

**THE ACTS;
AN EXPOSITION**

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The Acts; An Exposition by Charles R. Erdman

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CHARLES R. ERDMAN

**THE ACTS;
AN EXPOSITION**

The Arts

AN EXPOSITION

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TO
THE STUDENTS OF
PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
MY FRIENDS AND FELLOW WORKERS
IN FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

FOREWORD

In peace or war, in the past or present, no project has been so bold, no adventure so thrilling, as the enterprise of carrying the gospel to the whole world. The Acts tells how this work was begun, and how the good news was brought across the imperial provinces from Jerusalem to Rome, not by a single messenger or by individual effort, but by the rapid extension of the Christian Church. The book is a record of heroic achievement and inspired eloquence, a treasury of truths vital to believers, a manual of methods for evangelists and missionaries, and a witness to the unceasing activity of the living Christ and to the present power of his divine Spirit. Those to whom the story is quite familiar will be the most eager to read it anew, for they know best its value and its charm.

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INTRODUCTION

It was a high honor to compose the most significant chapters in the history of the Christian Church; yet the author of The Acts, who alone relates the origin of the most significant society and of the mightiest

The Author movement in the world, makes no mention of his own name. There is little doubt, however, that this author was "Luke, the beloved physician," the faithful friend and companion of Paul. This belief is supported (1) by a constant tradition extending back to the earliest centuries; (2) by the fact that the same writer composed the Third Gospel, which fact appears in the dedication of both books to Theophilus, in the similarity of style and spirit, in the identity of language, more than forty words being found in both books which appear nowhere else in the New Testament, in the common use of technical medical terms, in the opening reference of The Acts to a "former treatise" which was a life of Christ; therefore, as the Gospel always has been assigned to Luke, it is evident that he also must have written The Acts; (3) by the fact that in certain sections of the book the author writes in the first person, using the pronouns "we" and "us," thus modestly intimating that at the time of the events described he was associated with Paul; and when the circumstances recorded are compared with references made to Luke, by name, in the Epistles, it becomes evident that of all the associates of Paul only Luke could have written these passages. That these passages came from the same pen as the rest of the book is evident from the unity of plan and style and vocabulary.

It appears, then, that the author was a Greek by birth, possibly a native of Antioch, a man of culture and refinement, an extensive traveler, modest, intelligent, sympathetic, loyal. He accompanied Paul from Troas to Philippi on that memorable journey when the great apostle brought the gospel tidings from Asia to Europe; on a subsequent

journey he returned with Paul from Philippi to Jerusalem; he was with him during his imprisonment at Caesarea, he journeyed with him to Rome, and there in the dreary days of confinement, he showed the unique fidelity which Paul records in that memorable phrase: "Only Luke is with me."

Surely this writer was well equipped for his immortal task. For his earlier narratives he had opportunity to secure materials from Mark at Rome, from Philip at Caesarea, from Paul and his companions on their long journeys and during the repeated periods in prison; but the most brilliant passages are those which he writes as an eyewitness, when he again lives through the stirring scenes which by his genius have become unfading, inspiring pictures for the Christian world.

Luke shows himself a historian, not of the third or second but of the very first rank, by his absolute accuracy, by the definiteness of his aim, and by the consequent careful selection and consistent use of his literary

The Aim

material. He had in mind one clear purpose; to that every narrative is related, by that all needless details are excluded, with that before him he gave to his work unity, clearness, force; as a result, we have here no mere disconnected memoirs, no chance extracts from a diary, no careless collection of apostolic traditions, but a finished treatise, a monument of artistic skill. His definite aim was to write a history of the formation and early growth of the Church; or, in the words of a modern scholar, it was to compose "a special history of the planting and extension of the Church by the . . . establishment of radiating centers at certain salient points throughout a large part of the Roman Empire, beginning at Jerusalem and ending at Rome." Thus it was not the purpose of the writer to produce biographies of Peter or Paul or other apostles; he described these characters only in so far as their activities were concerned with his main purpose of showing how the Church was formed, how broadened to receive Gentiles, how extended from Jerusalem to Rome. So, too, it was evidently not his aim to write all that he knew of the history of any local church, at Jerusalem or