having been sent to get the opinion of a higher court. He mentions no letter of exhortation but simply says, "When they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship that we should go unto the Gentiles and they unto the circumcision." When men of Cyprus and Cyrene had effectively preached Christ to the Greeks at Antioch, and "the report concerning them came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem . . . they sent forth Barnabas as far as Antioch." Besides giving an impression of a governing body at Jerusalem regulating the affairs of the minor organizations, Luke, in some cases, fixes the apostles at such an altitude, personally, that the Holy Spirit—of whose moving power in us we conceive, as of the softness of the fall of snowflakes on the water, and against the materializing of which we cry out—is made in a manner subservient to their laying on of hands; giving the jarring impression that God withheld from humanity a communion with Himself until through a medium, a channel was opened. When, after the death of Stephen, the winds of persecution bore Philip to Samaria to preach Christ to a despised people, were are told that the apostles which were at Jerusalem on hearing "that Samaria had received the word of God, sent unto them Peter and John, who when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, for as yet he was fallen upon none of them. . . . Then laid they their hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost."

During his third missionary journey Paul came to Ephesus and finding certain disciples there, "he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed? And they said, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Ghost is given. . . . And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them." Notice the almost direct confutation of a theory followed immediately by its confirmation. Paul's words imply the possibility of the descent or impartation of the Holy Spirit without human agency. We read of no one having been sent from Jerusalem who should have confirmed the belief of these Ephesians before Paul's own coming. Apollos himself who had ministered to them had never been set apart by a laying on of hands—indeed we are told that Priscilla and Aquila, disciples, "took him unto them and expounded unto him the way of God; and when he was minded (not sent by order from Jerusalem) to pass over into Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to receive him." The account of Paul's own conversion contradicts the idea of the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the apostles alone, for we are told that Ananias, who must have been an ordinary disciple, laid his hands on Saul and said "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way which thou comest, hath sent me that thou mayest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost." We have no proof that the church at Jerusalem had anything to do with either the giving of the spirit to Paul, or the sending of him to confirm others as he is said to have done. After his conversion and his reception at Jerusalem through Barnabas, he preached there until, the Jews seeking to kill

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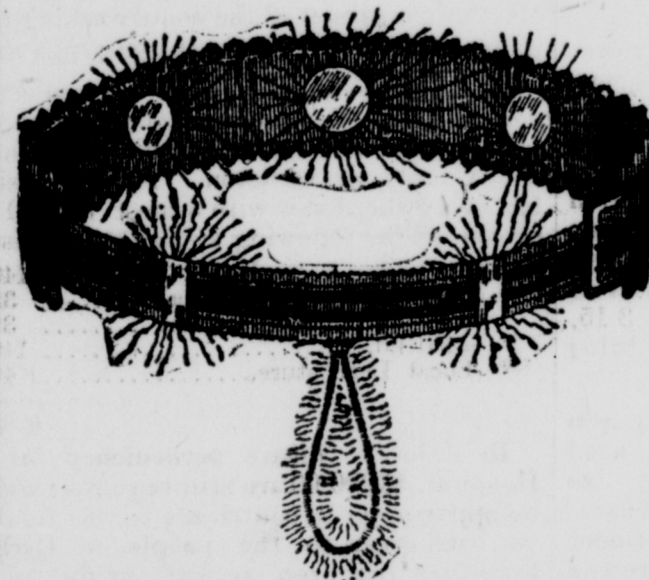
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