

Luke, the Christian physician of Antioch.

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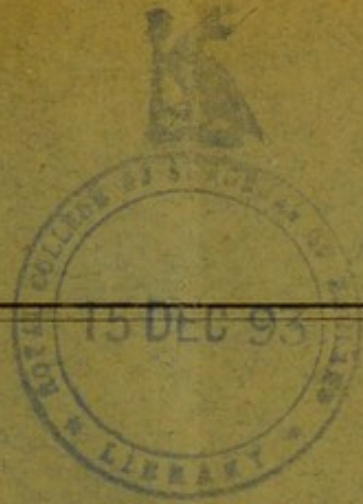
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LUKE, THE CHRISTIAN PHYSICIAN OF ANTIOCH.

[*Translated from Prof. A. Harnack's "Medicinisches aus der ältesten Kirchengeschichte," Leipzig, 1892.*]

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LUKE, THE CHRISTIAN PHYSICIAN OF ANTIOCH.

[Translated from Prof. A. Harnack's "*Medicinisches aus der ältesten Kirchengeschichte*," Leipzig, 1892.]

IN the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (iv, 14), we read: "Luke, the beloved Physician, greets you." In the epistle to Philemon (verse 24), written from Rome at the same time, the Apostle calls him his "fellow-labourer"; and in the last writing of Paul's which we possess, he says: "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim., iv, 11).

Luke, the first physician whom we know to have been a Christian, took a prominent part as Paul's "fellow-labourer" in the spread of the Gospel. Church tradition ascribes to him the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, and much may be alleged in favour of this report. Both these books, which form a considerable part of the New Testament, have undoubtedly been written by a highly cultured Greek, by one who worked with the greatest accuracy as regards the sources from which he derived his information, who thoroughly understood the rules of the science of history, and who wrote in an excellent style. There are also to be found in both works passages which would seem, both from the interest and the knowledge which they display as regards medicine, to point to a physician as their author;* indeed, it has even been asserted that the preface to the Third Gospel is formed after the pattern of the preface to the "*Materia Medica*" of Dioscorides.† It is certain, at any rate, that in no other

* Eusebius says in his *Church History*, iii, 4: "Luke, a scientific physician, bequeathed to us two books in demonstration of the science of soul-healing which he had learned from the Apostles."

† Lagarde, *Psalterium iuxta Hebr. Hieron.*, p. 165; compare also *Mittheil.* III, S. 355. [The following is a translation of the first sentence referred to. Dioscorides is assigned to the first or second century A.D. "Following many others, including not merely ancient, but recent authors also, who have written concerning the preparation of medicines, and their powers, and their use, we also, O dearest Areus, will try to show to thee that this matter has been taken up by us after due consideration and with no small amount of study: because some of them have not thoroughly elucidated the subject, and others of them have treated it merely historically."]

Gospel is the activity of Jesus as the Healer both of soul and body so earnestly brought into prominence, and so lovingly described as in the third Gospel.* The Acts of the Apostles also concludes with an address by Paul, in which, on the basis of an Old Testament quotation, God is spoken of as the Physician who has abandoned the Jews and exercised His healing power exclusively on the heathen.†

According to a tradition reaching back to the second century, Luke took part in the composition of yet another of the New Testament books—viz., the Epistle to the Hebrews. In recent times Delitzsch has come forward to support this idea. He writes:‡ “That Luke was by profession a physician is strikingly in keeping with the construction of the epistle; for this epistle contains, so to speak, an anatomical (iv, 12), a dietetic (v, 12-14), and a therapeutic passage (xii, 12).” A striking idea, quite like those of the late Leipzig scholar, but of no value whatever as a proof! That Luke was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews is merely an unauthenticated tradition, having its origin in the difficulties of the subject and the speculations of the learned.

Reasons have also been brought forward, which are worthy of consideration, against the idea of his being the author of the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. The fact, however, of his being that companion of Paul who wrote the description of the voyage from Cæsarea to Puteoli and the shipwreck (Acts of the Apostles, xxvii, *et seq.*) is beyond dispute. The accuracy and trustworthiness of the description are marvellous. Those who have studied the naval affairs of the ancients consider that in the whole range of antiquity we hardly possess another account so rich in respect of acuteness of observation and clearness of statement, regarding nautical matters, as this account by the Physician Luke.

If Luke be the author of the third Gospel, then we have among the four Evangelists, according to report, not only a “Theologian,” John, who bears this title of honour, but also a “Physician;” Mark, as the interpreter of Peter, would be the “Philologist;” and the Publican Matthew would require

* It must also have been noticed that the third Evangelist has endeavoured to draw a distinct line between the process of exorcising and the curing of “natural” diseases, both as regards their description and the methods used in curing them; see Campbell, *Critical Studies in St. Luke's Gospel*, Edinburgh, 1891 (known to me only through J. Weiss, *Theol. Lit.-Ztg.*, 1892, No. 3.)

† Acts of the Apostles, xxviii, 26-28. The two following verses contain only an appended historical notice.

‡ *Comment. 2 Hebräerbrief*, S. 705.

to see if he could find a place among the "Lawyers." The four Evangelists have been compared to every imaginable thing in the world that is fourfold and forms a *Universitas*—to the four quarters of the globe, the four winds, the four cherubim, &c. I know not whether in these comparisons, which were at one time taken quite seriously, any one hit upon the four Faculties, but I should be astonished if such were not the case. We do not think much of these matters now, and least of all of the union of the four Faculties, which has become somewhat loosened, and is in general not so likely to occur to the mind readily nowadays.

It rests on good authority that Luke came from Antioch, and was a member of the earliest of the Gentile Christian Churches.* Anything further, however, that tradition has to tell of him does not appear till later on, and is not authentic; he is said to have laboured in Achaia and Bœotia, in Dalmatia, Gaul, Italy, Macedonia, in Alexandria also, and so on. Some give an account of a martyrdom which he suffered in Thebes in Bœotia; others say Petrea or Ephesus. Out of the multiplicity of legends † let us give prominence to the pleasing one, that, on the grave of the saint in Thebes, there rained down pastilles or biscuits endued with healing power, and in this way the forgotten grave was discovered—probably a Bœotian local report got up by a speculative priest, who brought as an offering some small cakes in order to procure for his people a sacred shrine, and gain reputation and money for his church.

Not until very late—viz., in the sixth century ‡ appeared the information that Luke was not only a Physician, but also a Painter. But, as is so often the case, the later false legend nearly supplanted the ancient true tradition. The Painter Luke soon eclipsed the homely Physician. Nowadays Luke is recognised throughout the whole Eastern Church principally as a Painter. He became a Painter because people wished to have "genuine" pictures of the Virgin Mary, and Luke was the Evangelist who had given the most exact description of the Mother of God. The tradition that he had been a Physician was not, however, at that time, intentionally suppressed. True, the heretic Marcion, a celebrated man, though without followers, tried to do this as early as the

* *Eusebius*, iii, 4; *Quæst. ad Steph.* *Nova Patr. Bibl.*, iv, 1, p. 270; *Hieron. de vir. inl.*, 7. The information probably reaches back to Julius Africanus, and perhaps the other statement also, that he was better acquainted with the Greek learning than with the Hebrew.

† S. Lipsius, *Apokr. Apostelgesch.* ii, 2 S. 354 *et seq.*, who has collated and sifted these legends with marvellous diligence.

‡ Theodorus Lector (*Valesius, Mogunt.* p. 551).

second century. Marcion would recognise no physician among the apostolic heroes, because in his overflowing Christian enthusiasm, he held it as unchristian to busy oneself about the human body. Thus, in the Epistle to the Colossians, he struck out the words, "the beloved Physician" standing beside the name of Luke. But this Christianity, in opposition to Nature, which was a revisal even of the old records, was rejected by the Church at large; Luke continued to be to her "the beloved Physician," and as such the living token at the same time that Christianity and Medical Science can well be combined. Even in the history of the Church, however, there have been times when all Natural Science and Medicine were almost condemned as profane learning. At such times it was of no little value for her to remember that in the New Testament there appears a "beloved Physician," and that he is the historian of the Virgin Mary and of the Lord, of Peter and of Paul. Thus the Physician Luke has carried on, even after his death, a quiet but powerful mission. He has protected in the Church his Science of Healing, and triumphantly averted from the Catholic Church the final consequences of a Christianity opposed to Nature.

M.