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Ramsay on Christ's Birthplace *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?* A Study on the Credibility of St. Luke. By W. M. Ramsay. London: Hodder and Stoughton. 5s.

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RAMSAY ON CHRIST'S BIRTHPLACE.

Was Christ Born at Bethlehem? A Study on the Credibility of St. Luke. By W. M. RAMSAY. London: Hodder and Stoughton. 5s.

It is no little tribute to the importance of this book that two writers in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* have referred to it as of authority, Professor Driver in his article on *Jesus Christ* and Mr. C. H. Turner in his on *New Testament Chronology*. And yet to an English mind it cannot seem entirely convincing. In spite of Prof. Ramsay's strenuous argument, the English scholar, content to be regarded as illogical, will refuse to believe that a mistake in a date can damn St. Luke's reputation to be a great historian. The Professor sets out to vindicate, in what he regards as a crucial passage, the trustworthiness of his historian. And it may be said at once that the greater part of his thesis seems to be established: he gives what must be regarded as sufficient evidence (i) that Augustus ordered a system of general census for the Roman world, (ii) that Palestine was a part of that world, (iii) that this census was by households, (iv) and recurred every 14 years, so that there may well have been one in 9-8 B.C., as we have some reason to know there was in A.D. 6-7 and A.D. 20-21. He also gives a possible explanation of why in Palestine on this first occasion the people should have gone to their native cities for registration. Where it appears that the book is unsatisfactory is in its treatment of the last question that arises—how St. Luke comes to make Quirinius *hegemon* of Syria at the time. Much of the Professor's severity (pp. 41, 46-7, 69, 70, 71, 91, 101, 114) against those who find inaccuracy in St. Luke is beside the mark, if the doubt only affects the dating. It is exaggeration, even if we allow that 'he has taken special pains to connect his narrative with the general history of the empire' (p. 70), to say that 'if he allowed a statement on that subject (of the census) to find a place in his book, he makes himself responsible for it in the

fullest sense' and 'if one detail be false, everything is affected'—'he falls below the standard of accuracy demanded from the ordinary historian' (p. 111). When books of reference for dates were not in every one's library, a wrong date can hardly destroy the credibility of an otherwise unimpeachable narrative: such errors are not unknown to-day; and, if the suggestion (p. 74) be sound that Mary the Virgin was St. Luke's authority, his date will not necessarily be more censurable than Tertullian's *per Sentium Saturninum*, and our author allows that the books of distinguished modern classical scholars illustrate the difficulty of accuracy about Roman personal names. Yet St. Luke is, on a fair estimate, as remote from chronology probably as a modern scholar from Roman names: it would be another matter if he betrayed ignorance, as the older critics argued, in points of Roman provincial administration.

Another criticism that offers itself is that the arrangement of the book is somewhat disproportionate,—the title perhaps may pass. Six pages are devoted to an illustration of St. Luke v. § 20 'let him down through the tiles' (pp. 48-54) with references to Roman comedies: and though the separate chapters are given titles clear enough, there is an unfortunate air about the whole of a note-book sifted for matter kindred to the main thesis. Lastly the author refers to Niese for a *brochure* on Josephus' system of dates: it is to be hoped that he has verified that writer's conclusions, but the first thirteen dates of Josephus which I have studied seem to contradict them.

I have tried thus to indicate what weaknesses are in the book; but it will be understood that I have done so, because its main conclusions seem to me to be irrefragably made out, and to be so valuable that discussion of this part of the gospel narrative will always in future have to take account of them.

T. NICKLIN.