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## The Authorship and Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel.

BY THE REV. H. A. REDPATH, D.LIT., M.A.

THE subjects of my paper are attracting considerable attention at the present time, and it may be well to consider, in brief, what may be said about them both.

### I.

Let me commence with the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

It is extremely difficult, with our present knowledge, to attribute it definitely and absolutely to John, the son of Zebedee, the Apostle of our Lord. I feel constrained to say this in order to be honest ; but at the same time I am as confident as it is possible to be that he, and no other, was the author.

There are two kinds of evidence that have to be considered in their bearing on this subject—the external and internal.

But first let me insert here a word of caution. We must not attach too much importance to the title *κατὰ Ἰωάννην*—“according to John.” That is certainly not the author’s inscription, any more than the similar titles of the three Synoptic Gospels. It is simply the label attached to the Gospel by those who received it, showing to whom they attributed it, and we can see in the various forms which the title afterwards took how it received enlargement, till at last we find in a Syriac New Testament the Gospel headed “The Holy Gospel of the Preaching of John the Herald, which he spoke and preached in Greek at Ephesus.” In this title a curious transference seems to have been made of the title “the Herald” from the Baptist to the Apostle. We must therefore put all forms of title, as primary evidence, out of court. The internal evidence will be dealt with later on ; the external evidence must occupy us first.

That seems to be preponderatingly in favour of John the Apostle. Even Harnack, by no means a conservative critic,

goes so far as to assert that it is "beyond question that, in some way or other, John, the son of Zebedee, stands behind the Fourth Gospel."

This is not the place for me to go through the whole of the evidence on this side. It can be found in any ordinary Dictionary of the Bible. It is quite clear that before the end of the second century "a conviction had become deeply rooted that it was written by the Apostle John himself, at Ephesus, at the request of his friends, at the close of a long life." Here the main arguments that are brought forward against this view shall rather be dealt with.

1. It is contended that we can scarcely believe that John, the son of Zebedee, died a natural death at the end of a prolonged life, if we are to interpret our Lord's prophetic words about him and his brother James aright: "The cup that I drink ye shall drink; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized" (Mark x. 39). This passage, if taken by itself, does not really seem to indicate at all what it is desired to put into it. The verbs in the statement ascribed to our Lord are present in tense, not past nor future. His life at the moment, though, indeed, He is on His way to His sufferings at Jerusalem, is spoken of, not the future suffering. That whole life was a drinking a cup of humiliation and suffering—not merely the end of it. It can scarcely be thought that anyone would have narrowed down the application of these words to a necessarily implied martyrdom of both St. James and St. John, if they had not wished to read this meaning into it for the sake of their theories.

2. The only ancient support for this view of our Lord's words is an assertion made in two places, but supported by only one manuscript in each case. It is alleged on the authority of Papias that John was martyred by the Jews. For a careful discussion of these two passages Professor Swete's edition of the Apocalypse may be referred to. We may gather from what he says at least the necessity of exercising great caution in accepting this statement; for (*a*) it does not assert that the

two brothers suffered together; (*b*) an unverifiable reference to a lost book is not a very broad and stable foundation upon which to build; (*c*) Papias may have involved himself in some confusion between John the Apostle and John the Presbyter, about whom something must be said presently. The reference to Swete is *Introd.*, p. clxxv; the two manuscripts quoted are (1) a manuscript of Georgius Hamartolus, and (2) an Oxford manuscript of the seventh or eighth century, an epitome probably based upon the Chronicle of Philip of Side, who lived in the fifth century.

3, 4. Two other statements quoted in this connection are simply arguments from omission—an unreliable form of reasoning. In one case John the Apostle is not included with those who died a natural death by Heracleon (ap. Clem. Al., “*Str.*,” iv. 9); in the other he is not brought to Asia Minor (“*Martyrdom of Andrew*”).

5, 6. We are informed by Syriac scholars that in the Syriac martyrology mention is made of the martyrdom of James and John at Jerusalem; and Aphraates is said to have stated that James and John walked in the footsteps of their Master, Christ. The latter expression is certainly not quite conclusive; and, as to the credibility of the former, it should be remembered that the truth of facts asserted to have happened in martyrologies is not always to be depended upon.<sup>1</sup>

I have endeavoured to state this evidence as clearly as I can. Each person must weigh it for himself. To me it is far from being sufficient to upset the old belief in the son of Zebedee as the author of the Fourth Gospel.

If we were constrained to look elsewhere for an author for this Gospel, there are only two or three directions in which we could turn.

There is that very shadowy, and, as Dr. Swete calls him, “enigmatic” person, John the Elder, to whom many modern

<sup>1</sup> An interesting article on St. John the Apostle, with reference to this particular subject, by the Dean of St. Patrick's, is to be found in the *Irish Church Quarterly Magazine* for January, 1908.

critics have given their allegiance. In so doing they have transferred to him nearly all that used to be assigned to the Apostle. The idea of such a person may have come from the fact that the writer of the Second and Third Epistles of John calls himself the Elder. Upon this words quoted from Papias, and commented upon by Eusebius, may be founded. But the application to himself of the title of "elder" by an Apostle is not without parallel. St. Peter says (1 v. 1): "The elders, therefore, among you I exhort, who am also a fellow-elder." The appropriation, therefore, of this title by the writer of the Second and Third Epistles of John need not exclude the idea that he was an Apostle.

In any further search for an alternative author we must turn to the internal evidence of the Gospel for both the Apostle or for any other writer, and we must also keep in mind anything that may help us in the Synoptic Gospels. On an examination of all four, we shall find that, putting on one side the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John xiii. 23), whoever he may be, there are only four individuals specified as objects of the love of Jesus: the rich young ruler, Martha and her sister Mary, and Lazarus. If we are to identify the beloved disciple with one of these, we may, I suppose, at once dismiss the sisters Martha and Mary from our minds. It is also scarcely conceivable that he should be the rich young ruler. It is true that Jesus loved him, but he seems to have been incapable of returning, by an act of self-surrender and self-sacrifice, the love of the One whom he called Master.

There remains Lazarus; and I must confess that if I felt obliged to give up the authorship by St. John the Apostle, I should look with earnest eyes in this direction. The love of Jesus for Lazarus was a matter of public knowledge as well as known to Lazarus's sisters. They, indeed, when their brother was sick, sent to Him, saying: "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." The Evangelist's own remark is: "Now, Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." And when our Lord wept at the grave of His friend, it should be remembered

that He said: "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep"; while the Jews who stood by said: "Behold, how He loved him!" Moreover, it is noticeable that the expression, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (xiii. 20; xix. 26; xx. 2; xxi. 7, 20), which occurs five times, is not met with at all till after the account of the resurrection of Lazarus. Still further, we must not fail to take into account that the Gospel which deals almost entirely with our Lord's work in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood would, humanly speaking, have come much more naturally from one who had lived in the neighbourhood than from one who, like the Apostle, was only a temporary sojourner at Jerusalem at the time of the great feasts. Such a one as Lazarus could much more easily have been "known unto the high-priest." This, of course, is said on the assumption that the "disciple whom Jesus loved" and "the disciple known unto the high-priest" are one and the same person. Other arguments in addition to these, which are the most important in favour of the Lazarus authorship, may be found in a paper in the *Guardian* (December 19, 1906), by the Rev. W. K. Fleming.

But, after all, these arguments do not seem sufficient to establish the claim, unheard of for so many centuries, which is made that Lazarus should be accounted the author of the Fourth Gospel.

One argument, convincing to those who use it, would prevent my accepting the Lazarus theory. At the Last Supper only Apostles were present. St. Luke definitely says so. "When the hour was come, He sat down, and the Apostles with Him." And in the other Gospels the atmosphere surrounding the narrative compels us to think of a little band—a chosen few—surrounding their Master. This, to my mind, seems very convincing. It is certainly strange how little is said, even by tradition, about the post-resurrection life of Lazarus.

We come back, then, to John, the son of Zebedee, as holding the field against all those that have been mentioned. If we want a corroboration of this view from what is contained in the Gospel itself, we can still scarcely go to a better guide than

Bishop Westcott in his introduction to the Gospel in the "Speaker's Commentary."

Let me remind you of the steps by which he proceeds. The author was—(a) a Jew; (b) a Jew of Palestine; (c) an eye-witness; (d) an Apostle; (e) St. John. He also claims that there are three passages which distinctly point to St. John as author: i. 14; xix. 35; xxi. 24.

The citation of this last passage reminds me that I have not said anything about the authorship of the last chapter of the Gospel. It seems clear that the writer stopped first of all at the end of chapter xx. with those two verses which sum up the whole object of his work: "That ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye may have life in His Name." But this does not preclude us from admitting chapter xxi. as an appendix by the same author, any more than that we should deny Pauline authorship to the two or three conclusions to the Epistle to the Romans which are of the nature of appendices to that Epistle.

The last two verses in St. John xxi. (24, 25) are those upon which the greatest doubt has been thrown by some critics, and yet there is in them a harmony of diction and thought with what has preceded (compare 24 with xv. 27, xix. 35; and 25 with xx. 30), as also with 3 John (compare 24 with 3 John 12).

Perhaps a word ought to be said about the Greek of this Gospel, which some think could not have been written by a fisherman Apostle from Galilee. If we make the Gospel later than the Apocalypse, we can easily imagine the effect upon his style which a long sojourn in Ephesus would make. Here he would meet with Greek culture and Greek philosophy—a word will be said about this later—and these could not but influence the style of his writing. Some, indeed, have urged that the Greek might well have been written by a Palestinian Jew; but this scarcely admits of proof.

Those who wish to study the present state of the problem should read Dr. Sanday's New York lectures on "The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel," published at the Clarendon

Press in 1905. A short and useful little volume, which traverses some of the statements made in this paper, is of value, as giving us some of the latest information on the subject: "The Fourth Gospel and some Recent German Criticism," by Henry Latimer Jackson, B.D., Vicar of St. Mary's with St. Benedict's, Huntingdon, published last year by the Cambridge University Press.

## II.

It remains to say something about the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel.

We are told by many scholars of to-day that we must not take this Gospel as history at all. It contains, they say, the impressions, if you like, of an old man, which long after the events a pious mind had formed of all that had been told him of the words and deeds of Christ. Much of it is allegorical. Even "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is to be looked upon as "the exquisite creation of a devout imagination."

Now, in the case of most of us, when we hear or read such statements as this our minds naturally revolt from them. It is beyond the comprehension of most of us to think how they could be reconciled with anything we know of the first century of the Christian Church from A.D. 40 to 140, and it is quite certain that the Gospel cannot be put as late as 140. Harnack's limit is between A.D. 80 and 110, Jülicher's between A.D. 100 and 125, and these are not timid conservative scholars.

Moreover, when the Gospel itself is examined, what do we find? Constant notices of time. Take, *e.g.*, the beginning of the Gospel: "On the morrow" (i. 29); "Again, on the morrow" (i. 35): "On the morrow" (i. 43); "And the third day" (ii. 1). What use, if the Gospel is unhistoric, could there be, except a dishonest one, for the insertion of such a verse as this: "After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples: and there they abode not many days" (ii. 12)?

Take, again, the personal touches in the descriptive part of the narrative—*e.g.*, in chapter xi., the gladness of Jesus for the



sake of the Apostles that Lazarus was dead; the groaning in the spirit of Jesus twice repeated; the tears of Jesus. Are all these merely allegorical, and not historical? So, again, of the constant record of the observance of Jewish feasts.

There is, of course, a deep spiritual meaning in all the acts and words of Jesus; but they must be acts and words of the Divine Master, as He exhibits Himself to us, upon which a spiritual meaning is based—notably, for instance, in St. John vi., where we have, first, the feeding of the 5,000, followed by the spiritual and allegorical lessons derived from it.

Thus far was written before the Dean of Westminster delivered his three lectures on “The Historical Character of St. John’s Gospel,” which appeared at the time in the *Guardian* for December 11, 18, and 24, and are now to be had in a small booklet, published by Longmans (price 6d.). It is not necessary to examine them in detail; they are full of convincing arguments. In the first he quotes the first words of the First Epistle of St. John, and on them remarks: “These are the words of a man to whom facts have brought a revelation, not of one who conjures up imaginary scenes in order to clothe spiritual conceptions in an attractive form.” The whole of the three lectures deserve careful study. We may here interpolate that we do not see ourselves why there should not have been two cleansings of the Temple; but it is surprising to find the Dean, who only admits one, asserting that the position of that one in the Fourth Gospel has more historical probability than that in St. Mark.

There are just two or three points which may be touched upon in conclusion:

1. St. John’s doctrine of the logos. Whence did he derive it? It is certainly not purely Philonian. If the teaching of the doctrine is that of the son of Zebedee, from what source did he gather it? The answer seems to be that it is an adaptation of the logos of Philo, modified to a certain extent by Greek thought, and influenced, as Philo was, by the Rabbinic “Memrâ.” The inspiration to make use of it was Divine, while the Evangelist, as the human instrument, adapted what

he learnt from the discussions of such wandering teachers as would naturally find their way to a great centre like Ephesus. But, with all this, no one has ever yet fathomed all the depths of thought in the concentrated language of the first fourteen verses of St. John.

2. It has sometimes been said that, if we form a chronology of the acts of our Lord's life from the Synoptic Gospels, no place can be found for the Raising of Lazarus as a historical event. Those who make such an assertion must, it seems to me, be convicted of rashness. Readers of the Dean of Westminster's paper will see how he deals with it. There is one other very strong argument against this assertion. If the number of days in our Lord's ministry, the events of which are recorded by the Synoptists, be added together, and if, to put the case in its most unfavourable aspect, it be allowed that His ministry lasted only one year—which, personally, I should not be disposed to grant—it will be found that only about a tenth of the days during that period can be accounted for.

3. We must always remember that, whilst the Gospel of St. John is history, it is also condensed history, especially in the matter of the discourses, and this applies to the other Gospels as well. If anyone would take the trouble to read aloud, and slowly, some of what would be called the longer discourses of our Lord, he would find from the time it takes that, after all, the Evangelist has only given the salient points of each address. This will account in some cases for what is apparently a lack of connection between one statement and another.

4. There is also to be taken into account the fact that, in the Fourth Gospel, at any rate, it is somewhat difficult always to determine exactly where our Lord's words terminate, and what are the comments or supplementary notes of the Evangelist. This is especially noticeable in the latter half of the third chapter. By realizing this we arrive at a more reasonable mode of explaining the absolutely Johannine mark on some of the utterances. At the same time, it must be carefully remembered that no one of our Lord's disciples was apparently so intimate with

Him as he who, in the words of the Evangelist himself, "beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things." I hope that we shall be ready to add, "We know that his witness is true," because, to use a rather modern expression, his statements appeal to our own religious experiences from our communion, by the aid of the Evangelist, with the Divine Master.

[A careful treatment of the subjects dealt with in this paper is to be found in the critical introduction to Dr. Garvie's "Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus," published towards the end of last year.]



## Revival Memories.

BY THE REV. CANON W. HAY M. H. AITKEN, M.A.

MY earliest memories of religious revivals carry me back to the days of my childhood at the end of the first half of the nineteenth century. My dear father had hardly opened his temporary church at Pendeen before a great revival commenced, so that when the permanent structure was erected some two or three years later the living Church of converted men and women was ready to occupy it. Hence I saw a great deal of Cornish revivalism during my early years, and that even in its wildest forms. As St. Paul became all things to all men that he might win the more, so my dear father to the excitable Celts of Cornwall became as a Celt, never attempting to check the more or less extravagant excitement, but ever endeavouring to lead souls in the midst of it to a true and reasonable faith in Christ.

I can recall some seasons of extraordinary and prolonged religious influence, when the whole neighbourhood seemed to be under a mighty spell, the force of which was felt even by the most careless and ungodly. I remember how one revival continued through a whole year or more, and during all that period night after night the schoolroom would be crowded, and