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842ND ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 19, LIVINGSTONE HOUSE,
BROADWAY, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, APRIL 28TH, 1941,
AT 4.30 P.M.

MAJOR H. B. CLARKE (LATE R.E.) IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous meeting were read, confirmed and signed.

The CHAIRMAN then called on the Rev. F. N. Davey, M.A., to read his Paper entitled "The Probable Dates of the Gospels," with particular reference to their Importance as Historical Documents."

The Meeting was then thrown open to discussion in which Mr. P. O. Ruoff, Mr. W. E. Leslie, Mr. Philip Dive and the Rev. A. W. Payne took part.

Written communications were received from the Rev. Principal H. S. Curr and Mr. Everard Jose.

THE PROBABLE DATES OF THE GOSPELS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THEIR IMPORTANCE AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS.

By the Rev. F. N. DAVEY, M.A.

THE potential evidence for dating the Gospels may be divided into three classes.

1. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE : that is to say, any statements, references or citations, in other extant literature, which may have any bearing at all upon the dating of the Gospels. Of this class of evidence it may be said at once that much of it is uncertain and conflicting, and that none of it can confidently be dated earlier than at the beginning of the second century A.D.

2. INTERNAL EVIDENCE REFLECTING A HISTORICAL SITUATION ABOUT WHICH THERE EXISTS EXTERNAL EVIDENCE. For instance : the third evangelist parallels the vague predictions of the "*abomination of desolation standing where he ought not*" and of

the coming affliction, of which we read in Mark xiii, 14-20 and Matt. xxiv, 15-22, with the explicit prophecy "*But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand . . . and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*" (Luke xxi, 20-24). This precise situation came about in the year 70 A.D., and the irresistible conclusion is that Luke's rewording of an obscure prophecy must be dated, if not definitely *after* that event, at least sufficiently shortly before it for the situation to have seemed inevitable.

3. INTERNAL EVIDENCE BEARING UPON THE HISTORY OF THE FORMULATION OF THE EXTANT GOSPEL MATERIAL. For example: Mark iii, 22, like Matt. ix, 34, xii, 24 and Luke xi, 15, records the accusation brought against Jesus in terms that reflect the Semitic conception by which a miracle is wrought through the power of a name—*By the prince of the devils casteth he out devils*; but Mark adds, *He hath Beelzeboul*, which aptly expresses the Hellenistic conception of a magician possessed by a devil, and therefore suggests that the Markan version of the story has been reformulated for non-Jewish readers, either by Mark himself, or at some previous stage of its history. It is this third class of evidence which will be further exemplified in some detail, on the grounds that the second, and even the first, classes cannot be adequately handled until the complicated and intricate character of the material as a whole has been recognized.

There are two passages of the Fourth Gospel in the course of each of which Jesus uses the same words with some circumstance. In John xiii, 12-20, Jesus is explaining the meaning of His washing the disciples' feet, which has just taken place. No doubt it is a significant action, showing that His coming death, far from being an irrelevant misfortune, is the necessary and culminating act of service through which He makes men clean; that is to say, sanctifies them; and without which they have no part with Him. But this characteristic act inevitably defines the nature of the Church: there can be no obedience to Jesus without similar service. "*If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*" Then, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, A slave is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent (Gr. an apostle) greater than he that sent him.*" Now turn to John xv, 18-25.

Here Jesus, in the second part of His final discourse to His disciples in the Upper Room, is speaking of the persecution which is the expected lot of the Church, which must necessarily issue from the complete antagonism between Himself and the world, and which is the clear sign that the persecuting world is under the judgement and condemnation of God. In the course of this passage Jesus says : “ *Remember the word that I said unto you, a slave is not greater than his lord* ” ; and from this “ word ” draws the conclusion : “ *If they have persecuted me they will also persecute you ; if they have kept my word, they will keep yours also.* ”

At the centre of each of these passages stands the saying “ *A slave is not greater than his lord,* ” but in chapter xiii this is so introduced as to force upon the apostles the necessity of service as completely self-sacrificing as that of His own death, while in chapter xv it reminds the apostles that the persecution which was His lot will be theirs also. In fact, the two applications of the saying are entirely different. But, further. In either case the saying meets a situation that is known to have arisen in the history of the early Church. 1 Peter, Hebrews, and other parts of the New Testament, show the Church in the throes of persecution : 2 Cor. i-iv, and Gal. ii are not the only evidences that there was a danger lest the apostles should be exalted into great figures whose personal magnitude obscured their office. The saying is therefore used in the Fourth Gospel to meet two quite different situations, both of which, it would seem, had already arisen in the Church. Does this mean that the Fourth Evangelist perverted an ancient saying of Jesus from its original context in order to serve purposes that seemed to him pressing ? That would be a very bold conclusion, for the Synoptic Gospels amply affirm that not only His suffering at the hands of persecutors and the service of the many through His death, but also the declaration that His disciples must be involved in the same suffering and service, were conscious themes of Jesus Himself (*e.g.*, Mark x, 39, 43, 44). In fact, whatever the origin of the saying “ *A slave is not greater than his lord,* ” the Synoptic definition of the fundamental relation between Jesus and His disciples demanded that it should be so interpreted as to comfort the later Church in persecution and to guard the later Church against adulating its apostolic heroes to the detriment of their ministry. If, then, the applications of the saying in these two

passages have been formulated as a result of crises in the Church, they have none the less been fundamentally created by the tradition of the words and works and life and death of Jesus.

The saying in question appears, however, in the Synoptic Gospels as well as in the Fourth Gospel. In Luke it is introduced into the Sermon on the Plain, among a number of heterogeneous sayings of which the general purport seems to be the danger of judging, but which have little logical sequence. "*And he spake also a parable unto them, Can the blind guide the blind? shall they not both fall into a pit? The disciple is not above his master: but every one when he is perfected shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*" (Luke vi, 39-42). In this context and form the saying itself has to do neither with persecution nor with serving, but with the assurance that the disciples will be made like their master. Whether, so formulated, this originally referred to martyrdom conforming them to the death of Jesus (? cf. His "perfecting," Luke xiii, 32, 33), or whether it spoke rather of the hope of future glory in the coming Kingdom (cf. Luke xxii, 29), is not clear. These, too, are well-established themes in the Synoptic Gospels. What is clear is that Luke has set the saying here without regard for either of these interpretations, and only because the first part of it more or less suited his immediate purpose of instilling humility in his readers:—I say "Luke," because the arrangement of these same ill-assorted bed-fellows in Matthew makes it extremely unlikely that they were so arranged in any source Luke may have had, particularly as a pastoral interest in the Christian virtues is a characteristic of his. Nevertheless, the precise bearing of Luke's use of the saying is a little obscure. He may have meant, with reference to verse 39, either that Jesus is the only authority—no one else may judge; or even, with no reference to Jesus at all, that no pupil can possibly see, whose teacher himself is blind; or he may have wished to remind Christians, with particular reference to verse 36 (*Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful*), that even Jesus did not judge others.

In Matthew the saying appears in the discourse which follows the calling of the twelve (Matt. x, 24, 25), and is applied as in John xiii, to persecution, although more particularly, perhaps, to its moral than to its physical form. It might be

thought that with Matthew firm ground has been reached at last, and that here the saying is in its original context and meaning. So it may be, but here too there are difficulties. Matthew says: "*A disciple is not above his master, nor a slave above his lord. It is enough for the disciple to be as his master, and the slave as his lord.*" It is this addition that is perplexing. For although it is indirectly paralleled in the Lukan version, as we have seen, and therefore very probably appears here more or less as it was received by the First Evangelist, this addition is a proverbial expression found several times in ancient Rabbinical writings. What then of our saying? Is the contrast between a slave and his lord simply a version of a common proverb? And, if so, ought we to regard it as an authentic utterance of Jesus? There is, as it happens, considerable evidence that Jesus used proverbial expressions more than once in His teaching (e.g., Luke iv, 23), and there is little reason to doubt that He used this one (always supposing that the relation between a slave and his lord was *for Him* a natural analogy to the relation between His disciples and Himself—but this question, weighty as it is, is altogether beside the present purpose). The point is that a proverbial expression, which may have been used by Jesus but was probably not coined by Him, is carrying the weight, in our Gospels, of four distinct applications of four Gospel themes to various situations in Christian experience. When men began to set themselves up as judges of their fellows, or began to forget the essential character of their ministry, or began to wax impatient of persecution, or began to lose their grip upon the hope that their end, in this world as well as the next, is to be made like their Master; then the traditional theme of the implications of the actual circumstances and character of the life and death of Jesus for those who called Him Lord again and again enlisted this analogy into its service, and so confronted men, in very different historical circumstances, with the unalterable, but always living and vital Word of Jesus; with the old commandment that is ever new. It was the tradition itself *behind them* that created the traditional applications of our saying.

So far we have seen how a fundamental evangelical conception has controlled the solution of different problems arising in the history of the Church, and has left traces of its creative activity in the various applications of one proverbial saying. I now propose to show how, stimulated by similar pressing problems,

sayings and parables of whose authenticity there is little ground for reasonable doubt, seem to have re-fashioned and re-orientated other equally well-authenticated parables and sayings. In Mark xiii, 34 we read: "*It is as when a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, gave to each one his work, and commanded also the porter to watch.*" This parable is introduced to enforce the solemn charge, found more than once in each of the Synoptic Gospels, to watch against the unexpected coming of the Lord, or of "the hour." Mark—who is later going to tell how the three most intimate disciples could not watch one hour in Gethsemane, but fell asleep—applies the parable thus: "*Watch therefore: for ye know not when the lord of the house cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.*" But it is not the first disciples only that must watch: the charge is acutely pertinent to a church which soon, as we know (*e.g.*, 1 Cor. vii, 29–31) needed to be reminded that the things of this world should be of but temporary moment for Christians. Accordingly, Mark adds (xiii, 36): "*And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*" But does the parable really make this point? Fairly well, perhaps, so long as we concentrate upon the absent householder and the doorkeeper, and ignore the apparently gratuitous information about the authority given to each of the servants, and the transitional observation that each was given his work, which prepares us somewhat awkwardly for the doorkeeper's particular task. But look at Matt. xxv, 14. Here the Parable of the Talents begins in words which are even more strikingly similar to the Markan parable in the Greek than they are in the English: "*For it is as when a man going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability.*" Yet here the similarity ends, and the parable is developed at great length, not so that it turns upon the particular office of doorkeeper, but in such a way that it explains Mark's gratuitous information that each servant had authority and a task. In fact, the completed parable, like its more complicated Lukan parallel, the Parable of the Pounds, leads up to and illustrates a saying of Jesus which is found elsewhere in Matthew, in Luke, and in Mark (Mark iv, 25 = Matt. xiii, 12 = Luke viii, 18). It has nothing to do with "watching": it does not direct men's minds

away from the engrossing cares of this world, but warns them rather against failure to use present gifts in a Christian way : "*For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away*" (Matt. xxv, 29).

Another parable common to Matthew and Luke, the Parable of the Marriage Feast, illustrates a similar phenomenon. The Lukan form is the shorter, but has a distinctive interest, entirely in keeping with one of the evangelist's favourite purposes. Instead of saying, as Matthew does, that the servants are simply to go out and invite any they find so that the places of the neglectful guests may be filled, Luke represents them as sent to fetch "*the poor, and maimed, and blind and lame.*" So his parable reinforces the teaching which he has already attributed to Jesus : "*But when thou makest a feast, bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind*" (Luke xiv, 13). Yet Luke's particular humane interest—or a lack of humanity on the part of Christians of his day—cannot have created this application of the parable, even if it occasioned it. As it stands in Luke, the parable does not go one whit outside the implications of the saying preserved in Matt. xxi, 31 : "*The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you*" (the chief priests and the elders of the people). But it illustrates these implications in the context of later Christian experience (*cf.* 1 Cor. xi, 17–34). In Matthew, however, the parable does not apply, as in Luke, simply to the contrast between rich and poor, but first to the rejection of the apostate Jews in favour of the Christians (*cf.* for example, Rom. ix–xi), and then to the problem of sin and apostasy in the Church itself (*cf.* 1 Cor., 1 John, and the movement of John vi, 60–71 and xiii, 21–38). It speaks of the Fall of Jerusalem quite explicitly—"*But the king was wroth ; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city*" (Matt. xxii, 7)—and resembles two other parables given only by Matthew, the Tares and the Drag-net, in its evident concern about the presence of evil as well as good in the Church. Yet, as Matthew presents it, the whole leads up to, and culminates in, a saying which some manuscript authorities read also in Matt. xx, 16, and which is not altogether unlike Matt. vii, 13, 14, *cf.* Luke xii, 23, 24 : "*Many are called but few chosen.*" As little in its Matthaean as in its Lukan presentation is the parable untrue to the essential implications of sayings fundamental in the Synoptic tradition.

The varying applications in the Gospels of the two or three parables which have been considered suggest certain further conclusions about the formulation of the Gospel material. While, once again, we have found signs that the needs of the Church were being consciously met, the dominant factor in the re-interpretation of these parables already handed down most probably from Jesus Himself, seems to have been the tradition of sayings also most probably His. The material has been fashioned and re-fashioned more than once, but not arbitrarily, or simply under external pressure, but under the pressure of its own implications and in its own interest. If the history through which the primitive Church passed gave men a deeper insight into the meaning of the words and works of Jesus, it was none the less the already existing tradition of these words and works that illuminated their experience and *showed them the true meaning of current events* (such is in all probability the meaning of John xvi, 13; cf. John xiv, 26, xv, 27, remembering that the true understanding of Jesus is always presented in the New Testament as the work of the Father or of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mark ix, 7; Matt. xvi, 17; Mark iii, 9; 2 Cor. v, 16; Gal. iii, 1-5; 1 John iv, 2, etc.), and that the Fourth Evangelist constantly used the future to express circumstances characteristic of Christian experience after the Resurrection had been made known). What Jesus said and did was no static truth, such as might remain tranquilly set forth in the implications in which it had first been apprehended by the apostolic witnesses of the Resurrection. It was—so the New Testament theologians vigorously affirm—the absolute revelation in history of the truth of the living God. Consequently this history had to be re-formulated and re-fashioned immediately Christian perception of its meaning was deepened under the pressure—I will not say of Christian experience, but—of that history ever more deeply experienced by Christians who believed that it contained once and for all the meaning of their own history and of all history. So there lies behind our four Gospels an immensely busy, creative and yet disciplined process—their formulation by Christian apostles, prophets, teachers, and evangelists who, like scribes made disciples unto the Kingdom of Heaven, brought forth out of their treasures things old and new (Matt. xiii, 52).

By now you will, I hope, have perceived why it seems to me that my third class of evidence for the dating of the Gospels—

Internal Evidence bearing upon the history of the formulation of the extant Gospel material—must first be considered if the problem of dating the Gospels is to be seen in its true perspective. The limits imposed upon me by the conditions of this paper have made it impossible for me to take more than a few random examples, and to consider even these far more briefly than they deserve: none the less, these examples suggest two considerations very forcibly. On the one hand they have shown that a long process lies behind our extant Gospels. In this process the commonly assumed use of documents by the Four Evangelists, and in particular the supposed use of Mark and another common source by the authors of Matthew and Luke, which I have deliberately ignored for the purposes of this paper, is only the latest, though perhaps the most instructive, stage. However quickly this process may have been accomplished, the very nature of the Gospel material itself protests vehemently against the second century traditions that Matthew and John are based simply upon the undeveloped reminiscences of eye-witnesses, and Mark and Luke upon the exclusive record of the preaching of two great Apostles. On the other hand, our study of the Gospel material protests equally vehemently against the assumption that this was a process of deterioration, and that because a considerable period must have elapsed between the Crucifixion and the writing of the earliest of our Gospels, the witness of the Gospels has thereby been invalidated. Only the nineteenth-century dogma that the literal form of words, and the observable actuality of events *is*, or could possibly be, identical with historical truth, can support this assumption. But, if it were so, why did the Jews, who must have known far more about the literal form and observable actuality of what Jesus said and did than the majority of early Christians, put Jesus to death instead of worshipping Him? Precisely because they shared this dogma, and so were blind to the glory which the apostles beheld in the flesh of Jesus. This, of course, is an explicit thesis of the Fourth Evangelist (*cf.* John viii, 43), who is, moreover, well aware that even the apostolic understanding of what Jesus said and did, and of His death, did not come about simply because their eyes saw, and their ears heard, certain occurrences and words (*cf.* John 11, 22; xvi, 31; xx, 9, etc.), although—and this I would emphasize most strongly—he is equally insistent that the flesh of Jesus, His words and works

and death, are the point and the moment where the truth of God is concretely set forth in history (e.g., John 1, 51 ; iii, 14, 15 ; xiv, 9, etc.). The Fourth Evangelist writes consciously under the pressure of that paradox to which the eruptive character of the Synoptic material bears witness: *The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten from the Father* (i, 14) . . . *the flesh profiteth nothing ; the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life* (vi, 63).

Far from depending upon the personal authority of four—or seven—or twelve—individuals, the Gospel material commends itself to us as a complex process of apprehending more and more deeply the meaning of the words and works of Jesus, a process forged out in the living, corporate experience of men and women by the living power of those words and works themselves, when accepted as the revelation of God. In this process we ever and again find traces of the particular situation of some one or other of these men caught up and perpetuated. Some of these traces, moreover, appear to correspond with other non-Biblical evidence that can be dated with precision. These form our scanty second class of evidence—Internal Evidence reflecting a historical situation about which there exists external evidence. In the case of Mark, most of these traces are to be found in the thirteenth chapter, the famous Markan Apocalypse. The late Dr. B. W. Bacon thought that this their evidence suggested that Mark was written in Rome, about the year 75 A.D. Streeter, however, found the same evidence suggesting a date just before rather than just after the Fall of Jerusalem, though he also placed the Gospel's origin in Rome. More recently Bishop Hart of Wangaratta, reversing the general view that Mark xiii, 5–8 depends partly upon 2 Thess. ii, 3–12, and arguing that Paul's eschatology depends instead upon Mark, has tried to find in the Markan references to persecution, and in particular to the martyrdom of the Sons of Zebedee (Mark x, 35–40), a reference to the persecution of the Church by Herod in A.D. 43. Bishop Hart owned that his work was set in motion partly by the conclusion to which he was driven by his study of the Synoptic Problem, that the interval between Mark and Matthew must be much greater than that which is supposed by Streeter's or Bacon's dating. Another fairly recent thesis, precisely contrary to this, since it roundly asserts the priority of Matthew, has been set

forth by the late Dom Chapman, regardless of the subtle and much more scholarly attempt of Lagrange to comply with the dogmatic declaration of the Vatican Biblical Commission. More dogmatic still, perhaps, is the tendency of a recent school of German Biblical scholarship to accept the First Gospel as the work of an eye-witness, St. Matthew, simply because it is an authoritative apostolic work and it is therefore quite inconceivable that it should have depended for its material upon other sources than those supplied by the Apostle's memory.

If the character of the Gospel material is indeed such as the passages we have studied suggest, you will understand why there may be traces of persecution in the 'forties side by side with traces of the catastrophe of the Fall of Jerusalem. And if you remember that, in spite of these traces, the pre-occupation of the evangelists, or of their predecessors, was with the history of Jesus, you will be content to find theories of dating "non-proven"—above all when dogmatic interests are weighing down the balances and loading the evidence. We must, of course, take full account of all the traces which suggest dates. They do, perhaps, to the satisfaction of most of us, point towards the final composition of Matthew and Luke just after the Fall of Jerusalem and the composition of Mark just before; and this working hypothesis fits in very well both with much of the second-century External Evidence, and with the far more compelling evidence of the complex nature of the material. But whether we shall ever be able to say, on the basis of these pointers, that the Gospels *certainly* belong to this or to that or to a third date, is not only a matter for scepticism: it is an almost entirely secondary and irrelevant cul-de-sac in the study of Gospel origins.

DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN, Major H. B. CLARKE, R.E. (ret'd.), in proposing a vote of thanks to the Author for his interesting paper, said: It is always good for us to be made to think, even when we do not agree with the conclusions. I regret very much that he passed over the first division of the evidence for the dates so lightly, as after all, tradition is a fact and, unless it can be upset, should carry weight. May I suggest, too, another fact arising out of the second paragraph on

page 157, and that is that it is perfectly certain that the Gospel of St. Luke was written before the Acts. The latter brings down the history to about A.D. 61, and therefore as the Gospel precedes the Acts, it presumably was written at an even earlier date.

As regards the third division of the evidence, in class 3, page 148, line 5, may I suggest that the Semitic conception is perfectly correct, that it is the name through the power of the name that works the miracles, *vide* Acts iii, 16. I cannot follow, either, how as Beelzeboul was the God of Ekron, then a very small place, the Markan version of the story would be likely to commend itself to the outsiders for whom it was written.

On page 150, in the first paragraph, may I suggest the solution of the apparent incongruity. The blind Pharisee could not rise above his teacher, nor we above ours, and the connection is that until you can see yourself clearly as God sees you, you cannot be a help to others.

As regards page 153, paragraph 1, line 1, I would suggest that the two parables alluded to are quite distinct, and that in Luke's version it is to be noted that the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind and the lame belong to the city, which undoubtedly refers to Jerusalem. It was after those who were conscious of their own helpless state had been gathered in that the servants were sent outside the city into the highways and hedges to make the call to the Gentiles.

Page 154, lines 8 and 9. I should really like the lecturer to give some proof for the statement that the material has been fashioned and re-fashioned more than once.

Page 155, line 17. I regret that I cannot agree with this statement. Matthew was a business man accustomed to taking notes, and probably to writing up his diary every day. There was nothing, therefore, to prevent his Gospel being contemporaneous with the events he records, and in line 32 I would suggest that the Jews were looking for the Messianic kingdom and nothing less, and that our Lord's doom from the human point of view was sealed in that He bade them render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's. May I correct a slip in the last lines of this page—only one of the sons of Zebedee suffered martyrdom. There is, I think, another on page 148, line 6, as regards the date, which should, I suggest, be A.D. 66, as it was then that the prediction began to be fulfilled

which allowed the disciples to escape from the city after the repulse of Cestius Gallus.

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF: This able paper is mainly irrelevant to the subject, and gives meagre and questionable evidence of the probable dates of the Gospels. The last two paragraphs, indeed, cite opposed and contradictory theories. After considering the chief points raised in the paper, it is a relief to turn from the interpreters of Luke to Luke himself, and see what he says. This is Luke's own account: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things which thou wast taught by word of mouth." [Luke 1, v, 1-4.]

The lecturer takes unwarranted liberties with the exact historian Luke, and speaks of "Luke's *rewording* of an obscure prophecy." If Mr. Davey only means that Luke's account of Christ's words reports some additional words to those recorded by Matthew and Mark, no objection can be raised. If, on the other hand, he meant that Luke altered the words for any purpose, it becomes a grave matter, and, moreover, is sheer guesswork.

Mr. Davey says: "It was (what Jesus said and did) so the New Testament theologians vigorously affirm—the absolute revelation in history of the truth of the living God. Consequently this history had to be re-formulated and re-fashioned immediately Christian perception of its meaning was deepened under the pressure—I will not say of Christian experience, but—of that history evermore deeply experienced by Christians who believed that it contained once and for all the meaning of their own history and of all history." If the "absolute revelation" was given, surely this would be a substantial reason why it should in no circumstances be "re-formulated." Christ had promised that the Holy Spirit would "bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." [John xiv, 26.]

Mr. E. H. BETTS, B.Sc., wrote :—To the general Christian reader the main features of this paper will appear to be—

- (a) Rejection of the supernatural in the form of divine prophecy.
- (b) Ascription to the evangelists of words and sayings ascribed by them to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (c) Deprecation of literality of form and actuality of fact in the study of historical truth.

Consider one or two examples :—

(1) Mr. Davey cites Matt. xxiv, 15–22 and Mark xiii, 14–20, as “vague predictions” and Luke xxi, 20–24, as a parallel but “explicit prophecy.” (The parallelism is a demonstrable error, for the two prophecies are separable, in subject-matter, as to time, locality and purpose.) He admits that the last-mentioned was precisely fulfilled in A.D. 70, and thence reaches the “irresistible conclusion” that Luke’s *rewording* of the obscure prophecy of Matthew and Mark must be dated, “if not definitely *after that event*, at least sufficiently shortly before it for the situation to have seemed inevitable.” This “irresistible conclusion” carries the following implications :—

- (a) Prophecy is impossible.
- (b) “Luke” set forth, as a prophecy, an account of events that had already happened—or, alternatively, were already taking shape.
- (c) He represented Christ to have uttered the words on a definite occasion, in answer to a stated question and in the course of a conversation which he gives with some detail.
- (d) He *thus* gave the passage the form of an “explicit prophecy,” obtaining his materials from a parallel but vaguer prediction.

And by such a technique as this we are to believe that men are “confronted with the unalterable but always living and vital Word of Jesus” ! (citation from Mr. Davey’s paper).

(2) Mr. Davey asserts that the terms of Mark iii, 22, Matt. ix, 34, xii, 24, and Luke xi, 15, “reflect the Semitic conception by which a miracle is wrought through the power of a name—

By the prince of the devils casteth he out devils”; and that the addition by Mark of the words *He hath Beelzebul* “aptly expresses the Hellenistic conception of a magician possessed by a devil,” and that this addition suggests that the Markan version has been reformulated for non-Jewish readers. But seeing that Matthew, Mark and Luke *all* cite his opponents as attributing his power to Beelzebul, the Hellenistic peculiarity of Mark’s statement can lie only in the “He hath,” *i.e.*, in the attribution to him of “having” or “possessing” a devil. But if so, too much is proved and the suggestion destroys itself, for Matthew also uses the formula (xi, 18, “He hath a devil”); so does Luke (iv, 33, vii, 33, viii, 27) and so does John (viii, 20, x, 20). *Did the writers all “reformulate” for non-Jewish readers?*

(3) If the “literal form of words and the observable actuality of events” is not identical with historical truth, why did the evangelists simulate these features? Why were these writers so false—so *constructively false*? Consider the details of occasion, subject, time, place, interlocution, etc., so carefully given in Matt. xxiv, 3, 4, Luke xxi, 5, 7, 8, Mark xiii, 5 alone. Either these are truthful details of actual circumstance simply recorded as such or, supposing the stories to be re-formulations, they are pure invention. “*And as some spake of the temple . . . he said . . . and they asked him . . . and he said* (Luke xxi, 5, 7, 8),” and then follows the “explicit prophecy” of which Mr. Davey says, it must be dated far subsequently! So too, we presume, must be the words “*And now I have told you before it come to pass that when it is come to pass ye might believe.*”

Mr. W. E. LESLIE said:—The characteristics of the Gospels have long fascinated students. Of later years we have witnessed the rise of “source criticism” (more particularly of the Synoptics) and now “form criticism,” of which the present paper is an example. Evangelical writers have done little along these lines, partly through lack of diligence and partly because of an *a priori* mechanical theory of the mode of inspiration.

But our paper considers specially the dates of the Gospels. It has become usual to bring them down to the destruction of Jerusalem, because it is assumed that the Lord Jesus would not or could not have uttered the predictions which they contain. Surely this is quite illegitimate. Similarly, the later meaning of *ekklesia* has been read back into Matthew, making the usage there anachronistic. But if it is remembered that it is an O.T. word, and the passages be read in the light of the Zadokite communities which then existed in Palestine, the anachronism vanishes.

Mr. Davey contemplates a considerable period during which *this* saying became associated with *that* parable by the pressure of events. But suppose the selective process was simplified by the fact that the Ministry was largely iterative; proverbial and semi-proverbial expressions being repeated in various contents? Might we not then have the sayings in the contexts in which they were originally uttered? This would shorten the period of selection. Further, we must remember that the process was probably well under way before the resurrection.

There is an unfortunate tendency for "form critics" to start with the tacit assumption that the various sayings and parables were not uttered in the connections in which we now find them. Great ingenuity is then exercised in explaining how they reached their present position. From this tendency our author is not free—see page , line , page , lines and page , line . If it was proper for the history to be "re-formulated and re-fashioned" in those days, why should not we continue the process in our day? The fact that it has been committed to writing does not affect the principle.

The Rev. Principal CURR wrote:—In his suggestive and scholarly paper Mr. Davey adopts the modern theory, which enjoys such a vogue at the present hour, to the effect that the Four Gospels incorporate a mass of oral traditions regarding the words and works of Our Lord. These have a history extending over two or three decades at the lowest estimate. In the process of transmission they have been modified to suit various problems in the story of the primitive church. The result is that the Gospels contain not only

a record of what Jesus began to do and to teach, but also the reactions of the earliest Christians to that information. It is as if James Boswell had not merely reported the unique conversation of Dr. Samuel Johnson, but combined with it his own reflections in such a way that the two strands were practically indistinguishable.

The basis of this view is largely the striking differences and similarities between the Four Gospels, and the repetitions which seem to be so hard to understand. These same facts were equally patent to the fathers and brethren in the second century whose theory of the origin of the Four Gospels is thus summarized in the paper. Referring to this process of modification, so to speak, Mr. Davey writes in these terms: "However quickly this process may have been accomplished, the very nature of the Gospel material itself protests vehemently against the second-century traditions that Matthew and John are based simply upon the undeveloped reminiscences of eyewitnesses, and Mark and Luke upon the exclusive record of the preaching of two great Apostles."

Without taking account of the fact of Divine inspiration, attention may be drawn to the fact of supreme genius. The four Evangelists were something more than careful collectors and industrious recorders of early traditions regarding the sayings and doings of Our Lord. They were men of marvellous ability and skill. As a writer in "The Times Literary Supplement" once remarked, "The authors of the four Gospels knew what they were about." May not these perplexing features of their biographies of their Divine Master be explained as the lights and shadows of incomparable genius?

AUTHOR'S REPLY.

I am content to let this discussion be printed without particular comment: those who wish to go more deeply into the problems raised will easily find guidance for their study.

I am amused to find myself treated as a "form-critic," for my whole argument might be termed a refutation of the common form-critical conclusions. I sought to show, by means of a few random examples, which I never claimed to be more than straws showing the drift of a current, that the four Gospels reached their present state as the result of a complicated process in which the

dominant factor was always the tradition itself. To this end I took sayings and parables which Form-critics generally explain as *formulated by factors extraneous to the tradition and distorting it*, and attempted to demonstrate that in every case it is more simple to suppose that the formative factor lay *within the tradition*. In other words, I started where the critics *are*, and tried to show that criticism itself leads back to the Jesus of History. For this disservice to Christianity I am reproached !

My hearers and readers were shocked by the suggestion that there was "development" in the tradition. I should be more shocked had the tradition not developed. For if anything is historically certain about the disciples of Jesus, it is that they all forsook Him and fled. This means that those that were afterwards to transmit the record of His words and works to later generations were, until the moment when they became assured of His Resurrection, so ignorant of the meaning of what He had said and done that they could not watch with Him or die with Him. It was the Resurrection that drove them back to His words and works, because then, and then only, when they knew that Christ is risen, did they begin to understand their import. Then it was that these men had to draw upon their memories for the action of Jesus or the word of Jesus most adequate to the proclamation of the meaning of the Gospel of their crucified and risen Lord *for their actual hearers*. So, as they lived their lives and wrought their ministry by the light of the Word of the historical Jesus, they found the hard, short sayings, the dark, enigmatic parables, and the momentous, cryptic actions, which had at the time stuck in their almost entirely uncomprehending minds, more and more luminous with the Truth of God revealed in Jesus crucified and risen. And as their understanding grew, so, quite rightly, did their exposition of these memories develop. This is why I speak of the unalterable but always vital word of Jesus.

I wonder whether my critics have understood the close connexion between the words and works of Jesus and His death and Resurrection? St. Paul says that "if there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law" (Gal. iii, 21). No such law was given, and life came only through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Similarly, in the Fourth Gospel, the Jews are convicted of thinking to find eternal life in the Scriptures,

which in fact point to Jesus who bestows life to those that come to Him ; but the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is always the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world *in His death*. To take the words and deeds of Jesus as a static, final Revelation of God, comprehensible apart from His death and Resurrection, having literal meaning only—that is to say, meaning confined to the same three dimensions in which they were spoken or done, and exhausted in the one moment and situation of their event—is to make of Jesus a second Moses, and to render His death and Resurrection irrelevant. It is impossible for me to read much that is written in supposed loyalty to the Bible without being gravely disturbed by the phenomenon of a Jewish attitude to Scripture among professing Christians, and this impression is aggravated by the complacent and intolerant temper in which this “loyalty” is often expressed, and which also has its New Testament antecedents.