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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

# THE GOSPEL OF LUKE CONSIDERED AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL DOCUMENT

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SINCE Renan—master of the apposite and attractive phrase—informed the world that the Gospel according to Luke was “the most beautiful book ever written,” it has been the fashion to stress increasingly the esthetic values of this Gospel. The artist has taken precedence of the physician. Personally, we are not now here disposed to dispute the assertion, except to say that for ourselves, having read the mystical pages of the Fourth Gospel, we hold a different opinion from that of Renan. For us the chief value of Luke’s Gospel rests not so much in its literary beauty, which we readily concede, but rather in its psychological insight. We can well believe the ancient tradition that Luke was an artist, but we know positively that he was a physician. And this latter fact has great importance for the psychologist.

In every physician there are the makings of a psychologist. The good physician has to be something more than a physiologist. It is not enough that he understand “nerves,” he must understand moods and temperament. By the very nature of the case the physician seeks to understand not merely the human body but also human nature. He may have to guard his better judgment by thinking of his patient as a “case,” but they who still have memories of the old time family doctor know that underneath a scientific pose there often is a nature that is quick with human sympathy and feeling. And Luke was called “the beloved physician.” This characterizing phrase predisposes us to the belief that here is one whose profession made possible the psychologist. Predispositions, however, are slender evidence for the sustaining of an argument. To make progress we need to have concrete facts before us and not merely the current of our feelings within us. Our present purpose is to produce the facts.

In the two books of the New Testament ascribed to

Luke, the authenticity of which has been so brilliantly established in our day by Sir William Ramsay, Luke comes before us as an historian. His explanatory preface to his Gospel informs that he is concerned as to the orderliness of the narrative that he has taken in hand. It is pertinent to our theme to notice that Luke seems to have something deeper in mind than mere chronological sequence. Moffatt, in his Introduction to the New Testament, speaks of the "logical" arrangement Luke makes of his material. Our preference would be towards the use of the word "psychological," and for reasons which we trust will become more plainly evident as we proceed.

Writing a quarter of a century before Renan's picturesque phrase gave directive impetus to the study of the Lukan Gospel, the Dutch scholar, Da Costa, drew attention to the psychological nature of this Gospel. Unfortunately, psychology was not then a matured science. By many it was still thought of as a quasi-science. His suggestion, therefore, bore no fruit in his day. It is only in our day, when psychology has vindicated its right to a place among the sciences, that the full value of the suggestion can be realized.

A cursory reading of this Gospel by the psychologist is sufficient to indicate that here is a rich field for inquiry. The nature of the ministry of Jesus regarded from the viewpoint of the profession of Luke would not allow him to rest merely in the facts alone. It was not enough for him to narrate, he must go on to analyze. That is to say, in order to be "logical" (to use Moffatt's word) he had to become psychological. Which is to say that, as the Fourth Gospel was "a spiritual Gospel" to the early church so to us the Third Gospel becomes a scientific gospel. Luke is more than a mere sounding board for facts. Being what he was and Jesus doing what he did, it was the natural sequel that Luke should attempt to state the facts with the addition of some explanation. This is the psychology of Luke. In other words, he comes well within the definition of a psychologist as recently defined by Pratt in his work on *The Religious Consciousness* when he tells us that the psychologist is one who

gives a "systematic description of the verifiable facts of human experience."

It being the avowed intention of Luke to "draw up a narrative of those matters which had been fully established" our present interest is not so much with the success of his intention (that has value for the historical student) as it is to notice how he seeks to express the "matters" which he has substantiated. *Litterateurs* have long observed that it is to Luke that we are indebted for the exquisite stories of the infancy of Jesus. For the psychologist these have the added value of bringing to one's notice the environmental conditions surrounding the early years of our Lord. Additional to this we have the revealing incident of the boyhood of Jesus, narrated by Luke alone. There on the threshold of adolescence stands Jesus, sensing the work to which He was called, yet even there manifesting the perfect self-control (which is the essence of true greatness) in that he was also obedient to his parents. It is history to say that "the child grew and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40); it is also psychology.

This illustration is but one of many in which the psychological insight of Luke is demonstrated. As we follow the course of the Lukan narrative we are brought into intimate understanding of the inner life of Jesus as explanatory of his outward conduct. It is especially to Luke that we are indebted for the record of the prayer life of Jesus. Through his fellowship with the Father he replenished the reservoirs of his power and kept pure the springs of his conduct. Temptation was a reality to Jesus. Luke informs us that after the temptation in the wilderness the devil departed for a season from Jesus. With keen psychological insight Luke observes that the threefold temptation was more than a revelation of the sustaining power of God exemplified in the life of His Son, that it was also a source of spiritual development in the experience of Jesus, for he records that when Jesus came from the ordeal of the temptation "he returned in the power of the spirit into Galilee." Very remarkable also is Luke's account of the passing of power from Jesus

through the touch of the unnoticed woman. What a revelation of the personality is here! The giving of sympathy drains the spirit. As a physician Luke marvelled at the cure, but it was as a psychologist that he was conscious of the taking of power from Jesus.

Further evidence of this psychological insight of Luke is given in his recording of the parables wherein one touches the springs of human conduct in all its many phases. In this connection one thinks of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or of that of the Publican and the Pharisee, or of that of the Good Samaritan. Were one limited to the Gospel of Luke for source material in preparing a thesis on "The Varieties of Religious Experience" from the same viewpoint as that of the well-known work of James he would by no mean be a pauper. When we read of the prodigal coming to himself, or of the publican, who would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, we are listening to the words of a master psychologist.

Our present purpose is not to exhaust the subject in hand, but rather to indicate a fruitful line of study to those who would know Jesus in his inner life. If John has forever enriched Christian thought by writing of Jesus against the background of philosophy, so it is now becoming plain that Luke has performed a like service in a related field of thought in that he has written of Jesus against a psychological background. We are happy in giving credit to this Gospel along the line of esthetic value, but let us not forget also that it is entitled to be called a psychological document of the first importance.