

CHAPTER IV

THE JOHANNINE WRITINGS

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO S. JOHN

THERE are five books in the New Testament attributed to the Apostle John, namely, the Fourth Gospel, the three Epistles which bear his name, and the book of "The Revelation." Of these the Gospel is the most important; in the general estimation it is the most precious of all the books in the New Testament. Augustine said long ago: "John, the apostle, not unworthily compared to the eagle in respect of spiritual intelligence, hath taken a higher flight and soared in his preaching much more sublimely than the other three, and in the lifting up thereof would have our hearts lifted up too." Luther pronounced it "the one tender right chief Gospel and infinitely preferable to the other three." The late Dr. Dale has told how it went right to the heart of a Japanese reader: "The vision which

came to him while reading John's account of our Lord's life and teaching was a vision from another and diviner world; he fell at the feet of Christ exclaiming, 'My Lord and my God.'" A modern German critic says: "Who would not confess that in his sweet, unearthly picture this evangelist has given us the true religious import of the sacred life?"

The writer last quoted does not believe the book to have been written by John and cannot accept it as historical. He is one of many critics who hold that the value of the book is independent of its authorship and of the historical truth of its contents. This might be a tenable position if the Gospel made no claim to be historical and merely presented us with an ideal picture. But it is different when the writer expressly claims to have been an eye-witness of the ministry of Jesus. He says: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth" (1st). In the beginning of the First Epistle (which is generally admitted to be from the same pen as the Gospel) he says: "That which was from the beginning, that which we

have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also." In harmony with this is the statement in the last chapter of the Gospel, whether written by the Apostle or, as seems more probable, added by others: "This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true" (21²⁴). The context shows that the disciple here referred to is "the disciple whom Jesus loved," who appears in the Gospel under this name on four occasions—at the last supper, at the cross, at the empty tomb, and on the beach of the Sea of Galilee, when he was the first of a company of seven disciples to recognize the risen Lord (13²³; 19^{26 f.}; 20¹⁻¹⁰; 21⁷⁻²³).¹ The claims thus definitely made leave no room for a theory

¹ 19³⁵ also implies that the testimony in question was given by an eye-witness, but whether it is the writer that is referred to is open to question.

of pseudonymous authorship, in the sense of an innocent assumption of a great historic name. For the book is largely a narrative, and the assertion that the author speaks from personal knowledge is of vital importance, and could not have been made with a good conscience unless it had been well founded. The question of authorship, therefore, is of the greatest importance, and all the evidence on the subject ought to be carefully considered.

The first writer, so far as is known to us, who definitely quotes from this Gospel as the work of "John," is Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, who had been brought up as a pagan but was converted through the study of the Bible. In a defence of Christianity addressed to a pagan friend, Autolytus, about A.D. 180, he says: "The Holy Scriptures teach us, and all the inspired writers, one of whom, John, says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." In the "Muratorian Fragment," a little earlier, the Gospel is assigned to John, "a disciple of the Lord," and the following account of its origin is given: "At the entreaties of his fellow-disciples and his bishops, John said: Fast with me for three

days from this time, and whatsoever shall be revealed to each of us (whether it be favourable to my writing or not) let us relate it to one another. On the same night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John should relate all things in his own name, aided by the revision of all. . . . What wonder is it then that John so constantly brings forward Gospel phrases even in his epistles, saying in his own person, What we have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and our hands have handled, these things have we written? For so he professes that he was not only an eye-witness, but also a hearer, and moreover a historian of all the wonderful works of the Lord."

We have a most important witness in Irenæus, Bishop of Vienne and Lyons in Gaul, who was born and brought up in Asia Minor and had for his predecessor a man named Pothinus, who died as a martyr about A.D. 177, when he was ninety years of age. Irenæus had not the shadow of a doubt that the Fourth Gospel was the work of the Apostle John—regarding which, as he says, "all the disciples associated with John, the disciple of the Lord

in Asia, bear witness"; and he tells how John lived in Ephesus till the time of Trajan. What makes the evidence of Irenæus particularly valuable is the fact that in his youth he had been brought into close personal contact with Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, who was for about forty years Bishop of Smyrna (a few miles distant from Ephesus), and suffered martyrdom in his eighty-sixth year, about A.D. 155.

We have an interesting addition to this statement of Irenæus, in a reference by Tertullian of Carthage, a few years later, to the claim made by the Church at Smyrna that Polycarp had been appointed as their bishop by the Apostle John. Elsewhere Tertullian says: "John and Matthew form the faith within us: among the companions of the Apostles Luke and Mark renovate it." Another important witness of about the same time is Clement of Alexandria, a man of very wide reading and great scholarship. In a short treatise of his that has come down to us, entitled, "Who is the rich man that shall be saved?" he mentions that "after the tyrant's death John returned from the isle of Patmos to Ephesus." In

Eusebius's "Church History" we find a reproduction of a passage in a lost work of Clement's called "Outlines," giving an account of the traditions of the Elders regarding the order in which the four Gospels were written. This is what is said about the Fourth Gospel: "John, perceiving that what had reference to the body was clearly set forth in the other Gospels, and being encouraged by his familiar friends, and urged by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel."

The Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel and its singular worth were attested no less strongly by Origen, Clement's famous successor at Alexandria, who says: "We make bold to say that of all the Scriptures the Gospels are the firstfruits; and the firstfruits of the Gospels is that according to John, the meaning whereof none can apprehend who has not leaned upon the breast of Jesus, or received, at the hands of Jesus, Mary to be his mother too."

Eusebius represents the general tradition on the subject when he says: "The three Gospels previously written having come into general circulation and also having been handed to

John, they say that he admitted them, giving his testimony to their truth ; but alleging that there was wanting in the narration the account of the things done by Christ at the commencement of His ministry. And this was the truth ; for it is evident that the other three evangelists only wrote the deeds of our Lord for one year after the imprisonment of John the Baptist, and intimated this in the very beginning of their history. . . . One who understands this can no longer think that the Gospels are at variance with one another, inasmuch as the Gospel according to John contains the first acts of Christ, while the others give an account of the latter part of his life."

There is only one discordant note in the testimony of the early Church on this subject. It appears from statements made by Hippolytus in his "Refutation of all Heresies," and by Epiphanius, a writer in the fourth century, that in the latter part of the second century there were some people who rejected the Fourth Gospel, alleging that it was the work of a Gnostic, Cerinthus, although, strange to say, Irenæus tells us that it was the very object of the Gospel to refute the errors of this

Cerinthus, a purpose which it was well fitted to serve by the emphasis which it laid on the reality of the Incarnation. Epiphanius calls these rejectors of the Gospel *Alogi*, that is, deniers of the "Logos" or Word (the title given to Christ in the prologue), though perhaps he also meant the expression to be taken in another sense, as a name for people devoid of reason,—the same word in the singular neuter being applied, in modern Greek, to a beast of burden.

In opposition to the notion entertained by this obscure sect, of whom only one supporter can be named with any degree of probability, namely, Caius of Rome, we have to consider not only the weighty consensus of opinion above mentioned, but also evidence derived from still earlier writers, who appear to have been acquainted with the contents of the book. We find echoes of it in the writings of Ignatius, who seems to have known it almost by heart, and also, to some extent, in the "Didaché." It was used by several Gnostic writers who are quoted by Hippolytus and Irenæus, namely, Basilides (A.D. 125), Valentinus (145), and his friend and disciple Heracleon, who wrote a

commentary on it, from which it would appear to have already held an assured position in the Church. Eusebius tells us that Papias (c. 135), Bishop of Hierapolis, about eighty miles from Ephesus, quoted from the First Epistle of John as authoritative, which Polycarp also did. Justin Martyr (c. 155) appears in a number of passages to use language derived from this Gospel, and Tatian (c. 170) began his "Diatessaron," or Harmony of the Four Gospels, with its opening verse and drew largely from its contents. In the "Clementine Homilies," which are usually assigned to the latter part of the second century, Lagarde found fifteen quotations from this Gospel; and, according to Rendel Harris, the lately recovered "Gospel of Peter," which may also be dated in the second century, shows a considerable acquaintance with it. The testimony in its favour thus reaches back to the beginning of the second century, and it is therefore not surprising to find that in the fourth century it was included by Eusebius in the list of writings universally acknowledged to be canonical.

One of the first to question the authority of the book was the clergyman of the Church of

England already referred to in connection with the synoptics (p. 104). He regarded the Fourth Gospel as the work of a Christian Platonist of the second century. In 1820 a more formidable attack was made by Bretschneider in his "Probabilia." Since that time its genuineness and authenticity have been the subject of continual controversy. On the one side, favouring the traditional claims of the Gospel, but not excluding the possibility of John's having received assistance in the work, we may reckon Schleiermacher, Bleek, Godet, B. Weiss, Beyschlag, Zahn, Barth, Feine, Jacquier, Westcott, Lightfoot, Milligan, Dods, Salmon, Reynolds, Watkins, Sanday, Bernard, Swete, Stanton, Nicol, Drummond, Askwith. On the other side are ranged Baur, who regarded it as an ideal picture of the Christ, intended to meet the intellectual wants of the Church about 160-170 A.D.; Keim, who held it to be a theological poem by a liberal Jewish Christian, probably one of the *Diaspora* in Asia Minor, in the reign of Trajan (110-117); Pfeiderer, who pronounced it "a transparent allegorization of religious and dogmatic conceptions," written somewhere between A.D. 135 and 150; Matthew

Arnold, who regarded the author as a sincere Christian, a man of literary talent and a theologian, a Greek, not a fisherman of Galilee; Thoma, who attributed the Gospel to a Jewish Christian of Alexandrian culture, living at Ephesus about 134; Jülicher, who suggests from 100 to 125, and considers that the one unassailable proposition is that the author (100-125) was not "the disciple whom Jesus loved"; Schmiedel, who holds that it was not written by the son of Zebedee, or by an eye-witness or contemporary, but by a later writer, probably after A.D. 132, under the influence of Alexandrian and Gnostic ideas; von Soden, who regards it as the work (A.D. 110) of a devoted adherent of the beloved disciple, who was the "Elder" of Ephesus, but not the son of Zebedee. To these we may add Hausrath, Scholten, Grill, Wernle, Wrede, Scott, Réville, Loisy, and others—of whom some make out the author to have been a Gnostic, some an anti-Gnostic; according to some the Gospel was a polemic against Judaism, according to others against a heretical sect named after John the Baptist: while some are content with the assertion that the author was an unknown writer of the

second century, who composed the Gospel for the purpose of putting before the Church his view of Christ and Christianity.

There are a considerable number of critics who are disposed to take a middle position, not admitting that the Apostle was responsible for the composition or publication of the Gospel in its present form, but believing that parts of it may be from his pen, or else that he was one of the original sources from which the writer derived his information, or his inspiration, if that expression be preferred. Wendt, for example, thinks that the *discourses* are based on a genuine document, which may be classed with the two original sources of the Synoptics, while Wellhausen finds a Johannine nucleus in the *narrative* portion.¹ Renan thought the history was probably derived from the Apostle John through

¹ Many others (e.g. Delff, Spitta, Bousset, Schwartz) seek to arrive at a *Grundschrift* by a process of disintegration, but the view expressed even by such a radical critic as Schmiedel still finds general favour: "In the end we shall have to concur in the judgment of Strauss, that the Fourth Gospel is, like the seamless coat, not to be divided, but to be taken as it is."—E. Bi. ii. 2556.

one of his disciples. Holtzmann thinks that though the Apostle did not write it, the book may have owed much, perhaps its very existence, to his teaching and inspiration. Harnack thinks all the Johannine writings were produced about 80-110 by John the Presbyter (see pp. 186 ff.) with the aid of the Apostle's reminiscences; while Bousset would attribute them to a disciple of the Presbyter. In this category may also be included Schürer, Weizsäcker, Sabatier, Soltau, Dobschütz, E. A. Abbott, Briggs, Moffatt, and Bacon.

As regards the indications of the authorship to be found in Scripture, it is quite true that while the writer of the Gospel, as of the First Epistle, claims to have been an eye-witness of the Saviour's ministry, he nowhere expressly identifies himself with the Apostle John. But this is an inference which a careful reader can hardly fail to draw, when he observes the remarkable absence of John's name from the Gospel narrative except in connexion with the last meeting of the risen Christ with His disciples, on which occasion John and his brother are referred to as "the sons of Zebedee" (John 21¹⁻⁶). The inference is con-

firmed when we take into account, further, that on several occasions the part assigned to the disciple whom Jesus loved, in relation to Peter, is precisely such as we might have expected of the Apostle John. We have another sign of the author's identity with the Apostle in the fact that, although generally exact in his mode of designation, he always calls the Baptist simply "John," without any mention of his office, as if he knew no other John from whom the Baptist had to be distinguished.

All this, as we have seen, is in harmony with the tradition of the Church. What, then, is to be said against accepting the Gospel as the work of the Apostle? Space will not permit us to notice all the minute objections raised, many of which have been so successfully met that they are no longer advanced. We shall only attempt to deal with the more important of the arguments still brought against the Johannine authorship.

One of the chief objections is that the account which the Gospel gives of the ministry of Jesus differs in many respects from what is found in the Synoptics. It lays the scene of the ministry chiefly in Judæa, and extends it to a period of

about three years, during which Jesus is represented to have been present in Jerusalem at five different feasts, including two Passovers, whereas the Synoptics tell of only one visit to Jerusalem, and seem to confine the ministry within less than a single year.

But in reality there is no contradiction, no absolute inconsistency, between the two accounts. For, on the one hand, the Fourth Gospel expressly recognizes two periods spent by Jesus and His disciples in Galilee (4⁴³⁻⁵⁴ and 6^{1-7⁰}), in addition to the short visit to Cana and Capernaum recorded in the second chapter; while, on the other hand, the form of expression used by Mark (1¹⁴ R. V.), when he states that "after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee," like Matthew's statement (4¹² R. V.) that "when He (Jesus) heard that John was delivered up, He withdrew into Galilee," implies that He had been somewhere else previous to the Baptist's imprisonment, which did not take place for a considerable period after His baptism. If we had only the Synoptics to guide us, we should be apt to think that the active ministry of Jesus did not begin till after John's imprisonment;

but we have here apparently one of the cases to which J. D. Michaelis refers, "where John appears in a delicate manner to have corrected the faults of his predecessors," for in the Fourth Gospel (3²²⁻²⁴) we read, "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judæa; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Ænon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison." At the beginning of the next chapter the true reason is given for departing again into Galilee—"When therefore the Lord knew how that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples), he left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee." This account of the ministry, as dating from the baptism of Jesus, not from the imprisonment of John the Baptist, is not only more probable in itself, but is more in harmony with the reference made to it by Peter when the apostles were about to appoint a successor to Judas Iscariot (Acts 1^{21 f.}): "Of the men therefore which have

accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection."

That Christ's ministry should have centred in Judæa and Jerusalem was only to be expected, if He had a message for the whole Jewish nation. Indeed, unless He had often taught in the capital, it would be difficult to understand His words of lamentation over Jerusalem (Luke 19⁴² R.V.), when He "wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes," or that other pathetic utterance recorded both by Matthew (23³⁷) and Luke (13³⁴), "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

The same thing may be argued from other points of view. It was incumbent on all Jews

to repair to Jerusalem three times a year to attend the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, and it would have been strange if Jesus had never gone up before His last fatal visit, even if His ministry had been as short as the Synoptic Gospels might lead us to believe. There is a tendency in some quarters to assume that the Synoptics are to be preferred to the Fourth Gospel where they do not agree with it. But when it is remembered that the author of the latter had the three others in his hands, or at all events within his reach, it will be seen that the reverse is the view which we should naturally take, especially having regard to the fact that tradition represents the Apostle as having written with the intention of supplying certain omissions in the other Gospels, and with the conception of a more orderly arrangement than Mark had attempted in his Gospel,—the want of order being, as Papias tells us, a feature which “John” recognized in Mark’s narrative, while he admitted it to be nevertheless quite reliable (cf. p. 122).

A good many critics are now beginning to see that in one very important matter the

Fourth Gospel is right and the Synoptics are wrong, namely, as to the date of the last Supper, which, according to the latter, took place on the evening of the Passover, but, according to the former, on the preceding evening (John 19¹⁴). Matthew and Mark give evidence unwittingly in favour of John's view when they represent it as part of the plot formed by the priests and elders that it should be carried out "not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people" (Matt. 26⁶ and Mark 14² R.V.); and Luke does the same when he reports Jesus as saying: "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not eat it, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (22^{15 f.} R.V.). The wearing of a sword, too, by one of the followers of Jesus after they had partaken of the Supper, and Simon of Cyrene's coming into the city from the country on the day of the crucifixion, confirm the supposition that the Jewish Passover had not yet been celebrated. If the Fourth Gospel is right in this instance, it may also be right when it puts the cleansing of the temple at the beginning instead of the end of the

ministry. There could have been no more fitting initiation of Christ's work as a messenger of God, even apart from the assertion of His claims as the Messiah; and it seems far more likely that the Synoptists, having no place in their narrative for an earlier visit to Jerusalem, should have included the incident in their account of the final conflicts in the temple, than that the aged apostle or any other later writer should have diverged so widely from the narrative familiar to the Church, without having reason to do so.

Exception has been taken to the omission of our Saviour's baptism in the Fourth Gospel, and also to the representation which it gives of the Baptist's testimony to Jesus. But the baptism is really implied in the narrative, and we can understand how the testimony of the Baptist, which was involved in a true conception of his office, required to be specially emphasized when the last Gospel was written, if it be true, as some hostile critics have suggested, that there was still in Ephesus a remnant of the party indicated in the Book of Acts (18²⁴ ff.), who were disposed to call themselves disciples of the Baptist rather than

of Christ (cf. 1⁸). In the same way fault has been found with the Gospel for omitting the institution of the Lord's Supper and for introducing sacramental teaching in connexion with the feeding of the multitude (John, chap. 6). But there was no necessity to repeat what had been sufficiently recorded by the three other Evangelists; and the discourse regarding the bread of life helps us to understand how the disciples could receive apparently without any surprise or difficulty the mysterious announcement, "This is my body."

Still stronger exception has been taken to the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, on the ground that there is no mention of it in the Synoptics,¹ and that there is no room for it in their account of Christ's last visit to Jerusalem. But, as regards the nature of the miracle, the Synoptics tell us of two other cases in which Jesus raised the dead to life; and, as to the order of events, their account is not always to be relied on. The

¹ For example, Wernle says: "That the three Synoptists mention not a syllable of this greatest of all the miracles of Jesus, is enough, quite by itself, to destroy all faith in the Johannine tradition."

books are Gospels, not chronicles ; and, when we look at the question from a higher than a chronological standpoint, in the light of cause and effect, we can see that the alarm which was caused among the rulers by the public excitement produced by this crowning miracle, marked the crisis in the conflict which had been going on all along between the faith of the disciples and the unbelief of the Jews. This was the view taken by Schleiermacher more than fifty years ago : "The Johannine representation of the way in which the crisis of His fate was brought about is the only clear one." And again : "I take it as established that the Gospel of John is the narrative of an eye-witness and forms an organic whole. The first three Gospels are compilations formed out of various narratives which had arisen independently ; their discourses are composite structures, and their presentation of the history is such that one can form no idea of the grouping of events."

Another thing which is a stumbling-block to many critics is the marked difference between the style of our Saviour's teaching in the Fourth Gospel and that which is met

with in the other three. In the Synoptics Christ's utterances are generally of a popular character, frequently taking the form of parables, and relating to the laws and the prospects of the Kingdom of Heaven, while in this Gospel they are largely of a theological nature, and take the form of arguments addressed to the Jewish authorities regarding Christ's claims. Modern critics make a good deal of this objection, but they have not improved much on Bretschneider, the first formidable opponent of the Gospel, who wrote as follows nearly a hundred years ago:—

“Jesus, as pictured by the earlier Gospels, never employs dialectic skill, the ambiguity of artifice, a mystical style, whether he be speaking, preaching or disputing; on the contrary, there is the utmost simplicity, clearness, a certain natural eloquence which owes far more to the genius of the mind than to acquired art. In the Fourth Gospel he disputes as the dialectician, his speech is ambiguous, his style mystical, he deals in obscurities, so much so that even very learned people are quite in the dark as to the real meaning of many of his sayings. In the one case there are short and

pregnant utterances, parables so beautiful and of such inward truth that they grip the attention and sink deep into the soul ; in the other the parabolic style of teaching is practically absent. In the one case the question turns on conduct, on rules of life, the Mosaic law, errors of the Jewish people ; in the other the speaker is concerned with dogma, with metaphysics, with his own divine nature and dignity." With regard to the difference in the two portraits of Jesus, Bretschneider says : " The one has almost nothing to bring forward as to his divine nature, and judging by his utterances, will solely describe himself as endowed with divine gifts, sent by God, Messiah ; as for the other, he makes everything turn on himself, pre-existence is claimed, one with God he has shared the divine glory, he had come down from heaven in all the fullness of divine knowledge and might ; he is about to return speedily to the throne on high."¹

What is to be said in answer to this ? In the first place, it is not to be supposed that Jesus would be confined to one mode of address

¹ These quotations from the *Probabilia* are taken from H. L. Jackson's work on "The Fourth Gospel".

or one style of argument. We might expect Him to adapt His teaching to the wants and the capacities of the different classes of hearers, as we know He did in dealing with individuals. Dialectics which were suitable for the trained ecclesiastics of Jerusalem would have been quite out of place among the unsophisticated people of Galilee, who knew little of doctrinal theology. Yet nowhere in the Fourth Gospel does Jesus utter any more profound truth, or advance any higher claim, than He does in words recorded in the eleventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel, where we read: "At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." And again: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

If Jesus was more reticent regarding His Messiahship in addressing the Galilæan multitude, it was doubtless because the flames of insurrection would have been so easily kindled there. But even in Judæa He did not press His claims as the Messiah. Many of His words and actions were eminently in keeping with that office even as conceived by the Jewish nation; but He left every man to form his own impressions on the subject, and even His disciples did not realize the height of His calling till after He rose from the dead. At His first visit to Jerusalem He showed no desire to take people into His confidence and increase the number of His avowed followers, but rather the reverse (John 2²³ ff.). Even towards the close of His ministry the Jewish populace were so uncertain regarding the nature of His claims that when He was in the temple "the Jews came round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou hold us in suspense? If thou art the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10²⁴).

As regards His rebukes to the scribes and the chief priests and Pharisees, it should not be forgotten that the Synoptics attribute to

Him a tone of still greater severity in the arguments and appeals which He addressed to the same men a few days before His crucifixion. If there had not been such previous encounters as the Fourth Gospel records, it would have been difficult to understand the strong and deep-seated antagonism on the part of the Jewish authorities, which made them so bent on His destruction.

Such considerations as these may help to meet the difficulty created by the striking difference of style and treatment in the fourth as compared with the three earlier Gospels. But no explanation will be satisfactory which leaves out of account the personal idiosyncrasies of the writer and the circumstances of the age whose spiritual needs his book was intended to meet—when the Christian Church had completely broken with Judaism and was threatened with many subtle forms of error within its own pale. While we cannot doubt that the words which the Evangelist puts into our Lord's mouth are in essential harmony with what He had said, it was inevitable that, in giving his personal reminiscences of what had taken place more than fifty years before,

and in recalling discourses of which no record had been preserved, the Apostle's imagination should come to the aid of his memory. It would have been strange too, if, after having passed through such a long and wonderful experience, and writing, as he was doing, in Ephesus, a meeting-place of Oriental mysticism and Greek philosophy, he had not seen in the Saviour's words deeper meanings and wider implications than he could ever have divined at the time they were uttered.

There is a point of view not yet referred to, from which the surprising differences between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics may be regarded as an evidence that the former had apostolic authority behind it. Otherwise how can we account for its gaining general acceptance in all parts of the world, although it came so much later than the other Gospels and set forth views of Christ's life and teaching so very different from those to which the Church had been accustomed for a generation?

The strength of this argument is much enhanced when we find that closer examination tends to explain away most of the apparent

inconsistencies, and at the same time brings to light many confirmations of the author's claim to personal knowledge of the incidents and conversations he records.¹ The narratives are generally so true, in detail, to Jewish opinion and practice at the period referred to, and present traits of character, in those who come upon the scene, so vividly and so consistently, as to imply the possession of marvellous literary genius on the part of the writer, unless he had lived in Palestine in close association with our Lord and His apostles, or derived his information from some one who had done so. Though he brings before us a great variety of character in a variety of circumstances, and is generally very precise in describing time

¹ It is significant that the veteran critic, Dr. E. A. Abbott, in the preface to his recently published Introduction to his work on "The Fourfold Gospel," says: "I find that the Fourth Gospel, in spite of its poetic nature, is closer to history than I had supposed. The study of it, and especially of those passages where it intervenes to explain expressions in Mark altered or omitted by Luke, appears to me to throw new light on the words, acts, and purposes of Christ, and to give increased weight to His claims on our faith and worship."

and place and number and other particulars, he has not been proved guilty of a single anachronism. We have illustrations of his accuracy in the details given of the first calling of the disciples by the banks of the Jordan, of Christ's examination in the presence of Annas before His trial by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, of the crucifixion, of the conversation with Pilate, and of the resurrection; as well as in the circumstantial account given of the healing of the man born blind and the subsequent inquiry, and of the conversations which our Lord held with Nathanael and with the woman of Samaria. Not least remarkable is the acquaintance the author shows with the state of parties in Jerusalem, and the plans and policy of the high court. This is not so surprising, however, if he was indeed that "other disciple" who accompanied Peter to the high priest's palace, and, being known to the high priest, used his influence to procure Peter's admission. Of this supposition we have a curious confirmation in the fact that it is the author of the Fourth Gospel only who tells us that the name of the high priest's servant whose ear was cut off was Malchus,

and that it was Peter who inflicted the wound.¹

Recently a disposition has been shown by a number of critics to admit the claim of the writer to be an eye-witness, and to identify him with the disciple whom Jesus loved, but not with the Apostle John. In particular, it has been argued that John Mark fulfils all the requirements of the case. As his mother had a house in Jerusalem, he may be identified with the disciple known to the high priest (18^{16 f.}), through whose influence Peter was admitted to the palace, as well as with the disciple who was entrusted by Jesus at the cross with the care of His mother and took her in that same hour to his own home (19^{26 f.}). The acceptance of this theory is quite consistent with the historicity of the book, but there is nothing to support it in the early life of John Mark so far as known to us, and it would leave the Apostle John and his brother in strange obscurity, considering the prominence assigned to them in the Synoptics, and

¹For a fuller statement of the internal evidence the author may refer to his Introduction to the volume on St. John's Gospel in the "Century Bible."

the intimate way in which John is associated with Peter not only there but also in the Book of Acts and in the Epistle to the Galatians. Similar objections may be taken to other theories which would identify "the disciple whom Jesus loved" with some other John of Jerusalem than the Apostle (as held by Delff, von Dobschütz, Burkitt, and others). On the other hand, if we identify the disciple whom Jesus loved with the Apostle John, we get a harmonious picture of him, alike in relation to his Master and his fellow-disciples (cf. Luke 22^s; John 13²³, 20^s, and 21).

A more serious rival than John Mark is "John the Presbyter," although the only evidence for his existence is found in a passage in the writings of Papias, which has been preserved by Eusebius. It reads as follows: "If I met anywhere with one who had been a follower of the Elders, I used to inquire as to the discourses of the Elders—what was said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip, or by Thomas, or James, or by John, or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples, and what Aristion and the Elder John, disciples of the Lord, say." From this Eusebius inferred

that there were two Johns at Ephesus, one the Apostle, and the other known as John the Presbyter, a contemporary of Papias. This seems a natural interpretation of the passage, but the only confirmation of it that Eusebius offers (on the authority of Dionysius of Alexandria, who wrote in the previous century) is that there were two tombs at Ephesus associated with the name of John, and that if the theory were accepted it would admit of a separate author being assigned to the Apocalypse, whose apostolic origin both Eusebius and Dionysius were inclined to doubt. This is really all the evidence that has been adduced for the separate existence of John the Presbyter (i.e. Elder). Against it is the fact that none of the other writers previous to Dionysius who were connected with Asia Minor (in particular Justin, Irenæus—with whom we may associate Polycarp—and Polycrates), seems ever to have heard of any leader of the Church in Asia Minor or elsewhere bearing the name of John, except the Apostle. In view of the fact that Justin and Irenæus were well acquainted with the writings of Papias, we may be excused if we decline to

accept Eusebius's novel interpretation of the words in question, especially as he had a literary motive for it, as indicated above. There is really nothing to prevent us from identifying the "Elder John, a disciple of the Lord," who is referred to in the closing part of the statement as still alive when Papias used to make his inquiries,¹ with the "John" who, in the preceding clause, is mentioned among the apostles ("the Lord's disciples"), whose sayings had been reported to him by men of a former generation. This identification is the more probable, as the writer of II and III John assumes to himself the name of "the elder"—the very title given to "John" by Papias at the close of his statement, whereas all that Peter claims for himself is that he is "a fellow-elder" (I Peter v. 1).²

If "John the Presbyter" was not the Apostle, he must have been some one who could speak with authority regarding the early his-

¹ Supposed to have been made about the close of the first century.

² A careful and learned argument in support of this view will be found in Dom J. Chapman's "John the Presbyter" (1911).

tory of the Church, for Papias quotes elsewhere his testimony regarding the authorship and composition of the Gospel of Mark. If the Fourth Gospel was his work, it may still have been a trustworthy record, and the association of the Apostle's name with the book may have been due to a popular misapprehension. Prof. Harnack, however, is inclined to think that it was the result of a deliberate attempt to invest the Gospel with a fictitious authority, although he accepts the tradition that the Apostle spent his later years at Ephesus. The supposition is one that does little honour to the early Church and its leaders. Such men as Polycarp and Irenæus must have been poor guardians of the truth, if they allowed themselves and others to be deceived in a matter of such vital importance.

Of late there has been an increasing tendency among negative critics to reject the tradition, which was widely spread before the end of the second century, as to the Apostle John's residence in Ephesus. In support of this view (which was first taken by Vogel in 1801 and adopted by Keim) they cite a statement attributed to Papias and Origen by Georgius

Hamartolus, an obscure chronicler of the ninth century, to the effect that John the Apostle was put to death by the Jews, after being recalled from Patmos to Ephesus in the reign of Nero. Confirmation of this is alleged to be found in a late manuscript of an epitomizer of Philip of Side, a chronicler of the fifth century, where it is stated that John and James were killed by the Jews. As regards Origen it is found that Georgius was mistaken, and it is not unlikely he misunderstood Papias also, who may have been referring to John the Baptist; or Papias may have been misled, as Clemen suggests, by the prediction referred to below. If Papias really said that John was put to death by Herod at the same time as his brother, this is directly at variance with Acts (chap. 12), and also with Galatians (2^o) where John is spoken of, at a later period, as one of those "who were reputed to be pillars." Moreover, if such a fact was recorded by Papias, it is strange that none of the Christians of Asia Minor in succeeding generations betrays any knowledge of it. Justin Martyr and Irenæus, who were well acquainted with the country, and Polycrates, who was Bishop

of Ephesus *c.* 190, all speak with confidence of the Apostle's connexion with Ephesus; and the same may be said of the writer of the Leucian Acts of John (*c.* 150),¹ Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius. Such positive testimony is not to be set aside on account of the silence of Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Hegesippus.

In all probability the story about John's martyrdom arose from the prevalent belief that Jesus had predicted a similar death for the two brothers, when He said to them, "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized" (Mark 10^{38 f.}; cf. Matt. 20^{20 f.} A.V.). Indeed we know as a matter of fact that from this cause several legends arose regarding the fate of the two brothers.

Finally, if we wish to judge this Gospel fairly, we ought always to bear in mind the avowed purpose of the author, which is, that his readers may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they may

¹ Corssen and Pfeiderer regard the Gospel as designed to counteract the Docetic teaching of this apocryphal book.

have life in His name—a very different object from that of the Third Gospel, which is that the reader may know the certainty of those things wherein he has been instructed. The key to this Gospel is found in the prologue, where Divine revelation culminates in the incarnate Word. This idea dominates the mind of the writer and stamps its character upon the whole book. Believing, as he did, in the continual presence of the Saviour through the influence of the Holy Spirit, and reflecting on the wonderful words and works which he still treasured in his memory, the last and most thoughtful of those who had enjoyed personal intercourse with Him who was God manifest in the flesh, was enabled to give to the sacred life a more spiritual interpretation than the earlier Evangelists had done, and has bequeathed to the Church a Gospel which is as remarkable for its simplicity of style as for its sublimity of thought. When John wrote, he beheld the ministry of Jesus with other eyes, he understood His words in a higher and fuller sense, than when he walked with Him over the fields of Galilee or in the streets of Jerusalem.

Since much that at the first, in deed and word,
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,
Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,
Guarded and guided still to see and speak)
Of new significance and fresh result;
What first were guessed as points I now knew stars,
And named them in the Gospel I have writ.

—BROWNING.

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN

This Epistle has very strong external evidence in its favour, and is included by Eusebius among the *Homologoumena*. Internally it presents a striking contrast, both in form and substance, to the Epistles of Paul; but, on the other hand, in many of its features, it bears a resemblance to the Fourth Gospel. The resemblance is so close (closer, according to Holtzmann, than between the Third Gospel and the Acts) that the Epistle has been likened to a postscript, or a pendant, or a covering letter; but perhaps it might be better described as a counterpart, designed to show how those great truths regarding God and man, which in the Gospel are historically illustrated in the person of Jesus Christ, ought to be realized in the lives of His followers.

The genuineness of all the three Epistles of John was denied by Joseph Scaliger more than three hundred years ago, but the first serious attack on this Epistle was made by F. C. Baur, who rejected both it and the Gospel. Baur held the Epistle to be an imitation of the Gospel, and the majority of his followers attribute the two compositions to different authors, neither of whom they admit to be the Apostle John, their chief reason for rejecting the Epistle being that it differs so irreconcilably from the Apocalypse, which they hold to be genuine. A few of them accept the single authorship of Gospel and Epistle, and others of them admit that the author of the latter may have had a hand in the revision of the Gospel, when the twenty-first chapter was added. On the other hand, almost all critics who admit the apostolic authorship of the Gospel also accept the Epistle, and regard the differences which, amid all their similarity, may be discerned between them, as sufficient to prove their independence and refute Baur's theory of imitation.

The ground on which the rejection of the Epistle is usually based is that it contains

references to Gnostic heresies of the second century. But the objection is met by pointing out that the Johannine authorship is consistent with a very late date in the first century, and that the passages in question ($2^{22} f.$, $4^2 f.$, etc.) are quite intelligible on the supposition that they refer to Docetic views, which began to be held about this time, and especially to the doctrinal vagaries associated with the name of Cerinthus, who taught that the Christ became united with Jesus only at his baptism and left him at his passion.

Owing to the absence of a superscription and greeting, and of some other features usually found in an epistle, I John has been described as a "catholic homily," which might as fitly have been delivered to a Christian audience as addressed to a Church in writing. There is no indication to what Church or Churches it was to be sent, but probably it was more or less an encyclical intended for a circle of Churches in the neighbourhood of Ephesus, from which we may suppose it to have emanated. The writer frequently addresses his readers in such terms of fatherly affection as would well befit the aged Apostle.

His last words are, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (A. V.)—an exhortation specially appropriate at Ephesus, which was a stronghold of idolatry.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN

The nature of these two short letters (which, as Origen said, do not contain a hundred lines between them) precludes any reasonable suspicion of their genuineness, as we can hardly conceive of any object being served by associating them with the name of "the elder." Their brevity and insignificance also account for the scanty references to them in patristic literature; and when we consider their unsuitableness for reading in church, owing to their private and personal nature (which makes them letters in the strictest sense), we cannot wonder at their tardy recognition in parts of the Church where their origin was little known. It is very unlikely, indeed, that they would ever have been preserved, if they had not been invested with authority from the first in the community or communities to which they were addressed.

There is sufficient evidence to show that before the end of the second century the Second Epistle was known and acknowledged as written by the Apostle John; but the Third Epistle was later in obtaining recognition. The two are so closely related, however, that Jerome was justified in calling them twin sisters. While he admitted the common authorship of the First Epistle and the Fourth Gospel, he attributed the Second and Third Epistles to "John the Presbyter," whose separate existence in Asia Minor was believed in by Eusebius on the strength of the vague statement made by Papias (cf. pp. 186 ff.). This view is still taken by a considerable number of scholars in modern times, but it is scarcely likely to prevail, and the claims made for the mysterious presbyter must be settled in some other way. It is generally admitted that the Second Epistle resembles the First both in ideas and expressions, and there is so great a family likeness in all three that they must stand or fall together.

The title of "the elder" was one which the writer could only fitly assume (cf. I Peter 5¹), if he was the elder *par excellence* among the

hundreds of elders in Asia Minor at that time ; and the use of it harmonizes with the quiet tone of authority which runs through the Epistles. Such a position the general tradition of the Church, from the earliest times, has attributed to the Apostle John.

There has been much controversy as to whether the Second Epistle is addressed to a Church or to an individual, and, if to an individual, whether we are to translate the designation of the recipient (*ἐκλεκτῇ κυρίᾳ*) by "the elect lady," or "the lady Eklektē," or "the elect Kyria." The opinion held by Jerome that a Church was referred to under the figure of a lady and her children has been recently gaining ground among all classes of critics. Such a metaphor need not surprise us when employed by a writer so fond of symbolism as the author of the Fourth Gospel, and it gives more dignity to the sentiments and language of the Epistle. In particular it suits better the closing message sent by "the elder": "The children of thine elect sister salute thee"—language which is intelligible and natural when the message comes from the members of a Church, but would be strangely

defective if the greeting came merely from the sister's children and not from herself.

Probably the local destination of the two letters was the same, II John being the previous (or possibly the accompanying) communication referred to in III John v. 9. The object of the letters, however, was somewhat different, the former being directed against heresy, while the latter relates rather to the evils of schism. Both illustrate the difficulties encountered by those who were responsible for the government and administration of the Church at that early period of her history.

There is no means of determining the date of the Epistles, or discovering who were their recipients, beyond inferring that they were composed in the last quarter of the first century, and that they were in all probability intended for Christians in Asia Minor.

THE REVELATION OF S. JOHN THE DIVINE

A few words still remain to be said with regard to "The Revelation," otherwise called the *Apocalypse* (the Unveiling). It is a book whose origin, authorship, and interpretation have been the subject of infinite controversy, beginning

in the second century and culminating in the voluminous literature which has appeared on the subject during the last hundred years.

The Apocalypse shared the fate of the Fourth Gospel in being attributed by a heretical sect in the latter half of the second century to Cerinthus, the chief Gnostic antagonist of the Apostle John: but otherwise it held a secure position in the Church, and is strongly attested from an early period in the second century. The first serious attack upon the Johannine authorship was made in the third century by Dionysius of Alexandria, who was chiefly influenced by the marked difference between the barbarous Greek of the Apocalypse and the more correct grammar and better style of the Gospel—an argument which has also led not a few modern critics to conclude that both could not have been written by the same author.¹ Dionysius thought the Apocalypse might be the work, not of John Mark (though he mentions him in this connexion), but of a John of Ephesus other than the Apostle, there

¹In this question, however, the Hebraic features of the Gospel, both in style and otherwise, must not be overlooked.

being two tombs of John shown, as he says, in that city. This view was favoured by Eusebius and by the Eastern Church generally, which was slow to admit the book into the Canon. In the West, on the contrary, its canonicity was hardly ever disputed till the Reformation, when it was looked upon with suspicion by Luther and Zwingli and some of their followers, but its ecclesiastical authority remained unimpaired. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was subjected to increasing criticism.

In the middle of last century the prevailing opinion among German critics was that John the Presbyter, not John the Apostle, was the author of the work, and this view is still held by many scholars, including some of the most eminent English critics. On the other hand, Baur and his immediate followers maintained the apostolic authorship and dated the publication of the work about A.D. 70. A number of recent writers regard the use of the name John in the opening of the book as a case of pseudonymity, which was a common thing in apocalyptic literature, and hold the epistles to the seven Churches, with which the book

commences, to be a separate composition. Zahn, on the other hand, attributes the whole book to the Apostle, as Sir William Ramsay also does. Briggs takes a similar view as regards the epistles and a considerable part of the remainder of the book, while Spitta believes it to be partly based on a Christian apocalypse written about A.D. 60 by John Mark, to whom Hitzig attributed the whole book.

Dr. Swete is so impressed with the linguistic difference between the Gospel and the Apocalypse that he holds it to be "due to personal character rather than to relative familiarity with Greek," the latter being an explanation which commended itself to many, when it was supposed there had been an interval of twenty or thirty years between the composition of the two books. But Harnack, on the strength of the deep, underlying similarity of their thought, holds the two books to have had the same author, whom he identifies with John the Presbyter, while Ramsay and Feine, on the same principle, attribute both to the Apostle. In this connexion we have to bear in mind the part that may have been

taken by amanuenses, as well as the peculiarities of apocalyptic literature and the position of a convict in Patmos.

The question of literary sources, and of revisions or interpolations, has of late received much greater attention than that of the personal authorship. In the investigations and discussions which have been going on for the last thirty years, various theories of composition have been advanced by Weizsäcker, Völter, Vischer, Spitta, J. Weiss, Wellhausen, Gunkel, Bousset, and others. An important point, suggested by Gunkel and admitted by Bousset, is the likelihood of many elements in the book having come from ancient Jewish sources through a succession of traditions derived from Babylonian, Persian, or Egyptian sources.¹ The composite nature of the book may be inferred from the fact that some passages (especially chapter 11) appear to have been written while Jerusalem was still standing, while others imply that the period of the

¹ In chapter 12. Gunkel finds a reflection of the birth of Marduk, and Bousset of that of Horus; while Diesterich thinks he can trace in it a reminiscence of the birth of Apollo.

compulsory worship of Cæsar had set in (13¹⁴ f., etc.); as well as from the symptoms, in some passages, of Jewish exclusiveness, and, in others, of a broad missionary outlook (7⁴⁰). That the book in its present form has a literary unity about it cannot be denied;¹ but it seems equally certain that its author made use of some earlier source or sources, Jewish or Christian,—though, when it comes to details, the critics are as hopelessly at variance on this question as with respect to the authorship.

With regard to its interpretation, the moderns have the credit of being the first to realize that the key to its meaning is, partly at least, to be found in contemporary events, and that its relation to the Book of Daniel, as well as to other apocalyptic literature which has recently come to light, must not be left out of sight. As to its occasion and date, it is now generally agreed that in its present form it appeared, as Irenæus informs us, towards the close of

¹ Jülicher says: "The uniformity of the book in language, style, and tone must not be forgotten, and especially the fact that the general plan—introduction, seven epistles, three cycles of seven visions, Kingdom of the Messiah on earth, end of the world, New Jerusalem, and finally the literary conclusion—is perfectly straightforward."

the reign of Domitian, say A.D. 95, when the persecution of the Christians had become so much a matter of public policy that it would have been dangerous for them to speak plainly in matters affecting their relation to the State. It is also agreed that the great theme of the book is the heroic stand the members of the Church were called upon to make against the worship of the Emperor, which was then being enforced by the Roman authorities, especially in Asia Minor. It hardly admits of doubt that the first beast rising out of the abyss is to be identified with Nero, the "number of the beast" (666) corresponding to his official designation in Greek, and that the second beast represents the provincial priesthood of Asia Minor, while the seven heads and the ten horns symbolize the power of the Roman Empire looked at from different points of view. The healing of the wounded head of the beast is to be understood with reference to the expected return from the underworld of Nero, as the protagonist of evil, to wage war with Christ at His second coming.

The Chiliastic, or literal and sensuous view of the Thousand Years (20th c.), which was

held by Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Hippolytus, and others, has given place to a more spiritual interpretation, which leaves room for many symbolic applications of the visions and prophecies contained in the book, and recognizes its fitness in all generations to sustain the faith and courage of Christians in times of danger and distress. As a modern critic, who has departed widely from the traditional view of its authorship, has said: "The book has its imperishable religious worth, because of the energy of faith that finds expression in it and the splendid certainty of its conviction that God's cause remains always the best and is one with the cause of Jesus Christ."