

616TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING,  
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, ON MONDAY, MARCH 1st, 1920,  
AT 4.30 P.M.

THE CHAIR WAS TAKEN BY THE REV. PREBENDARY  
H. E. FOX, M.A.

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

The HON. SECRETARY announced the following elections:—Mr. Theodore Roberts as a Member, and Mrs. A. H. Husbands, The Rev. Arthur T. Dence, Mr. Smetham Lee, Mr. M. Gutteridge, Mr. Alfred Dixon, Lady Borwick and Mr. Thomas Verrinder as Associates.

The CHAIRMAN then called upon the Rev. Professor A. S. Geden, M.A., D.D., to read his paper.

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*SIMILE AND METAPHOR IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL.*

By the Rev. Professor A. S. GEDEN, M.A., D.D.

IN laying before you a few thoughts on a subject of the very greatest interest and importance, it appears to me to be unnecessary and irrelevant to discuss questions of authorship or integrity or date, and I propose to leave these and similar investigations on one side. They do not, I think, from this point of view, which is not primarily historical but exegetical and doctrinal, affect the argument and interpretation of the text. I shall tacitly take it for granted that with the possibility of slight additions, as ch. xxi. 24 f., the Gospel is the expression of the mind and thought of one author, and that author the Apostle St. John. If anyone dissents from this judgment it does not appear to me that he will or need of necessity reject the reading and suggestions that I venture to offer. These I trust will be taken on their merits, independently of authorship. They would, I think, be equally just if this treatise were traditionally anonymous. I have little personal faith in a shadowy or mythical presbyter John of Ephesus. At the same time, if I may be allowed to say so, I would not be understood to imply or plead ignorance of the difficulties of the view I have expressed. They are sufficiently serious. They appear to me, however, to be very considerably less than on any other hypothesis.

In taking up so wide and comprehensive a subject as that of metaphor in the fourth Gospel, it is not easy to determine the best point at which to begin. Nearly all language is more or less consciously metaphorical, and the thought and speech of the East is steeped in metaphor. The mind of the Oriental, more than in the West, approaches a subject not directly but by the way of comparison and illustration. It would not be too much to say that the most fruitful source of misunderstanding of the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testaments has been the literal interpretation of figurative expression. Our Lord employs the picturesque and figurative speech of His country and time. In the early days of my apprenticeship to Biblical lore it used to be solemnly debated in commentary and sermon whether, when He spoke of the camel passing through the needle's eye in order to describe something absolutely impossible to human skill, He was not really thinking of the side passage in a city gateway through which it was just conceivable that a young or very lean camel might manage to creep! Most if not all of our everyday phrases and expressions are metaphorical in their origin. Outside of the rigorous statements and demonstrations of mathematics no language dispenses with metaphor; and mathematics is the only science which by the very conditions of its existence eschews its use and aid. It cannot indeed be otherwise, since we are surrounded by that which, to use the language of the mystics, "veils its reality." Especially, of course, is it true that only by the way of metaphor can Divine truths be conveyed to the human mind or set forth in human speech. The tongue of man is incompetent to describe or his mind to conceive the reality of God. Strip away the metaphor, and you deprive the words not only of their glow and beauty, but of their very meaning and relevance. The Gospel of St. John is perhaps more full of metaphor, in the stricter sense, than any other part of the New Testament, with the possible exception of the book of Revelation.

It is perhaps right that I should endeavour at the outset to explain the general meaning which I attach to the word "metaphor." I have used it throughout in a somewhat wide and comprehensive sense. The Oxford English Dictionary defines as follows: a metaphor is "a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable; an instance of this, a metaphorical expression." In other words,

a metaphor and a figure are much the same thing as they appear in the garb of spoken or written language. The one is Latin and the other is Greek; but you may call the phrase almost indifferently figurative or metaphorical, and the intention or conception at the back of the mind is practically expressed equally well by either term. To me however "metaphor" appears to be a process almost a habit of thought rather than of speech. Of course the thought, if it is not to be barren and unfruitful, must express itself in language, for its own sake as well as for others. But there are minds that run in metaphorical grooves, as well as those that are painfully exact and literal. The mental attitude is descriptive and picturesque, finds more meaning and pleasure in an appropriate simile than in the most painstaking and exact definition, and sees light and colour everywhere. Thus the mind of the East is pre-eminently at home in metaphor. It is in the realm of figure and metaphor that all mystics more or less consciously live, move, and have their being. I would venture to reiterate and emphasize again that one of the most fruitful causes of misunderstanding of the Old and New Testaments has ever been the reading of metaphor as though it were literal demonstration and phrase, like the clumsy tread of a giant in a fairyland of sunshine and gossamer. Metaphor as I understand it, and certainly as it is used in the Gospels and by our Lord, illustrates and illuminates a truth too profound for literal or precise exhibition in human language. No seer so revels in metaphor and figure of speech, whether reminiscent of his Master or original, as the author of this Gospel.

Against one further or possible misapprehension a *caveat* must be entered. It does not in the least follow that because a treatise or writing is full of metaphor it is therefore less true, if the expression may be allowed, or conveys its teaching with less precision and accuracy. In one sense at least it is more true, if truth admits of degrees, because it transcends the bounds of geometrical and physical description. It is in touch, if again I may make for it a high claim, with greater and Diviner things. No philosopher or theologian can disdain its use. In part at least it unveils the spiritual; and linking it to the earthly interprets each to each. It can do no more. Conformably to the experience of St. Paul (2 Cor. xii. 4) the higher spiritual realities cannot be rendered or expressed in human utterance. They are not however on that account dreams but facts, which

may be partially at least comprehended, but to which no verbal definition or substance can be given.

The fourth Gospel begins with metaphor. The Logos, whether you render the word Reason or Word or Speech, or maintain that it is untranslatable and in its connotation comprehends all these three and more, is not a literal measure or term, like pound or rupee, but is a figure or simile, a title or convenient name, which in limited inadequate fashion sets forth the nature and function of Him Who in the beginning was with God and was God. He is supreme Reason and inspirer of the loftiest speech. But if you pour into the term all that you can conceive of majesty and power you have not equalled the Divine greatness of Him of whom the Apostle thinks and desires to write. "Logos" is a human word, of human coinage and associations, and behind it there is the limited human capacity to understand. It is as though at the very threshold and beginning of his teaching the Apostle declared his purpose to set forth the realities of the Divine life as he conceived or had been taught them in the terms which seemed to him most faithfully to image forth the truth.

*Mutatis mutandis* the same reasoning is valid for the abounding metaphor employed throughout the Gospels, both in the discourses of our Lord, and in the setting of the author's teaching and narrative. It would be tedious, even if it were possible, to enumerate them all. I propose to discuss a few of the more striking or unusual similes that are found in the text, and to suggest or refer to some others, where points of especial interest or importance appear to be involved.

The birth *ἀνωθεν* is a striking instance of a metaphor, which seems to correspond faithfully to the definition of the word above quoted. An adequate rendering of the term is perhaps unattainable. The English Revisers adopt "anew," with a marginal alternative "from above"; and the latter meaning would appear to be distinctly implied in ch. iii. 31, and in St. James' description of the wisdom *ἀνωθεν*. Elsewhere the word is of time, "from the beginning" (Acts xxvi. 5; Gal. iv. 9; Luke i. 3), or of direction in space or place, "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom" (Mark xv. 38; cp. John xix. 23). If it is necessary to select here one or the other rendering, then undoubtedly "from above" corresponds most closely to the Apostle's thought. The conception of a fresh or second birth is subordinate in his mind to that of Divine origin. The former,

however, is certainly not excluded. There is Divine origination and execution superimposed upon the conception of natural or physical entrance into the world. But the very statement of the doctrine reveals the insufficiency of the human analogy or verbal expression. The one fact or experience is in the sphere of the natural, the other in the realm of the spirit. "If I have spoken to you of the earthly things and ye believe not, how will ye believe if I speak to you of the heavenly things?" (v. 12). The comparison or contrast with the earthly birth is appropriate, because the latter marks an initiation, a new development, with wellnigh infinite possibilities before it; like St. Paul's "new creation," *καινή κτίσις* (2 Cor. v. 17); the beginning of a new era, a life that finds itself in a new environment, heir to wider and loftier experiences. The analogy, however, is and necessarily remains imperfect. If the earthly birth admits to a certain extent of description, its methods and laws determined and its processes set forth, it is otherwise with the modes and facts of spiritual life. "The spirit bloweth as it will . . . thou knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth away" (v. 8). The heavenly transcends the earthly, and it is only suggestively and partially set forth in terms of mortality. The symbol is however a faithful reflection as far as it goes, not misleading but insufficient; and is not intended to be urged or emphasized in all its details, as the details of a picture may be expected to correspond with its photograph. Only in its general outline as it were, and the essential points of its representation is the truth to be sought and found.

The three so-called "great words" of St. John's teaching—Light, Life and Love—(*φῶς, ζωή, ἀγάπη*) are all in a more or less degree figurative and suggest or imply a metaphorical content. They are words borrowed from human thought and experience to describe Divine relations and character. For this purpose they are insufficient, as all finite terms are unequal to the exposition of the infinite. They illustrate or illuminate in part; but they cannot attain to adequacy or fullness of definition. This again, let me repeat, does not imply that the characterisation is erroneous, still less misleading. It is true, as far as it goes; and in some instances surely it carries us far. But of necessity it falls short of exact and complete analysis. Human thought is as deficient as human language in any terms that would adequately set forth the superhuman and Divine. God is light and love; but not the physical light and human love which we

know, nor even these raised to their highest power and freed from all the limitations and defects associated with them in our experience, but something greater, beyond the power of imagination to conceive or of language to utter. With the imagery and conception of "life" (xi. 25; xiv. 6; cp. 1 John i. 2) it is natural to compare the living water (*ῥόδωρ ζῶν*, iv. 10), and the bread of life (*ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς*, vi. 35, 48; cp. *ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν*, *ib.* 51). The former might be illustrated by the familiar use of the term "living" of water, to denote fresh or running water as contrasted with stagnant or salt. Perhaps, however, the most highly metaphorical discourse recorded in the Gospel is that on the bread of life, coming down from the heaven (vi. 50 f., 58). Even the disciples, accustomed as they were to Oriental veil and imagery, found it a hard saying (*σκληρὸς ὁ λόγος*, ver. 60), and many retreated from fellowship and company with Jesus. He tells them plainly that His words are not literal, but of spiritual interpretation, they are spirit and life (ver. 63). It is not a question of fleshly eating and drinking, but of the most intimate spiritual communion, which the assimilation within the body of food and drink may illustrate but cannot explain.

In the tenth chapter we have the well-known and important figure of the good shepherd. Here simile approaches parable; and it is indeed not easy in all instances to demarcate a clear line between them. The harrying of the deserted flock, the flight of the hireling shepherd at the apparition of the wolf, the recognition by his own sheep of the true shepherd and their contented following at his call—all these details build up a real picture, as vivid and moving as it is true to life. The freedom of metaphorical speech and teaching is illustrated in vv. 7 ff., where the speaker is now the gate through which the flock pass to safety and pasturage, and now the good shepherd who defends them at the cost of his own life. As so often in the reported discourses of this Gospel, metaphor and interpretation are so nearly intertwined that to separate them in strict logic, as it were, is impracticable. They meet, for example, in ver. 16 in the thought of the other sheep, who are not of this fold. It is one of the rare instances in which the narrator seems to lift his eyes and thought from the Jews, his fellow-countrymen. They shall become one flock (*v.l.*, *γενήσεται*, there shall come into being)—not of course one fold—under the guardianship of one shepherd.

In a real sense the metaphor or parable here culminates not in the unity of the flock, but in the self-sacrifice of the shepherd.

And the writer in his exposition or report lays stress upon the fact that this self-sacrifice is voluntary, and is a motive or ground of the Father's love (vv. 17, 18). Thus again metaphor and interpretation, comparison and the subject compared, meet, and the inadequacy of the simile to the truth which it is designed to set forth becomes apparent. The sheep, the fold, the wolf, the rightful shepherd, all the external features of the simile, belong as it were to the mortal and temporal sphere, in which the life laid down is laid down once and for all. The interpretation transcends this meaning and the earthly sphere. The Good Shepherd abandons His life that He may take it again (ver. 18) and is Himself the one Shepherd of the united flock. For the moment the thought is pursued no further, or at least the reporter has not preserved for us any further continuation of the discourse, or given any clue to the significance of the other parts of the parable. Some of them we interpret without difficulty, or we are more or less familiar with a traditional interpretation. A similar difficulty or reticence meets us in other instances. It is as though it were upon the dominant significance of the voluntary death and renewal of life of the Good Shepherd that it was desired without distraction to concentrate attention; as a skilful painter makes all the details of his picture subservient to the central theme.

A further striking though simpler metaphor, one that has been adopted into popular and ordinary speech, is the sleep of Lazarus (ch. xi. 11). The misunderstanding of the disciples is entirely simple and natural; and Christ at once corrects it. The analogy of course between physical death and the sleep of the body has been recognised by many peoples, and no doubt goes further than a mere superficial resemblance. Christ was not the first to use the analogy, as He has not been the last. In the instance of Lazarus there was a peculiar appropriateness in the phrase, suggesting and doubtless intended to suggest that the interruption to the activity of the bodily faculties and to the expression of the vital powers was only temporary, that these capacities were to be restored, as at the awakening from sleep.

Two of the greater metaphors of the Gospel, as they may be called, claim more than a passing reference. The distinction of greater or less is indeed artificial, and of no practical value or importance. All the likenesses and similes of the evangelistic teaching are instructive, and contribute to our knowledge of the

mind of the Master and of His disciple. Nor is it meant that Christ Himself laid more stress on one than on another. There are some however, which seem to offer a more definite and satisfying insight into spiritual truth and the relations of God to man, while others we think to be more limited in range, and expressive to a less degree, if I may use the term, of the Divine purpose or will. Perhaps judgement in this respect goes entirely astray.

The metaphors indicated, highly charged with spiritual significance and instruction, are those of the harvest in the fourth chapter and the true vine in the fifteenth. The latter is elaborated in greater detail than any other representation or picture in the Gospel. The speaker is Himself the true, the genuine (*ἀληθινή*) vine. His Father is the husbandman; His hearers the branches. And the simile is carried forward, as it were, into the future history and fate of the branches, until it gradually fuses, as so often in the discourses of the fourth Gospel, with the highest ethical and spiritual precept and exhortation. Once more however, the figure must not be pressed unduly in particulars. No analogy goes, as has been said, on all-fours. There is of necessity inequality and divergence in some respects between the simile and the meaning or lesson it is intended to convey. The resemblance is never complete, or equivalent to identity. In the world of nature the branches *are* the vine, and the latter exists only in and through them; they are throughout of the same nature, possessed of the same properties and vitality. While the branches cannot live except in the vine (ver. 6); if they are lopped off, they wither and perish; so on the other hand the vine cannot and does not live except in the branches, and unless it puts forth branches and leaves and fruit, it is at the best dormant and quickly perishes. If that is Christ's meaning, it is pantheism; and some have found pantheism and pantheistic teaching here. Where analogy and metaphor venture farthest into detail, they most clearly reveal their own inadequacy. The spiritual content always exceeds and overflows the limitations of the earthly figure.

The figure of the harvest (*θερισμός*, iv. 35) is so familiar, and has been so fully adopted in secular as well as in sacred literature, and in ordinary thought, that it seems hardly to need comment or illustration. It is more fully elaborated under the form of a parable in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. xiii. 30 ff.; Luke x. 2) and interpreted by Christ Himself; and it reappears in the



Book of the Revelation (xiv. 15 f.). In the brief use which Christ makes of the figure in the fourth Gospel, the literal and the figurative meanings of the word are so closely intertwined that the distinction between them is not perhaps readily or obviously made; and by some commentators curious inferences have even been drawn as to the time of year at which Jesus was speaking. It is in the highest degree improbable that any such thought was present to the mind of the speaker or writer. But though the earthly harvest must await its appropriate season, the sight of the approaching Samaritans, many of whom were ready to believe on Him, suggests that there is no delay to the harvest of the spirit. The fields are already white to harvest. And He commissions His disciples to go forth and reap.

Some of the most striking metaphors or analogies are conveyed in brief allusion or phrase, and they have often become so familiarised by use that their origin in comparison or metaphor has been overlooked, and their force thereby in not a few instances enfeebled. It would not be feasible to enumerate them all. Nor does it lie within the scope of this paper to comment on the relation which these bear to the text or doctrine of other parts of the New Testament. It may be pertinent, however, to indicate the suggestive use which the author of the Book of the Revelation has made of the metaphorical teaching of the Gospel. His thought is saturated with the emblems and figures of the Evangelist, and he works these up into the richly-coloured paintings of the Seer. There is here, I believe, a fruitful and almost unworked field of research into the relation of the two books, which has no little value for the exposition and significance of each.

In some instances emphasis is given to the speaker's words by reminiscence of Old Testament history and teaching, or by the circumstances in which they were uttered. A well-known example of the latter is ch. viii. 12, "I am the light of the world," spoken or supposed to be spoken at the hour when the Temple and its courts were ablaze with lights, and the contrast therefore is made more striking between the earthly illumination which would so soon burn dim and disappear and the abiding light of His presence. The bread of God (*ὁ ἄρτος τοῦ Θεοῦ*, vi. 33), and the food that endureth unto eternal life (*ἡ βρωσις ἡ μένουσα εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον*, vi. 27) carry with them a figure that would appeal all the more forcibly to the Jews, as they thought of their fathers'

sustenance in the wilderness and the rapidly vanishing manna, which melted away in the morning's sunshine (Ex. xvi. 21). So also the language of the declaration or prophecy of Jesus that lifted up from the earth He would draw all men unto Him (xii. 32) would possibly convey to his hearers a clearer appreciation of their meaning as their thought was carried back to the serpent of brass, at the sight of which the stricken Israelites were healed (cp. iii. 14, "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness"). So again the *Lamb* of God (ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, i. 29) is a fitting emblem or type of the Christ not only or chiefly because of the nature of the symbol chosen, but because of its associations in the mind of every Jew with the atoning sacrifices of the old covenant in the Temple.

There are, further, two occasions at least on which Christ Himself or the Evangelist adds a word of explanation, as though there were danger of the metaphor being misunderstood or misapplied. To us these appear so familiar and easy that we are apt, I think, to underrate the difficulty which they must have presented to those who heard the words for the first time, and to whom this method of conveying instruction was apparently strange. "Destroy this temple" (ii. 19) is Christ's answer to the demand of the Jews for a sign, "and in three days I will raise it." The writer of the Gospel adds the note that He was speaking concerning the temple of His body (ver. 21); that He meant by "this temple" not the pride of the city in marble and stone that cost so many years' labour in building, but His own body, the earthly temple of the Son of God. And the Evangelist significantly adds that after His Resurrection the disciples remembered the saying and their faith in Him and in His word was strengthened (ver. 22)

The other occasion was one of the rare instances in which Christ illustrated and enforced His teaching by symbolic act as well as by figurative speech. He himself explains His action as a *ὑπόδειγμα* (xiii. 15), a pattern or ensample—the only place in which the word occurs in the Gospels—but the *ὑπόδειγμα* conveys and was intended to convey more than lies upon the surface. The writer of this Gospel never records an incident for the purpose merely of narrating historical fact. His interest is in the concealed and spiritual meaning. For the disciples physically to wash one another's feet was no fulfilment of their Master's command. We never read that they so misconstrued His intention and thought. And the literal obedience formally

and at set times rendered by some prelates of the Christian Church was as futile as it was unintelligent. The outward washing is a symbol of that which they especially need, to be clean "every whit" (*καθαρὸς ὅλος*, ver. 10); and in the endeavour to secure this, and in the application of the remedy for uncleanness they are to be ministers and helpers one of another (ver. 15).

Other metaphors of the Gospel are perhaps less easy to classify. Of these one is more or less common to the thought of the whole New Testament, and is familiar especially to St. Paul; another is found only in this Gospel, in the reports of our Lord's teaching, and in the writer's own narrative. Without further comment or explanation the phrase *οἱ νεκροί* (the dead) is used of those spiritually dead equally with those who have physically ceased to live in the flesh. A play upon the contrasted thought or idea has been found in the well-known utterance of Christ recorded in the Synoptists, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Matt. viii. 22; Luke ix. 60), interpreted, and no doubt rightly, to mean that earthly burial may well be cared for by those who are of the earth and have no higher aspirations or pursuits. The claims of the spiritual kingdom of God, its furtherance and proclamation, must override all others. Twice at least in this Gospel, but in the same discourse, Christ employs the word with this higher or metaphorical meaning; I am not sure that He does not read into it both meanings at once, but the spiritual is uppermost in His thought. The Father "giveth life" (*ζωοποιεῖ*, v. 21) to those whom He raiseth from the dead, and so also the Son quickeneth whom He will. That is not physical resurrection or life. The New Testament knows nothing of a re-creation of physical existence. A few moments later in His discourse Christ speaks of the coming hour when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God (ver. 25, cp. 28), and they who have heard (*ἀκούσαντες*) will receive the gift of life. The latter verse perhaps indicates that again the twofold meaning is present in His mind. There will be no tenant left of an earthly tomb. At the summons of His voice they will come forth, and then only will the distinction be drawn between the well-doers and the wicked. The contrasted word *ζωή*, of so frequent recurrence in this Gospel (more than twice as often in St. John than in the three Synoptists together) seems always to connote to the writer the higher life of the spirit.

The Apostle records also with great frequency the use by the Master of another term of wide import in a derived or metaphorical application. He does not appear so to use it himself,

although he reports a similar use at least on the part of others (cp. xii. 19 ; xiv. 22). The world (*ὁ κόσμος*) in St. John's Gospel is not, except in a few instances (*e.g.*, i. 9 f. ; xvi. 28, 33 ; xviii. 36), the mere physical universe, constituted of material substance, but the world of life, as tainted and dominated by moral evil, from the control of which He has entered into the world to save it (iii. 17 ; xii. 47). He is thus, while not of this world as they to whom He speaks are (viii. 23), the light of the world (viii. 12). It is this world that knoweth not the Father (xvii. 25), and from the evil of which He prays that His own may be delivered (xvii. 15). This metaphorical meaning of "the world," with all its doctrinal importance and inferences, reappears in the first Epistle of St. John, and is frequently employed by St. Paul ; but it is absent from the Synoptic Gospels, and from the first Epistle of Peter, although it occurs in the second. Nor is it found in the book of the Revelation.

Finally some of the greatest sayings of the Gospel, as reported by the writer, if they are not in the strict sense parable or metaphor, move within the region where suggestive simile and literal expression meet. Of such are words or phrases with a double import or meaning, of which there are many in the Apostle's record, and some of these were misunderstood by the hearers in a way that seems to us strange. The bread from heaven (vi. 33, 58), and the eating of the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking His blood (ver. 53) are examples. "Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find ; and where I am, ye cannot come" (vii. 34 ; cp. xiii. 33) ; "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (xiii. 9) ; "if a man keep My word, he shall never see death" (viii. 51), with many others, are instances in which the more profound significance of the Speaker's words failed to reach the thought and understanding of at least the more loud-voiced and forward part of his audience.

A last example to which I would refer is that in which the utterance of spiritual truth seems to enter into nearest contact with human prejudice and passion. Christ has been declaring the conditions of eternal life, and meeting the controversial charges which the Jews preferred against Him. Finally, as they are still uncertain and perplexed by his declaration of Abraham's vision of His day and gladness thereat (viii. 56), which they interpret of bodily sight (ver. 57), He formulates His own claims and asserts His own Divine prerogative and being : "Before Abraham came to be I am" (viii. 58, *πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ*

γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμι). The last phrase has been supposed to have carried with it to a Jew the connotation of the Divine ineffable Name. In their ears it was the assertion by a man of equality or identity with God. There was no further parley or misunderstanding. It was for unforgiveable blasphemy that they took up stones to stone Him.

That the writer of the Gospel is a mystic is therefore abundantly evident, and his place is among the greatest and most spiritually minded mystics of any age or country. No one, I venture to think, who is out of sympathy with mystical thought and aspiration can appreciate his Gospel. It is not the exposition of a doctrinal system, still less the formulating of dogma or of a canon or rule of instruction. It is the search of a soul for truth and for God under the guidance of the Master whom he revered. The traditional portraits of St. John the Apostle attest the character of the mystic. As you look upon the painting you feel that if that man wrote a Gospel it would be such a one as we possess; not set in the hard and fast lines of literal speech or of necessary chronological succession, but instinct with life and light and love, with loyalty to the highest truth expressed, and as it were personified in the Christ; subordinating the letter to the spirit, with an intensity of longing and aspiration that only the Divine can satisfy. Such, if I am not mistaken, is the fourth Gospel, the Gospel according to St. John.

#### DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Prebendary H. E. Fox) thanked Professor Geden for the paper, which admirably combined scholarly skill with spiritual sense.

Lt.-Col. MACKINLAY said: The Professor's paper is very attractive, and expressed in beautiful diction.

Sir Isaac Newton made a true and shrewd observation when he remarked that, following the custom of the prophets of old, our Lord and His forerunner, John, very frequently referred to things actually present in their parabolic discourses.

Our author on p. 107 thinks that our Lord followed this rule when He called Himself the Light of the World because there were brilliant lights before Him at the time, at the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem; but on the same page it is difficult to understand

why the Professor thinks that this rule was *not* followed when our Lord uttered His words about the harvest. Nothing in the context contradicts the supposition that it was then summer time.

A very interesting simile is contained in the seventh verse of the first chapter of this Gospel, in which John the Baptist is compared to the morning star and our Lord to the sun. As the planet heralds the coming of the sun, so did the Baptist herald the coming of our Lord. This simile is frequently made in Scripture (Mal. iii. 1 ; iv. 2 ; Luke i. 76, 78 ; Matt. xi. 10 ; John iii. 28, 30 ; etc.). It has been recognised by Dr. F. B. Meyer,\* and probably by others, for Dryden† used this figure when he wrote of the Duke of Monmouth, "Fame runs before him, as the Morning Star."

This raises an interesting point. There are some eighty mentions of John the Baptist in the Gospels, during and just before our Lord's ministry. Many of these references are contained in parallel passages in different Gospels, and in some instances the Baptist's name is repeated several times during one discourse. The various occasions of references to him may therefore be reduced to a very much smaller number of groups. In each group approbation or rejection is expressed. According to Sir Isaac Newton's observations, we may expect to find that the morning star was actually shining on the days when approbation was expressed, and not shining when He was rejected. This is found to be actually the case, if the generally accepted date, A.D. 29, is taken for the Crucifixion at the end of a ministry of three years and a half.

The periods of shining of the morning star in the first century are well known from ordinary astronomical calculations, and a reliable chronology of the ministry has now been found. We have not space to prove this here, but it is mentioned as an example of the unlooked-for results to which Scriptural simile and metaphor may conduct us.

There seem to be examples in this Gospel of what may be called double similes ; for instance, our Lord spoke of the Baptist as "the lamp that burneth and shineth" (John v. 35, R.V.). A lamp is a very appropriate simile for the morning star, as everyone who has watched its rising in the darkness of the night must allow.

Our Lord made use of the second part of the same simile when

\* *John the Baptist*, pp. 7 and 75.

† *Absalom and Ahitophel*.

He called Himself "the Light of the World" (John viii. 12), for the sun is most certainly the light of the whole earth.

Holman Hunt's picture of the Light of the World, beautiful as it is, entirely misses the point, and the force of this simile, because he represents our Lord provided with a very poor artificial light, reminding us of the words about the burial of Sir John Moore when the lantern was dimly burning—a much lesser light than that at the Feast of Tabernacles, whereas the sun is infinitely greater in brilliance.

Our warm thanks are due to the Professor for his helpful and suggestive paper on this important subject.

The Rev. Dr. J. AGAR BEET said: Dr. Geden was for fourteen years my colleague at the Wesleyan College, Richmond, and throughout that time I found him a fully reliable and very helpful friend. The teaching about Christ in the Fourth Gospel is a definite and most valuable addition to that in the other Gospels. Its immense superiority to everything else in pre-Christian literature, Jewish or Gentile, and its controlling influence on Christian thought in all ages, point to Christ as its only possible ultimate source. If so, it is much more likely that the record is due to the Beloved Disciple, who can be no other than the Apostle John, rather than to some unknown writer whose memory has altogether passed away.

Moreover, Paul's central doctrine (Rom. i. 16) of salvation by faith is clearly implied in John iii. 15-18 and elsewhere, and is thus traced to the lips of Christ. The great words *God is Love*, in 1 John iv. 8, 16, are a definite advance on, yet a fair inference from, all other teaching in the New Testament. In them is revealed the guidance of the Spirit of God.

Lt.-Col. M. A. ALVES said: On p. 100, upper part, the reader has struck at one of the tap-roots of the misunderstanding of the Scriptures, viz., "the literal interpretation of figurative expression." In another part of the paper, on p. 105, *re* Lazarus, he has touched another tap-root, viz., the grammatical interpretation of idiomatic expression.

It is not only in the East, see p. 101, that metaphor is at home. The Red Indians of America dug up the hatchet, or buried it, and smoked the pipe of peace. The loving-cup, the touching of wine-glasses, and the fellowship of the snuff-box, are, or were, well understood amongst ourselves; and it was left to men, who bartered their

natural intelligence for book-learning, to turn a symbol of fellowship into a means of grace.

But is it "mystics" alone, whatever that word may mean, who "more or less consciously live, move, and have their being" "in the realm of figure and metaphor" ?

Nor am I inclined to think that metaphor "illustrates and illuminates a truth too profound for literal or precise exhibition in human language." But I think both metaphor and idiom give an attractiveness to the letter of Scripture, as also of every-day speech, and thus make it far pleasanter to read than it otherwise would be, especially by the unregenerate ; and far less prolix.

Grammarians, whose proper place is the servants' hall, have been put into the drawing-room.

The case of Lazarus (John xi.) and that of Jairus' daughter are very instructive. In the latter case, our Lord would not admit of the word "death" ; in the former, it had to be dragged out of Him, because, as the reader explains, He was about to restore him to life.

I speak with all humility and subject to correction if wrong, but it seems to me that our Lord was not only using the figure of prolepsis or anticipation, but also emphasizing the importance of that figure so common amongst the Hebrews and other ancient nations.

Had our learned theologians understood this figure better, they would not have made death mean a form of life, or a type of it, nor would they have made people dead who had never lived ; for death is the ending of life, not its mere absence. In this connection, I consider (see p. 109) that *οι νεκροί* means doomed to die, not spiritually dead. I think also, in the case of the man who wished to bury his father, that he meant "Let me stay (like Abram) with my father till he dies." Had his father been actually dead, he would have been in the house, arranging the funeral. Our Lord's words might well mean, Let those doomed to die bury their dead—or doomed to die. As in the late war, there was much to do and little time to do it in.

There is another important figure in both Old and New Testaments, whose name I do not know, viz., the word describing the effect is attached to the word describing the cause ; e.g., "eternal redemption" = redemption with eternal results, "eternal destruction" =



destruction with eternal results, and "to a perpetual end" = no more destruction. (See Ps. ix. 6.)

I could say much more on this subject, but time does not permit.

Mr. THEODORE ROBERTS differed from Dr. Geden's statement on p. 104 that the Evangelist rarely went beyond the Jews in his vision and thought, instancing the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, "God so loved the world," and "The Light of the World."

He thought the Lecturer might have said more about the use of water as a figure, pointing out that the authoritative commentary on the blood and water flowing from the side of the dead Saviour in 1 John v. showed that the incident was figurative of the two aspects of the death of Christ, viz., expiatory towards God and of cleansing towards man. The Epistle doubtless referred to the present condition of Resurrection which our Lord had reached through His death. He believed the water in John iii. 5 referred to cleansing and in iv. 14 to satisfying, which are the two main uses we have for water.

Mr. ROUSE said: With most of the utterances of this instructive paper I for one am in hearty sympathy and accord, even where it would supersede our time-honoured translation "born again" by "born from above." And yet I find room for criticism in certain features and phrases of the paper. The closing words hint at a chronological order in John's Gospel, whereas it is the one Gospel by which the length of Christ's ministry is determined, and an opinion expressed on p. 107 would actually sweep aside one of the chief links of that determination. When our Saviour, after His interview with the woman by the well of Sychar, said to His disciples, "Say not ye there are yet four months and then cometh harvest; behold I say unto you, Look upon the fields, for they are white already to the harvest," He was, after His favourite custom, comparing a natural fact with a spiritual one, and in this case drawing a contrast as He had just drawn between material water and spiritual water, and a little later in the record drawn between natural bread and spiritual bread. Then where would have been the contrast, if the natural harvest had not been four months away?

Mr. W. HOSTE, referring to the Professor's quotation of John iii. 12, "If I have spoken to you of the earthly things *and ye believe not*, how will ye believe if I speak to you of the heavenly things?"

questioned whether "the earthly things" could be interpreted as referring to "earthly birth" or the action of the literal "wind." How could it be said that Nicodemus or others "believed not" such things. Nobody then or now throws doubt on "natural birth" or the action of the "wind." What, then, can "earthly things" refer to? Some have suggested that the contrast lies between "the new birth" and the possession of "eternal life"; but this seems even less satisfactory, for how can "new birth"—more properly rendered, as has been pointed out, "birth from above"—be correctly described as an "earthly thing"? Nicodemus and his fellow-countrymen had seen the "powers of the Kingdom," the miracles which Jesus did, but instead of recognising the King, they saw in Him at best "a Teacher come from God" to whom they would have yielded the professor's chair, while refusing him the kingly throne.

This leads our Lord to emphasize the need of "the birth from above" in order to see that which was even then being announced by Himself and John—a literal kingdom for Israel. This kingdom, in its centre and scope, was an "earthly thing." Israel refused their King, and the setting up of this form of the kingdom was necessarily postponed to a future day. But was there then to be no kingdom in the absence of the King? Yes, this is the mystery of the kingdom.

A spiritual kingdom was to be set up in the hearts of His believing people—"righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost." These are, I would submit, the "heavenly things" the Lord referred to, which required even more faith to grasp than the earthly kingdom foretold by the prophets.

Mr. Hoste also asked how Professor Geden intended the phrase on p. 109 to be understood: "The New Testament knows nothing of a re-creation of physical existence." Would not such a phrase, as it stands, seem to deny any literal bodily resurrection? though the words a few lines down, "There will be no tenant left of an earthly tomb," show this is not the Professor's thought.

Dr. A. WITHERS GREEN said: If you look up over the west entrance to St. Paul's Cathedral you will see four groups of figures, one on each side of the north and south bell towers. Beginning from the north you have the Apostle Matthew with a man child, then St. Mark with a lion's head and neck at his side. Passing over the

Apostles Peter, Paul and James, you come to the south tower, where there is St. Luke with an ox, and lastly the Apostle John with an eagle.

I suppose these figures correspond to the man, lion, calf and eagle of Rev. iv. 7, 8, and Ezek. i. 10. I cannot resist adding that St. Peter has by his side the cock that crowed twice, perhaps also pointing to the impetuous, always to the front, somewhat boasting, crowing character of the genuine Apostle.

If parents and teachers would show these details to the children, some interest in Divine realities might be assured, but millions, year in and out, pass St. Paul's Cathedral and do not observe its fascinating imagery.

We know that St. John's Gospel has been called the Evangel of the Glory because the early chapters begin with telling us of heavenly things, and the line of the Shekinah runs on, steadily expanding wider at the closing chapters promising us the eternal dwelling places of the Father's house.

I do not read of any mention of the eagle in St. John's Gospel. His loving disposition might have qualified him more for the symbol of a dove, though naturally as Boanerges he was associated with the eagle's home among the thunder clouds.

In the Old Testament we are told of the eagle's way in the air, its mounting up, its high nest, its great wings, its strength and swiftness. I should like to learn more than the above if possible why the eagle is associated with the writer of the fourth Gospel.

Perhaps it is as writer of the Apocalypse, in which we are told that he saw heavenly visions, which no one else ever knew, like the eagle who sees regions and distances which no other created person or animal can attain unto.

Professor H. LANGHORNE ORCHARD felt sure that the audience would not wish to part from the author before according him a very hearty vote of thanks for his able and interesting paper. It had exemplified Bacon's saying that illustrations are "windows which let in the light," so enabling us to see more clearly. It had brought light and warmth to the consideration of an important subject.

They would, he thought, quite agree with the author (see p. 103, the latter paragraph) that the metaphors brought forward in the fourth Gospel are borrowed from human thought and experience to

illustrate in part (although inadequately) Divine relations and character; and (p. 106) the "spiritual content always exceeds and overflows the limitations of the earthly figure."

The statement (p. 100) that "only by way of metaphor can Divine truths be conveyed to the human mind or set forth in human speech" may be a clerical error. If not, it stands in need of explanation. The first Bible statement, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," is a Divine statement which does not seem metaphorical.

On p. 106 (line 14 from the bottom) it is affirmed that "the vine cannot and does not live except in the branches." Surely there is some "slip" here?

The fact, pointed out in p. 107, that the thought of the writer of the Book of the Revelation is "saturated" with the metaphors of the fourth Gospel, is of great value and should be a strong argument in support of the view that both books are written by John the Apostle.

Our earnest conviction and entire concurrence are with the author when, speaking of the term "Logos" as applied to the Lord Jesus Christ (p. 102), he makes the beautiful remark, "If you pour into the term all that you can conceive of majesty and power, you have not equalled the Divine greatness of Him of whom the Apostle thinks and desires to write."

I ask you to carry the vote of thanks by acclamation.

(This was done.)

Chancellor J. J. LIAS writes as follows:—

Having been lately engaged in a careful study of St. John's First Epistle, may I be forgiven if I venture to make some remarks on to-day's paper?

Page 99.—I *fully* agree with the author's remarks on the works attributed to the Apostle St. John.

Page 100.—I as fully respond to the comments on the absurdity that any Oriental fancied that One so immeasurably great as our Blessed Lord Himself must be regarded as refusing the use of the "picturesque and figurative speech of His country"; I will not add "of His time," for from the time of Moses to the present day the Oriental uses expressions of hyperbole which are universally attributed to men of his race and region.

Pages 101, 102.—I cannot accept the words *metaphorical* and *figurative* as synonyms. A *metaphor* is something taken out of one sphere and transferred to another. A *figure* is a representation in another shape of something *within the same* sphere.

Page 102.—I must think that “born from above” is the proper translation of *ἄνωθεν*.

Page 107.—I must think that *βρῶσις* means the *act of eating*, *βρῶμα* would be *food*.

Page 111.—I cannot accept the statement that St. John is a mystic. Many of my brethren seem to think that anyone who has an inner life is a mystic. I should despair of most Christians were this the fact; but a mystic is one in whom the inner life *takes an abnormal shape*.

I must not be taken as disapproving of the paper because I occasionally criticise it. I think it a very valuable paper indeed.

I should like, in conclusion, to say, and it will, I think, have the support of the writer of the paper, that my study of the First Epistle of the Beloved Apostle has confirmed my belief that the Gospel, the Epistle and the Apocalypse can have but one author. I think but little of the objections raised against this. They are generally very one-sided. Even those of Dionysius of Alexandria, a very weighty, because so early, an authority, seem very external. But the use of such words as “Logos,” *ἡρατυρία* and its compounds, often translated *record* and *bare record* in our version, *ζωή*; *φῶς*; *παράκλητος*; overcometh, St. John strikes the key-note (ch. xvi. 33) with the speech of the Master, “I have overcome the world.” It occurs *six* times in the Epistle and *sixteen* times in the Revelation. Another phrase common to the three is *living waters*, or waters of life. Here again the key-note is in St. John, who repeats his Master’s words. (See ch. iv. 10; also see ch. iii; vii. 30; xix. 34, 35. Cf. 1 John v. 6, 8; Rev. vii. 17; xxi. 6; xxii. 17.) Many other pieces of evidence may fall to the lot of the careful student. They will be the more valuable in that they are *not upon the surface*.

Mr. J. C. Dick, M.A., writes: On p. 99 of Professor Geden’s paper there is a reservation respecting a portion of ch. xxiv of the Gospel. There does not seem to be any reason for the reservation on the ground of either external or internal evidence. As to the former, the fact that the entire Gospel as we now have it, including this portion, is comprised in every manuscript and every version, leaves

no doubt of its genuineness. Internal evidence, though never very conclusive, does not, in the case of this passage, suggest any doubt of its genuineness; the style, in respect both of its qualities and elements, is the same as that of the rest of the Gospel. The purity of the Greek is sustained from beginning to end. But apart from all this a *caveat* ought to be entered against the absurd assumptions of "critics" that an author may not change his style; that diversity of style implies diversity of authorship; and that the critics can partition off the sections and assign them to their imaginary writers. Macaulay wrote history and poetry and delivered speeches, exhibiting great diversity of style, yet no critic has invented three Macaulays. Anyone who treated Ruskin's books as the books of Scripture have been treated could discover by the same methods half a dozen Ruskins. Now the "critics" some years ago had an invitation from Professor Joyce to take up a composition written in collaboration by Besant and Rice, or one by some other joint authors, and assign to each author the portion contributed by him. One would have thought that the "critics" would have welcomed the opportunity of exhibiting their literary acumen and justifying their claims, or of being convicted of arrogant pretension. However, they have as yet confined themselves to the safer course of dissecting the compositions of authors with whom they can no longer be confronted.

Mrs. A. C. BILL writes: I have always felt that the similes and figurative expressions made use of by our Lord were intended to convey lessons of vital import in relation to surrounding circumstances.

The *fields awaiting the reapers* pointed to the necessity for the disbandment of religious organisations which have completed their legitimate period of usefulness, after which the letter and spirit will be found at variance. This was the case with the Jewish Church of that period. The letter of the Levitical code had become a dead letter owing to changed human circumstances. It was the authority of the *organised* Church which caused Jesus to be crucified.

The "*shepherd*" going before *the flock* points clearly to the functions of the true leader in all periods, and teaches that an advanced individual perception of truth added to ripe *experience* (not necessarily old age) are the essential qualifications for the post of authority

in the religious community of Christian denomination. The vital relation of *the one to the many* and the necessity of maintaining the right order of precedence if all are to progress is surely a lesson for the Church in all times.

Mr. C. Fox writes : While in this Vale of Tears we see through a glass darkly—*ex delicta*, owing to our Fall. Even things here we see not as they are and “they are not what they seem.” Moses must “be hid,” even from our eager gaze, and the veil, even over the prosopopœia of his *Mosaic System*, must cover his face, as on Tabor it might shine. Not only is the veil—even like that of all ceremony and type—over it to the incredulous Jew, but, alas ! to hosts of “Christians” hardly less, who would be termed Judaised by Paul. When we see “with open face” we are changed into the Image we see ; not till then.

Thus things as well as personalities Divine have to be shown and given us, and cannot be perceived here *totus, teres atque rotundus*. As in fulness or amount, so too in kind they transcend, and our knowledge is limited by our mind. The spiritual needs spiritual faculties, or cognate, to discern. Hence the prophets were themselves shown and then exhibited symbols, and Hosea said, “I have used similitudes,” and *a fortiori* our Saviour gave us a new natural theology of metaphor, evidently most familiar with and sympathising towards all nature, a prince of poetry and observation, and it is said, even, “Without a parable spake He not unto them.” For, with His unfathomable knowledge, including what was in man, He knew Divine truth could not be presented to or understood by us as it is, and we had to be condescended to in this as in all other respects. The true and more easy apprehension of all of it we here knew of, and would know truly, will doubtless be a chief joy above.

What can be more natural and often more perfect, yet plain, than His parables ? This didactics is almost His *proprium*. It shines in and characterises His short earthly life in our flesh like His amazing shower of dicta and repartee or ever-irrefutable arguments, so that He would be a unique wonder if but a man, and His Divinity is further demonstrated thereby. What a galaxy of similes all relating to one central, divinely simple entity, the seed, is in Matthew xiii.—in His loving, persistent effort to render intelligible the profound mystery with which it was fraught.

With its beauty, the emblematic teaching is inexhaustible as the Divine treasures it is needed to convey to our understanding and the field of nature and of man whence it is drawn. It would have been both interesting and instructive, doubtless, to have shared the privilege of our colleague's exposition, to which (as unable to be present) I feel to add a short comment, as if one had been, on the general theme—and, thus, indirectly on his—for those who are.

John's being excepted from the synoptic Biographies as parabolic, even at all, one concludes is due to the more spiritual Gospel's little needing, or transcending, this mode. But the singular absence of them remarked in the last memoir of our Saviour is not complete, as is said—which, perhaps, the Lecturer may point out—as one may see in the cases of the wind, the living water, and the Vine. Many are hinted and may be here, as the allusion to John the precursor, (? lit.) beautifully, as “the *Lamp* that burneth and shineth,” in which the *Light* was exhibited then only through him and giving him all its glory and good—really expressing, in admirable metaphor, the same as the Evangelist so named, utters at the beginning: John came to *witness unto* that Light, and the true Light now shone—in coming, as the *Word* made *Man*, as *Men's Life* and the *Life* which was *Light* illuminating the world He would save, even in all.

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

I am grateful for the very generous and kindly manner in which the thoughts that I have ventured to lay before you have been received this evening. There is little, I think, that I need add by way of comment or explanation. When I wrote with regard to the metaphor of the harvest, and the improbability that our Lord was counting the months, I did not mean, of course, to deny that the season may have been summer. It is quite likely that it was. It does not seem to me however that the importance of the imminence of the spiritual harvest has anything to do with measurement of weeks or months.

Mr. Hoste raises a difficult question, but I think he misinterprets Christ's meaning. The “earthly things,” which to Nicodemus seem incredible, are all those to which reference has been made, including the spiritual birth. With these Nicodemus as a Jew and “the teacher of Israel” should have been familiar, both in theory



and experience. In His further discourse Christ expounds and elucidates the "heavenly things," of which He declares (iii. 12) that He proposes to speak. They are the *supernatural* motives and purposes and acts of the Divine realm.

Mr. Hoste also refers to the phrase used, "re-creation of physical existence." I was thinking when I wrote of the doctrine of re-incarnation or metempsychosis as understood, for example, in India. Some readers have found this doctrine in the New Testament; and I wished to deny it explicitly of St. John.

The word "metaphor" is used throughout with a wide and liberal connotation. No doubt it would be possible so to contract its meaning as to except much that I have written. Surely however (p. 118) the opening statement of Genesis is one of the greatest and most wonderful metaphors ever conceived or penned. "Metaphor" and truth are not opposed but corroborative, and mutually interpret each the other.

The distinction which the Rev. J. J. Lias draws between *βρῶσις* and *βρῶμα* (p. 119) may be true theoretically, but it is certainly ignored in usage. It is sufficient to refer to the passages in the Gospels in which *βρῶσις* is found. In the Septuagint the words are used to render one and the same Hebrew term, *e.g.*, Gen. i. 29, "To you it shall be for *βρῶσις*," not surely the "act of eating"! (Cp. ver. 30, ii. 9, etc.; Ps. lxxvii. 30; Ezek. xlvi. 12.)