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~~NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY~~

THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHRISTIANITY

A SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS EMBODIED IN THE "ENCYCLOPÆDIA BIBLICA"

ONCE upon a time there was a system of Christian Theology. It was a wonderful though a highly artificial structure, composed of fine old crusted dogmas which no one could prove, but very few dared to dispute. There was the "magnified man" in the sky, the Infallible Bible, dictated by the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the Fall, the Atonement, Predestination and Grace, Justification by Faith, a Chosen People, a practically omnipotent Devil, myriads of Evil Spirits, an eternity of bliss to be obtained for nothing, and endless torment for those who did not avail themselves of the offer.

Now, the house of cards has tumbled to pieces, or rather it is slowly dissolving, as Shakespeare says, "like the baseless fabric of a vision." The Biblical chronology, history, ethics, all are alike found to be defective and doubtful. Divine Revelation has become discredited; a Human Record takes its place. What has brought about this startling change? The answer is, *Knowledge*. Thought, research, criticism, have shown that the traditional theories of the Bible can no longer be maintained. The logic of facts has confirmed the reasonings of the independent thinker, and placed the dogmatist in a dilemma which grows ever more acute. The result is not pleasant for the believer; but it is well that the real state of things should be known, that the kernel of truth should be separated from the overgrown husk of tradition.

During the last few years a work has been issued which sums up the conclusions of modern criticism better than any other book. It is called the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, and its four volumes tersely and ably set forth the new views, and support them by a mass of learning which deserves serious consideration. And the most significant thing about it is not merely that the entire doctrinal system of Christianity has undergone a radical change, but that this change has largely been brought about by Christian scholars themselves. A rapid glance at

this store-house of heresy will give the reader some idea of the extent of the surrender which Christianity has made to the forces of Rationalism. It must be premised that space will permit of the conclusions only being given, without the detailed evidence by which they are supported.

THE CREATION MYTH.

Let us begin with our supposed first parents. Is the story of Adam and Eve a true story? There are, we are told, decisive reasons why we cannot regard it as historical, and probably the writer himself never supposed that he was relating history. It is not a mere myth, but an idealistic narrative, containing moral as well as mythical elements. This means that it is simply an imaginative reflection of what the original author or authors believed—a very different thing from a Divine revelation. The Creation story originated in a stock of primitive myths common to the Semitic races, and passed through a long period of development before it was incorporated in the book of *Genesis*. Its coincidences with the Babylonian myth are so numerous that it is impossible to doubt there was a real historical connection between them. The legend was not taken over as it stands from the earlier account, but many important features in it cannot be explained except on the supposition that they were borrowed from the Babylonian myth. The latter gives the key to understanding the Biblical story by revealing the principal source from which it was drawn. Its differences are due to its independent development; its striking resemblances to the Chaldean legend prove its origin. The Amarna tablets furnish evidence that Babylonian influence had penetrated to the shores of the Mediterranean by the fifteenth century B.C.; but even if the Biblical account originated so early it could not have assumed its final form till very much later—in fact, many indications show that not till after the Exile in the sixth century did the story take its present shape. If, then, it is the fact, as Christian scholars assert, that this story of the Creation originated in a pagan myth, and was shaped and altered by unknown hands for nearly a thousand years, it is nothing more nor less than superstition to hold that it is divinely true.

THE PATRIARCHS.

As for the Old Testament patriarchs, we now learn that their very existence is uncertain. The tradition concerning Abraham is, as it stands, inadmissible; he is not so much a historical personage as an ideal type of character, whose actual existence is as doubtful as that of other heroes. All the stories of the patriarchs are legendary; they may contain some truth, though how much will probably never be known;

to suppose them entirely true is to throw historical criticism overboard altogether.

HISTORY OR LEGEND?

The whole book of *Genesis*, in fact, is not history at all, as we understand history. It is a composite narrative, based on older records long since lost, and the parts of which it is made up can be separated in such a way that each reads as a consecutive story. Many indications of later date are found in this book, such as the Egyptian names appearing in the story of Joseph, which point to its having been compiled in the seventh century B.C. The welding together of the two main narratives appears to have been effected about the same period, though both accounts were added to at still later dates. The story of the Deluge is, of course, a Hebrew version of the Babylonian epic.

‡ The book of *Exodus* is another composite legend which has long been mistaken for history. Vast ingenuity has been expended in attempts to reconcile the narrative with known facts, but the particulars of the supposed exodus, and the route followed by the Israelites, remain in hopeless obscurity. The tradition is inconsistent; the element of legend is predominant; sober history gives no warrant for supposing that the signs and wonders wrought by Moses ever occurred, that the first-born of Egypt were ever slain, or that Pharaoh was ever drowned in the Red Sea.

MOSES.

The historical character of Moses has not been established, and it is doubtful whether the name is that of an individual or that of a clan. The story of his being exposed in an ark of bulrushes is a myth probably derived from the similar and much earlier myth of Sargon. Quite possibly some elements of truth underlie the account of Moses, for, if the Israelites were really delivered from Egypt, they had no doubt a leader, but who he was and what he did cannot be ascertained with certainty. The alleged origin of the Ten Commandments is purely traditional; it is probable that they were framed not earlier than the time of Amos, on the basis of the old laws of the tribe, which we find embodied in the later chapters of *Exodus*. It is admitted by even conservative critics that the original worship of the Israelites was not of an ethical character.

The popular opinion that the book of *Deuteronomy* was written by Moses is at variance with both internal and external evidence. The work has many signs of later date, and appears to have been unknown before the seventh century B.C. Originally it may have consisted merely of the long speech attributed to Moses, and this may have been the book which was "found" in the temple in the reign of Josiah, the

rest of the work being added shortly afterwards. As it is difficult to believe that such a work would have remained in the temple undiscovered for 800 years, it is reasonable to conclude that the book was placed there by men who thought the time ripe for religious reforms—in fact, that a “pious fraud” was perpetrated. Evidence of every kind concurs to prove that in its original form it was a product of the seventh, not of the fifteenth, century B.C. In its present form *Deuteronomy* is a composite and considerably modified version of the older work.

THE PSALMS A COMPOSITE BOOK.

The fond illusion that all the Psalms were written by David except where otherwise stated has been entirely dispelled. The book of *Psalms* is really the hymn-book of the second temple, some of its parts possibly ancient, others clearly indicating an origin as late as the time of the Maccabees in the second century B.C. After the victories of the patriot Judas Maccabæus, the national worship was restored, and the dedication of the Temple in the year 165 was accompanied with hymns and music; and it is probable that several of the Psalms in the existing collection were among those sung on that occasion. According to modern criticism, it is doubtful whether David wrote any of the Psalms. It used to be gravely questioned whether any of them were written after the Exile; it is now a question whether any were written before it. One critic goes so far as to consider that the oldest Psalm of all (No. 137) was only written during the Exile, and that even that one was afterwards put into its present shape. As to *Proverbs*, it is impossible to suppose that Solomon was the author of the book, though it is not denied that he might have collected or written proverbs of some sort. The book may date from the fourth and third centuries B.C.

POETRY AND PROPHETIC LITERATURE.

The book of *Job* has sometimes been thought the oldest book in the world. Criticism will not admit the claim. It is, we are told, impossible to place it very early; it is best understood as representing special influences which existed after the Exile, and at no other time. The book is not a literary unity, nor was it written with any particular purpose; it is not a manufacture, but a growth. The romance of *Esther* is a very late production, written probably after the time of Alexander the Great, and is without even a kernel of historical truth. *Jeremiah* is a composite work, containing spurious passages, some written as late as the second century; while *Ezekiel*, though probably in the main a genuine production of the prophet, contains numerous errors, additions, and changes of the text. *Ecclesiastes* dates from the third century B.C.,

while *Jonah* is a Jewish *midrash* or tradition, like the histories of Tobit and Susanna, and was certainly written after the Exile. The great book of *Isaiah* is the work of several authors, some of them probably disciples of Isaiah, though it is doubtful whether Isaiah himself wrote any of it. Some parts appear to have been written during the Exile, and the earlier portion edited during the third century B.C. Later criticism, we are assured, deepens our sense of the gulf between the first and second portions of *Isaiah*.

The book of *Daniel* was once assumed to be the most definitely prophetic of the Old Testament writings—a notion which is seriously discounted by the discovery that it was beyond question written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, after or during the happening of the events which were supposed to be foretold, and nearly 500 years after the time of its supposed author. It is questionable whether such a person as Daniel ever existed; but it is certain that his adventure in the den of lions, and that of Shadrach and his companions in the fiery furnace, are as fabulous as if they formed part of the collection of *Æsop*. In the very first verse a subsequent origin is indicated by the name of the king of Babylon being given in a late and inaccurate form. In a historical sense the book is utterly unreliable. The prophetic literature generally cannot be accepted as having the character of literal accuracy.

NEW TESTAMENT CHRONOLOGY.

Turning to the New Testament, we find that modern critical research only brings out more clearly than ever the extraordinary vagueness and uncertainty which enshroud every detail of the narrative. From the article on "Chronology" we learn that everything in the Gospels is too uncertain to be accepted as historical fact. There are numerous questions which it is "wholly impossible to decide." We do not know when Jesus was born, or when he died, or who was his father, or what was the duration of his ministry. As these are matters on which the Gospel writers purport to give information, the fact of their failure to do so settles the question of their competency as historians. As to the birth of Jesus, the only account which claims to give indications of date rests on a series of mistakes. No census was possible under Herod, and none took place under "Cyrenius" until A.D. 7. The tradition as to the age of Jesus is meagre, and leaves the question undecided. With regard to the Crucifixion, we may assume any date between the years 26 and 35 without making any approach to certainty. The narrative of Matthew in particular is full of "suspicious circumstances," and the only results which have a high degree of probability are the date 30 A.D. for the death of Jesus, and the period of about one year for the length of his public ministry.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

The supposed supernatural birth of Jesus has of late exercised the minds of theologians. It is not surprising that some of them should reject the notion, for it is one without a shred of evidence in its favour. Setting aside the well-known fact that many other religions assume a similar origin for their founders, we may note that the New Testament accounts are in such hopeless conflict with each other that reconciliation is impossible. The Gospels themselves afford the amplest justification for a criticism of their narratives. It is of little avail for Luke to tell us that Jesus was born of a virgin when, in other parts of the same book, his natural relationship to his father and mother is explicitly recognised. Jesus himself made no appeal to his supposed miraculous birth, and it is clear that it is excluded by the subsequent bestowal of the holy spirit at his baptism. The only two verses in the first chapter of Luke which clearly express the idea of a supernatural birth so disturb the connection that we are compelled to regard them as an interpolation. As to the date, there is a discrepancy between Matthew and Luke of at least ten years, the one placing the event at about 4 B.C., the other not earlier than 6 A.D. There is ample evidence that the belief in the divinity of Jesus was a growth which went on during a long period. This developing belief led to a desire to bring him into closer relationship with God, and out of such anxiety arose the story of the nativity. Among the Jews the notion of supernatural birth did not attach to their conception of the Messiah. It is therefore probable that the idea was originally absent from both Matthew's and Luke's Gospels. The genealogy of Joseph, given in the first Gospel, is prior in date to the story of the virgin birth, and could have been drawn up only while he was regarded as the real father of Jesus. Luke so frequently coincides with Matthew that he probably had the latter's Gospel before him; but, on the other hand, his differences as to the birth and genealogy are so marked that it is unlikely these particulars then formed part of Matthew's work. Paul's statement also, that Jesus was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, cannot be reconciled with the account of his having been born of a virgin. It is clear that there was an endeavour to invest the birth and childhood of Jesus with a miraculous halo. It must be added, finally, that "for the whole birth and childhood story of Matthew, in its every detail, it is possible to trace a pagan substratum." Further comment is unnecessary.

JESUS.

The article on "Jesus," by Professor A. B. Bruce, shows a cautiously critical tendency, but points out that, while the Gospels may be regarded as in the main a trustworthy tradition, they are unreliable

in many of their details. They raise so many perplexing questions, to which they afford no solution, that anything like a dogmatic tone is inadmissible. The account of the Temptation is a symbolic representation of a spiritual experience. The story of the Crucifixion, even in its most historic form, is not pure truth, but truth mixed with doubtful legend. The bare facts of the betrayal, the desertion, the sentence, the crucifixion and death, are regarded as historical, while the picturesque accessories, such as the night-trial, the mocking, the incident of Barabbas, the two thieves, and the preternatural concomitants of the death, are of doubtful authenticity.

We may discover in the Gospels many indications that Jesus was the product of his time and nation. His conception of Messiahship was greatly influenced by the later Isaiah; but the ideal he had formed was not in harmony with that of the Jewish teachers of his day. In fact, "his attitude towards the whole circle of ideas associated with conventional religion was without doubt that of a radical sceptic": while his language concerning the Father shows limitation of vision, his spiritual intuitions are pure truth, valid for all ages. His acts of healing are considered to have been real, though it does not follow that they were miraculous. It is assumed by the writer of the article that these beneficent deeds must have taken place, or the family of Jesus would not have thought him mad—surely a very slender ground on which to assume that the works of healing actually occurred. Referring to the strange statement that Jesus declined to expound his parables to the people, lest they should be converted, we are assured that it is not credible that Jesus would either cherish or avow such an inhuman intention, though it is possible that in his disappointment he may have expressed himself in such a way as to be misunderstood.

It is pointed out that, while in the Gospel of Luke Jesus is called "the Lord" about a dozen times, the earlier Gospels of Matthew and Mark refer to him simply as "Jesus"—a fact which seems to indicate the gradual evolution of the belief in his divinity.

THE RESURRECTION.

The important subject of the "Resurrection" is treated by Professor P. W. Schmiedel, of Zurich, who tells us that the Gospel accounts "exhibit contradictions of the most glaring kind." Referring to the contention that, in spite of these discrepancies, the event may have really happened, it is pointed out that the actuality of the resurrection depends for its establishment upon these very narratives, and in such a case unimpeachable witnesses are naturally demanded. Such unimpeachable witnesses, of course, do not exist. In view of these contradictions, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the Gospel writers were

far removed from the events they describe. Another point to notice is that the canonical accounts do not actually describe any resurrection; they merely treat it as having already occurred. It is inferred from the statements that Jesus appeared to his disciples after his death; but the reality of the appearances has ever since been in dispute. The first of these appearances, it is held, must have been believed to have taken place in Galilee. There were strong reasons for placing them in Jerusalem, where the Crucifixion had taken place; there must, therefore, have been stronger reasons for stating that they occurred at a distance. The account of the watch at the sepulchre and the sealing of the tomb is now given up as unhistorical even by those who accept the story as a whole. It is entirely excluded by the question of the women, "Who shall roll away the stone?" The many attempts which have been made to explain the disappearance of the body become superfluous on the adoption of the view that the statements as to the empty sepulchre are unhistorical. Moreover, the silence of Paul with regard to these details is unaccountable, if the story of the Resurrection is true. An apologetic tendency is perceptible in the Gospel accounts, and this may help to explain the rise of unhistorical elements. It is probable that, in the absence of knowledge, conjectures were freely made, and many questions asked, the replies to which were afterwards assumed to be facts.

PAUL'S BELIEF IN THE RESURRECTION.

Paul's statements regarding the appearances of the risen Jesus are in themselves fairly consistent; the difficulty is that they do not agree with the Gospel accounts, though Paul purports to give a categorical relation. It must be remembered that he wrote, so far as we are aware, long before any of our present Gospels were in existence, and, as the Resurrection was the cornerstone of his theology, his testimony is of particular interest. For him nothing less than the truth of Christianity rested on the actuality of the resurrection of Jesus. As he had found it hard to believe, he must have sought the more carefully to inform himself of all that could be said in favour of such an astounding event. During his visit to Jerusalem he had had opportunities of acquiring knowledge relating to it, and it may naturally be assumed that, when endeavouring to prove to the Corinthians the truth of the Resurrection, he would state fully and clearly all that he knew about it. Paul, however, does not say that he ever saw the risen Jesus in bodily form. It is admitted on all hands that the appearance recorded by him was in the nature of a vision—in other words, a purely subjective experience. It is not even clear that he heard the words supposed to have been addressed to him by Jesus, for we must put on one side the

accounts recorded in the Acts, which are so contradictory that no reliance can be placed upon them. And it is well known that Paul uses the same Greek word to describe both the appearance to himself and the appearances to the original disciples, thereby implying the possibility that the latter also were of a subjective or visionary character.

THE GOSPELS.

The article on the *Gospels* by Dr. E. A. Abbott and Professor Schmiedel is crammed with criticism of a kind most damaging to every form of the orthodox faith. The view hitherto current, that the four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and appeared thirty or forty years after the death of Jesus, can, it is stated, no longer be maintained. In a matter of this sort, where the whole of the material is not merely scanty, but deeply tinged with superstition, criticism is compelled to be mainly of a negative character, and modern research, far from clearing up the admitted difficulties, has only brought them into greater prominence, and removed their solution to an immeasurable distance. The idea that we are at liberty to treat as true everything in the Gospels which cannot be proved false is wholly fallacious. Some of their statements of fact are quite erroneous, and the data often in direct contradiction to one another. The element of miracle cannot fail to give rise to doubts, and the evangelists made it clear that they wrote with a lack of concern for historical precision, while the chronological framework of the Gospels must be classed among their most untrustworthy features. Several of the reported sayings of Jesus clearly bear the impress of a time which he did not live to see; in plain English, they were put into his mouth by later writers. All the Gospels are marked by "tendencies"—that is, they reveal traces of the special purpose for which they were compiled; each Evangelist is influenced by, and seeks to serve, an apologetic interest.

It need hardly be said that, if these general conclusions can be supported by a reasonable amount of evidence (and it is not to be supposed that Christian scholars would recklessly proclaim them), they entirely do away with the idea that the Gospels are credible and trustworthy narratives.

A few brief references to details will serve to illustrate the main conclusions of this article.

With regard to the Virgin Birth, it is pointed out that, in the school of thought of which Philo was the head, there were traditions that every child of promise was born of a virgin. The genealogies were written first, and implicitly deny the miraculous conception which the Gospels themselves affirm. The alleged eclipse of the sun at the Crucifixion is impossible. One of the orthodox shifts respecting this phenomenon is

that it was an eclipse of the moon! Matthew's statement as to the empty sepulchre must be rejected as a later innovation, while his account of a watch being placed over the tomb was inserted merely to exclude the charge that the body had been removed. The saying of Jesus in Matthew xvi. 11 as to spiritual bread is unaccountable if the previous miracles of feeding the multitudes had been actual occurrences. The only sense in which the words could have been understood at the time was that of the material bread which had been provided. The deduction, therefore, is that the feeding of the four or five thousand was a parable which had been misunderstood. Only if the term "bread" represents spiritual truth (and Jesus actually employed the word in this sense) can we understand more being left over than was originally used, since truth is not consumed by being made known. Both Matthew and Mark, in fact, seem to have read into the utterances of Jesus details borrowed from subsequent facts or controversies.

The third Gospel is also untrustworthy, its historical value being lowered by evidence of the writer's errors and misunderstandings. It is the most beautiful and picturesque of the four, but in point of bald fact probably the least authoritative. It has been widely assumed that it was written by the physician Luke, and that Luke was a companion of Paul. This view of its Pauline character, however, can now be maintained only in a very limited sense. It is clear that the third Gospel and the Acts are by the same author, but that author was not Luke. The silence of Papias, who lived at the end of the first century, with regard to the third and fourth Gospels, implies that either he did not know them at all, or that he did not regard them as of equal authority with Matthew and Mark.

In the fourth Gospel we find more ambiguities than in all the other three together. The story of the raising of Lazarus cannot be admitted as historical; it is not a pure myth, but a poetic development, an allegory intended to illustrate man's conversion from spiritual death to spiritual life. An incident is referred to of a youth who was converted by one of the Apostles, and thereafter regarded as a "trophy of the resurrection." In an age which appears to have been very prone to misunderstand metaphor and to materialise inner experiences, it is more than probable that expressions indicating spiritual death were assumed to imply physical death, and the growth of new feelings to imply a return to material life. We may reasonably suspect that this peculiarity influenced the belief in the resurrection of Jesus himself.

It is important to note that Justin Martyr, who lived about the middle of the second century, and was the most famous Christian writer of that time, makes no clear reference to the fourth Gospel, though it would have added great weight to his arguments if he could

have quoted it as a genuine apostolic writing. Up to the time of Justin there is nothing to prove, or even to suggest, that the fourth Gospel was recognised in this sense by the early Church, and Justin markedly abstains from employing it as an authority. This is unaccountable if it was then in existence and believed to be the work of an Apostle. The allusions which Justin is supposed to have made to it are really references to the Old Testament, the Gospel of Barnabas, or the general Christian tradition. We are plainly warned that "it is vain to look to the Church fathers for trustworthy information on the subject of the origin of the Gospels."

The imperfection of the Gospel accounts is everywhere manifest. An extremely small proportion of the actual words of Jesus can have come down to us. His longest discourse would occupy only about five minutes to deliver, even if uttered as it stands, which is a most unlikely supposition. Even if his ministry lasted only a few months, he must have said a thousand-fold more, and repeated his sayings with many variations. And the text must not be taken as a trustworthy guide to its original meaning. It merely shows us what the Evangelists, or their predecessors, believed it to mean. The situations in which the words of Jesus are said to have been spoken cannot be implicitly accepted. We are left in doubt whether the Lord's Prayer was uttered in response to the request of the disciples or voluntarily to the public in the Sermon on the Mount. The announcement that, whatsoever the disciples should bind or loose, their decision would be ratified could not have been made either to them or to Peter. The Trinitarian formula of baptism put into the mouth of Jesus is of later date, not having come into use till the time of Justin Martyr. If Jesus had enjoined the mission to the Gentiles upon his Apostles, it is simply incredible that they could have hotly disputed with Paul on that very point. The names of the women at the cross, and even the names of the Twelve Apostles, are not given in two places alike. Matthew xxii. 7 clearly pre-supposes the destruction of Jerusalem as already past. The Gospel incidents are often grouped together for purely arbitrary reasons, sometimes even for the sake of a word, such as "salt," "light," "fire," where it is impossible to suppose that Jesus uttered such disconnected sayings together. Sometimes the statements are in direct contradiction, sometimes they are inconsistent, as when we come across a prohibition of making deeds of healing known, though crowds of people are stated to have just been healed. Even the least supernatural of the writers, we are told, is not to be considered as entitled to credibility because he has less of the miraculous element. The Lord's Prayer affords a significant example of the scantiness and incompleteness of the Gospel tradition. It is not found in the second Gospel, which is probably the

oldest, and the others give it in slightly different forms. The narrative of Nicodemus is stamped as unhistorical by the expression attributed to the Jews: "Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." It is impossible that Jews could have used it, as they well knew that several of the prophets were Galileans. Among the few statements that may be accepted with some confidence are those which place the first appearances of the risen Jesus in Galilee, whither the disciples had already fled. But even these indicate the belief that he had appeared there, rather than the fact that he did so appear, and they, of course, conflict with the statement that the first appearances occurred at Jerusalem, where the disciples remained. Considering that it was a duty to bring forward convincing evidence of the resurrection, the inadequacy of the Gospel accounts is the more striking, and it becomes necessary to withhold belief from what the writers actually do say. The account of Jesus having eaten and been touched is incredible. It is suggested that the story of the betrayal by Judas may have been invented to account for the ease with which Jesus was captured, and the ignorance of the real circumstances on the part of his followers.

THE SLENDER BASIS OF FACT.

We thus find that modern criticism decides that no confidence whatever can be placed in the reliability of the Gospels as historical narratives, or in the chronology of the events which they relate. It may even seem to justify a doubt whether any credible elements at all are to be found in them. Yet it is believed that some such credible elements do exist. Five passages prove by their character that Jesus was a real person, and that we have some trustworthy facts about him. These passages are: Matthew xii. 31, Mark x. 17, Mark iii. 21, Mark xiii. 32, and Mark xv. 34, and the corresponding passage in Matthew xxvii. 46, though these last two are not found in Luke. Four other passages have a high degree of probability—viz., Mark viii. 12, Mark vi. 5, Mark viii. 14-21, and Matthew xi. 5, with the corresponding passage in Luke vii. 22. These texts, however, disclose nothing of a preternatural character. They merely prove that in Jesus we have to do with a completely human being, and that the divine is to be sought in him only in the form in which it is capable of being found in all men.

The four Gospels were compiled from earlier materials which have perished, and the dates when they first appeared in their present form are given as follows:—Mark, certainly after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70; Matthew, about 119 A.D.; Luke, between 100 and 110; and John, between 132 and 140. But even if they appeared about A.D. 50, that would not, of course, affect the conclusions of criticism as to their contents.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

The sections of this book in which the narrative is written in the first person plural may (says Professor Schmiedel) be implicitly accepted, but it is equally certain that they are not by the same hand as the rest of the book. The writer purposely wrote as if the whole work was from the pen of an eye-witness, when it was not. Nor can he be absolved from the "tendency" of writing in order to justify to himself and to his time a form of Christianity which was already on the way to Catholicism. This is the only view which reconciles the numerous discrepancies and inaccuracies of the work. Apart from the "we" sections, no statement merits immediate acceptance on the mere ground of its presence in the book. All that contradicts the Pauline Epistles must be absolutely given up, unless the latter are to be regarded as spurious. Positive proofs of the trustworthiness of Acts must be tested with the greatest caution. The speeches are constructed by the author in accordance with his own conceptions. The book does not come from a companion of Paul; its date may be set down as between A.D. 105 and 130.

THE EPISTLES OF PAUL.

The question just alluded to, of the genuineness of the Pauline Epistles, is now far from being so clear as was once universally supposed. Advanced criticism, Professor van Manen tells us in his elaborate article on "Paul," has learned to recognise that none of these Epistles are by him, not even the four generally regarded as unassailable. They are not letters to individuals, but books or pamphlets emanating from a particular school. We know little, in reality, of the facts of Paul's life, or of his death: all is uncertain. The unmistakable traces of late origin indicate that the Epistles probably did not appear till the second century.

MINOR EPISTLES.

The Epistles of *Peter*, *James*, and *Jude* are none of them held to be the work of the Apostles. They probably first saw the light in the second century; the second Epistle of *Peter* may even belong to the latter half of that period. It is well known that they were not received into the Canon without considerable opposition.

THE APOCALYPSE.

The strange book of *Revelation* is not of purely Christian origin. Criticism has clearly shown that it can no longer be regarded as a literary unit, but is an admixture of Jewish with Christian ideas and speculations. Ancient testimony, that of Papias in particular, assumed the Presbyter John, and not the Apostle, as its author or redactor.

DOCTRINAL CHRISTIANITY ABANDONED.

All the above conclusions are summarised, as nearly as may be, in the words of the authors of the respective articles. Their significance is surely enormous. Right or wrong, eminent Christian scholars here proclaim results in complete antagonism to the ideas usually accepted as forming the true basis of the Christian faith. They amount, in fact, to a complete and unconditional surrender of the whole dogmatic framework which has hitherto been held as divinely revealed, and therefore divinely true.

CHARLES T. GORHAM.*

* Author of "The First Easter Dawn," etc.

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