

CHAPTER XVI.

IDENTITY OF THE FOURTH EVANGELIST.

THERE remains still to be considered the identity of the Evangelist, a subject which has come to bulk largely in the criticism of the Fourth Gospel. Just when it seemed as if the Gospel, which had been placed late in the second century by Baur and the Tübingen school, had been restored to the Apostolic age by the efforts of a saner criticism, the doctrine is promulgated that not John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, but John the Presbyter, the disciple of the Lord, is really the author.

Keim, in his 'Jesus of Nazareth,'¹ is the first explicitly to ascribe the traditions concerning John the Apostle to the Presbyter of that name mentioned by Papias. Lützelberger, as early as 1840, had maintained that John the Apostle never set foot in Asia Minor, and consequently could not have written there the Revelation or

¹ l. 211 ff.

the Fourth Gospel or the Epistles. Keim advances upon this, and, denying that the Apostle ever was in Ephesus, makes the Presbyter John of Papias "the veritable hero of Church History in Asia Minor, and the true winner of the fame which has been allowed to gather round the name of the son of Zebedee."¹ He appeals to the absence of any allusion to John in Asia Minor by Ignatius or Polycarp, and declares that Irenæus, partly from misunderstanding and partly from the necessity of having an Apostolic authority to oppose to the progress of Gnosticism, proclaimed John the Apostle of Asia Minor about 190 A.D.

Upon this Professor Harnack in turn improves. He maintains² that those followers of John of Ephesus, who set their seal to the Fourth Gospel as the work of the disciple whom Jesus loved (John xxi. 24), of set purpose started the legend that the author was John, the son of Zebedee. "When the Gospel, after the death of the Presbyter John, began to be circulated, it was at first still well known that it was no literary production of the son of Zebedee. Papias has definitely distinguished between the Presbyter and the Apostle, and has referred to the former the opinions given regarding Matthew and Mark (which have later also been transferred to the Apostle). But already Papias, through the oral

¹ *Canonicity*, p. xlv.

² *Chronologie*, p. 674 ff.

traditions about which he took such pains, stood under the influence of Presbyters, of whom some perhaps purposely set on foot the legend that the Presbyter John was the Apostle."¹ Harnack bravely faces the consequences of this theory, that Polycarp, in those recitals of John's accounts of the Lord's life and discourses which Irenæus and Florinus heard from him, was speaking not of John the Apostle but of John the Presbyter; that the John who had the encounter with Cerinthus was really the Presbyter. It was, on Harnack's theory, not the Apostle that was the teacher of Papias, that was the hero of the story of the young robber told by Clement of Alexandria, that declared love to be all that was needed for the welfare of the Church, and that was the author of the Fourth Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse (for he holds to the unity of the Johannine writings),—the credit of all these was surreptitiously filched from the rightful owner and associated by deliberate fraud with the name of an Apostle, the son of Zebedee. And yet he feels that the process would have been easier if it could be shown that John the Apostle had been, even for a little while, in Ephesus, and thinks it "overwhelmingly probable" that John the son of Zebedee was one of those whom Ignatius had in his eye when he reminds the

¹ *Chronologie*, p. 679.

Ephesians in his letter¹ of the intercourse they had had with Apostles.

We have already² shown good grounds for holding that the Presbyter John of Papias is himself the Apostle, and owes what shadowy importance he had to the mistaken conception of Eusebius. But granting that such a person existed,—a man who filled the place in Ephesus which came to be attributed to John the Apostle, and who was sufficiently gifted to write the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse,—what a marvel his complete disappearance from early Church history, and how rapid the vanishing of all trace of him from the region and the age which he is supposed to have adorned!

One of the most interesting of the numerous variations of the theory maintained by Keim is that of the late Dr Hugo Delff³ of Husum, in Hanover. The disciple whom Jesus loved was not of the number of the Twelve,—not a fisherman of Galilee, but a member of the aristocracy of Jerusalem,—not only acquainted with the high priest, but even connected with one of the high priestly families. He found his way to Asia Minor and Ephesus, and is the John whom the

¹ See p. 274.

² See pp. 190-200.

³ *Geschichte des Rabbi Jesus von Nazareth; Das vierte Evangelium.* His views are criticised in detail in Zahn's Introduction (Eng. trans., iii. 227, 230 ff.)

Church in Asia honoured and revered. He is the Presbyter John of Papias, the author of the Fourth Gospel, and the John mentioned by Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus about 190 A.D., as having worn the high priest's frontlet of gold. Although this view plausibly gathers up points in the testimony of the Fourth Gospel and points in the patristic testimony to our Evangelist, it can only subsist by doing violence to the whole of the early Christian tradition. This John of Jerusalem, who stood outside the number of the Twelve, and who in course of time appears as the Presbyter of Papias, can only be made to displace John the son of Zebedee by the most violent treatment alike of the Gospels and of the testimony of the Fathers.

There is one point in the external evidence which has not yet been noticed, and which finds an important place in the theory of Delff and others. This is the testimony of what is now known as De Boor's Fragment,¹—almost the only one of the discoveries of recent years which has not gone to confirm the traditional view of the Gospel history,—in which it is said that “John the Divine (*ὁ θεολόγος*) and James his brother had been slain (*ἀνυρέθησαν*) by the Jews.” This statement comes from an Oxford manuscript of

¹ Texte u. Untersuchungen (v. 2, p. 170). Cf. Funk, *Patres Apostolici*, p. 366.

the seventh or eighth century, and may be an epitome of what is said in his Chronicle by Philip of Side. It has been seized upon with avidity, and has become an important buttress to the view that John the Apostle never was in Asia, and could not have been the author of the Fourth Gospel. The statement is not without some corroboration. A manuscript of the ninth century, containing the Chronicle of Georgius Hamartolus,¹ after telling how Nerva had recalled John the Apostle and Evangelist from his exile on Patmos and given him permission to live the rest of his days in Ephesus till he "was counted worthy of martyrdom," goes on to say that Papias, who had seen the Apostle "with his own eyes" (*αὐτόπτης*), declares, in the second book of his 'Expositions,' that he was put to death (*ἀνῆρέθη*) by the Jews. The Chronicle adds that by this martyr death John, with his brother, fulfilled the prediction of Christ that they should drink of His cup and be baptised with His baptism (Mark x. 38, 39). Upon this prediction of Christ and its presumed fulfilment in the death of both the sons of Zebedee at the hands of the Jews, as vouched for by Papias, Dr E. Schwartz, the learned editor of the Berlin Eusebius, bases a thesis,²

¹ See Funk, *Patres Apostolici*, p. 368.

² *Über den Tod der Söhne Zebedæi.*

the object of which is to prove that the entire tradition concerning the long-lived Apostle John of Ephesus is a myth. He holds that the words of Christ as recorded by St Mark predict the simultaneous martyrdom of both Apostles, or, rather, that on the basis of that fact the prophecy was invented. Upon his view that the deaths both took place together in 44 A.D. (Acts xii. 2), there could be no residence of the Apostle in Ephesus and no authorship by him of Gospel or Apocalypse.

Arguments based upon testimony so precarious and so largely hypothetical might well be met with a blank refusal to entertain them. The following considerations will serve to show what a slender basis the huge fabric of speculation reared by this recent negative criticism has to rest upon.

1. The statement purporting to come from Georgius Hamartolus (850 A.D.) is given on the authority of a single transcriber of his 'Chronicle,' all the other known manuscripts—of which his most recent editor¹ has described twenty-six—being without it. It may represent an extract in some collection of passages, and, at any rate, even though it gives chapter and verse of the 'Expositions' of Papias, does not

¹ Muralt, St Petersburg, 1859, p. xvii. See Zalin, *Forschungen*, vi. 147 ff.

represent the work of Georgius himself. That the statement of the De Boor Fragment cannot be a direct quotation is equally certain, because Papias could not have written of John under the designation of "the Divine," an epithet which did not attach itself to the Apostle till the fourth century. Testimony which comes to us from documents so late as the ninth and tenth centuries, and which may have come through several hands before it was taken from its ultimate authority, Papias, is not to be entertained; and, when it does violence in its main statement to all other known tradition on the subject, can only be regarded as essentially erroneous. That such feeble support to their theories has been seized upon so eagerly by the advanced critics shows how slender a foundation they have in the early literature and history for their fantastic theories.

2. The two authorities thus relied upon are by no means in accord in what they tell us regarding John. The De Boor Fragment can by itself be interpreted to mean that James and John died together at the hands of the Jews at Jerusalem, and is so interpreted by Schwartz, even though such an interpretation does violence to the Apostolic history in the Acts and the Epistles. The excerpt of Georgius implies that John had lived in Asia and was known to Papias,

and the context tells of his residence in Ephesus as the last survivor of the followers of the Lord. How the blunder arose we may not be able to say. Lightfoot¹ has surmised that a line has been left out by the transcriber of the excerpt from Georgius, and Zahn favours the view that John the Baptist has been confused with John the Apostle. The likelihood of such error and confusion on the part of transcribers of the fifth or ninth centuries is vastly more credible than that the Churches and Christians of Asia Minor in the second century were ignorant of the fact, known to Papias alone, that John, who leaned upon the Master's breast at Supper and was so prominent among the Twelve, perished in the persecution of Herod Agrippa, and never had the career Christian antiquity has been wont to assign to him at all. If Papias had really written the words which are attributed to him, why, as Professor Zahn² asks, did people vex themselves for centuries about the fulfilment of the prediction of the Lord (Mark x. 28), and already in the second century invent the legends of the poisoned cup and the boiling oil in order to show how the prediction was fulfilled in the case of St John? And why did Eusebius leave a passage unnoticed which would have served so

¹ *Essays on Supernatural Religion*, p. 212.

² *Forschungen*, vi, 150.

well as a weapon against the Apostolic character of the author of the Apocalypse and the teacher of Papias, if Papias himself had furnished him with it?

3. If there had been an early mistake as to the identity of the Evangelist, or if the Church had purposely transferred from the rightful owner to John the Apostle the traditions which have been for so long associated with his name, it is remarkable that so many early writers had been involved in the transference, independently and in different generations. Justin Martyr,¹ in the middle of the second century, speaks of a man named John, the Apostle of the Lord, as the author of the Apocalypse,—a reference carrying the Asiatic residence of St John along with it. Irenæus testifies that John the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon His breast, himself too published the Gospel while he was living at Ephesus, in Asia. Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, 190 A.D., writing² to Victor and the Church of Rome on the Paschal controversy, appeals to the example of the Apostles John and Philip, and to the uniform practice established by them in Asia in support of the day for the celebration of the Christian passover as the fourteenth of Nisan, whatever the day of the week, instead of the Friday customary in Rome. He classes John,

¹ Dial., c. 81.

² Euseb. H. E., V. 24.

to whom he appeals, with Philip, and calls him "a witness and a teacher who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord." Clement of Alexandria, who lived till 212 A.D., and who had for one of his teachers a certain Ionian with special knowledge of Asia, tells the story of John and the young robber¹ without the slightest doubt that it was the Apostle who was concerned. Tertullian of Carthage, in North Africa, speaking² of the Apostolical succession in the Churches of Christendom, refers to the Church of the Smyrnæans as relating that Polycarp was appointed their bishop by John, and takes for granted that this was the Apostle. That all these authorities, having independent sources of information and being well versed in the history of the times, could have been mistaken, or could have conspired in the publication of a falsehood, is incredible.

4. The identity of the Evangelist, the *ἐπιστήθιος* of Irenæus, the teacher of Polycarp, with the son of Zebedee, the son of Thunder, the Apostle of the Lord, is established by many infallible proofs. That he was associated with St Peter in the events succeeding Pentecost, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and that he was present with St Peter and St James, the Lord's brother, at the Apostolic Council at

¹ Euseb., III. 23.

² De Præscript. Hæret., 32.

Jerusalem, 51 or 52 A.D., some years after James his brother had been slain by Herod, as St Paul testifies (Gal. ii. 9), is part of unquestionable Apostolic history.¹ That he left Jerusalem some years later, and with others of the Apostles and disciples of Christ settled in Asia and became head of the Church of Ephesus, is a tradition of the early Church which was never questioned till the nineteenth century. That he was banished to Patmos in the reign of Domitian, and there saw the visions of the Revelation which he has put on record; that on his return to Ephesus on the death of the tyrant, he lived there, teaching and guiding the fortunes of the Church in Asia until the reign of Trajan, is testified by authorities who could scarcely be mistaken. That he wrote his Gospel and Epistles towards the close of his long life has been shown to be supported by a great mass of credible evidence. In the controversy regarding the celebration of Easter, which arose about 160-170 A.D., one of the parties appealed to his practice in Asia, as one who had been intimately associated with

¹ Dr Schwartz holds that the author of Acts, "for the sake of the later tradition," omitted the name of John in telling of the death of James in Acts xii. 2, and that the John mentioned by St Paul in Gal. ii. 9 is John Mark of the Acts, whom the author of that book mistook altogether, and who is not the Mark of St Paul's Epistles. To such mutilation of the Apostolic history he is driven in the attempt to make good an impossible case.

the Lord, and had partaken of the Last Supper with the rest of the Twelve. Montanism, which originated in Phrygia about 156 A.D., based itself upon the doctrine of the Paraclete set forth in the Gospel according to John. The story of the flight of John¹ from the bath, in which he found the heretic Cerinthus, "the enemy of the truth," is in keeping with what is recorded of the son of Thunder in the Gospels; and there is much in the Epistles and Revelation of St John to recall the disciple who (with his brother James) wished to call down fire from heaven upon the inhospitable Samaritans. With the phantom Presbyter John eliminated from the sub-Apostolic history on the one hand, and the erroneous assertion of the death of St John by the Jews cleared out of the way on the other, the ancient tradition of the residence of St John in Ephesus must stand, and the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel is established.

Into the differences between St John's Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels, raising suspicion as to the credibility of the former, and into other difficulties arising from the peculiarities of the Fourth Gospel, we cannot enter here. We believe there is no need to come past St John himself to a school of disciples who preserved and set forth his recollections. It was possible for the Apostle to have

¹ Euseb. H. E., IV. 14. 6.

retained by dint of a well-trained memory and by constant repetition, even to extreme old age, his own recollections of his Master; and it is just a question how far those discourses which he puts into his Master's lips have taken their special mould and colour from the Apostle himself. In affirming the possibility that the former fisherman of Bethsaida might have been able at the close of his long life to produce a work like the Fourth Gospel, we take account not only of the natural gifts and the spiritual susceptibilities which made him "the disciple whom Jesus loved," but also of the training he had enjoyed during those three years in the company of Jesus, of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, who was promised to bring all things to the remembrance of the disciples, and of the tendencies of thought and speculation with which he was familiar at Ephesus in the closing decades of the first century. That the Apostle's own spiritual experience and his own intellectual affinities should have dwelt upon certain aspects of his Master's teaching, and should have cast them in the mould in which we have them in the Fourth Gospel, is surely in the highest degree probable. It is in this direction that we are to seek the explanation of the differences in the substance and presentation of our Lord's discourses in St John and the Synoptics respectively. This is the view taken by many scholars who maintain

the Johannine authorship. Luthardt¹ has said: "When Hilgenfeld thinks that the historical is sunk in the doctrinal, we can readily own it, rightly understood. What they call doctrinal is just the soul of the history, which shines out everywhere from the body of the history. It is true that this is not possible without a certain freedom in the handling of the historical materials, and indeed a greater freedom than we permit to ourselves and to others. But in antiquity in general, and on Biblical ground in particular, they stood towards the historical material in a manner different from ours." This is perhaps the utmost latitude which a defender of the genuineness of the Gospel permits himself, and it is the position of scholars whose theological position is much more advanced than Luthardt's. The late Dr P. J. Gloag² has no hesitation in allowing a certain degree of subjectivity on the part of John. The thoughts and sentiments were those of Jesus, but "John clothed them in his own language, and in some cases subjoins to those discourses of Jesus his own reflections. Probably, also, he unites into one discourse utterances of Jesus spoken at different times."

We have thus traced the Fourth Gospel up to the threshold of the Apostolic age, and we have

¹ St John, the Author of the Fourth Gospel, p. 247.

² Introduction to the Johannine Writings, pp. 146, 147.

seen that modern attempts to rob the Apostle John of its authorship have not proved successful. When we turn to the Gospel itself, despite acknowledged difficulties in the internal evidence, we find proofs which satisfied scholars like Westcott and Lightfoot and Luthardt of a former generation, and scholars like Professor Sanday, Principal Drummond, and Professor Zahn, still spared to us, that the external and the internal evidence converge upon John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, as the author.