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NOTES ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

I. INTRODUCTORY.

(1) WHEN the writer was preparing his *Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus* he was constantly confronted by the Problem of the Fourth Gospel. This difficulty hindered and delayed the carrying out of his purpose for a number of years ; and at last a solution was adopted only tentatively. The conclusion thus reached has, however, been confirmed by subsequent study and reflexion ; and the writer now ventures to submit a fuller statement than was then possible, for he has read enough and thought enough on the subject to entitle him to offer an opinion of his own, however modestly and diffidently ; but he has not read so much and thought so little as to be content with merely commenting on the views of others. His method will be not to discuss other theories at all, although when necessary reference will be made to them, but to offer a running commentary on the Gospel, dealing only with such matters as bear directly on the authorship, purpose, mode of composition and characteristics of the Gospel. For it is in this way that he has himself reached the goal of his inquiry. One detail after another has presented itself, almost spontaneously, in such a light as has always made clearer to his own mind the conclusion at first only provisionally accepted in default of a better solution of the problem.

(2) The problem of the Gospel strikes the eye at once, as it were, when comparing Westcott's Commentary and Scott's Exposition of its Purpose and Theology. How can one book appear so different to two competent scholars, and lead them to so diverse conclusions ? The weakness of the position of each is that the one fails to give due weight

to the considerations which afford strength to the position of the other. The Fourth Gospel is a Janus-like reality ; it is history and doctrine, fact and idea, reminiscence and reflexion. The signs of an eye-witness in the narrative, the familiarity with local and temporary details, the impression of a direct and potent response of human faith to the personal revelation of divine grace in Jesus, the confirmation of the presentation of the Christ in Christian experience support the position of Westcott so far at least as to show that the author was a Jew of Palestine, an eye-witness, and a disciple of Jesus, if these aspects fail to prove that he was the Apostle John. The prologue with its speculative interest, the prevalence in the Gospel in report of speech, as well as record of fact of the peculiarities of thought, tone, temper, also characteristic of the Johannine Epistles, the difference between the manner and method of teaching assigned to Jesus, and the Synoptic representation, lend colour to the contention of Scott that the Gospel is a doctrinal work belonging to a later stage in the development of Christian thought and life, having very slight contact with the facts of the earthly life of Jesus.

(3) A solution of the problem has been sought in various "partition" theories, the separation of a source, more or less trustworthy, from editorial additions, and modifications, dominated more or less by doctrinal interests ; but difference has emerged as to the question, whether the discourses or the narratives are more authentic. Wendt, for instance, in his *Inquiry into the Genesis and Historical Value of the Fourth Gospel*, uses as the clue "the difference between the point of view of the Evangelist and that of the discourses of Jesus" in respect to the purpose of the miracles ; and comes to the "conclusion that the source contained discourses and conversations of Jesus," and "does not seem to have included any pieces of a purely narrative charac-

ter" (p. 166). From this standpoint he offers a detailed analysis of the *source components* in the Gospel. Against such a hypothesis the final objection seems to be the organic unity of the Gospel as a whole; it is only by rending in pieces a garment that is as a whole without seam that we can in such detail separate source and editorial additions. In the carrying out of the hypothesis we have not, as in the Two-Document theory of the Synoptic Gospels, three distinct works for comparison of the treatment of the sources by the editors: but must set up a criterion of our own, of doubtful validity, as is Wendt's, to determine what does, and what does not belong to the source. The writer was once attracted by such hypotheses, but must now dismiss them as unsatisfactory.

(4) While a detailed analysis seems to him altogether impracticable, yet the Gospel does appear to him to offer indications of three strands so closely woven together that only here and there can we detach the one from the other. (a) There are first of all the *reminiscences* of an eye-witness, including sayings as well as doings of Jesus. This eye-witness the writer believes to have been a Jerusalemite, or at least Judæan disciple, who may have been John the elder or not, but certainly was not John the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve apostles. His dominant interest in, and familiar acquaintance with the Judæan ministry on the one hand, and his comparative indifference to, and silence regarding the Galilæan on the other is the main reason for this conclusion, although others will be indicated in the subsequent discussion. (b) Secondly, around these reminiscences in the course of years clustered many *reflexions*, resulting not only from this eye-witness's religious experience, but also from his intellectual environment to answer its questions and meet its needs. In his teaching he presented reminiscence and reflexion blended together, so that

his hearers, and probably even he himself could not always tell where the one ended and the other began. (c) Thirdly, a scholar of this teacher wrote the *report* of these blended reminiscences and reflexions, discharging the same function as Mark to Peter, and this we have in the Fourth Gospel possibly with later additions. To this scholar is due the interest in the Logos doctrine, and the tribute of gratitude to his teacher in the title "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

(5) This solution of the problem may at first sight appear too complicated; but who can deny that the data to be taken account of, are numerous, varied and even, at least apparently, inharmonious. A solution more simple than the problem may rather be suspect. The solution *all history*, or *all doctrine* is apparently very much more simple, but then neither covers all the facts. The solution this verse is history, and this verse is doctrine may also appear more simple; but what gain is that, if violence has to be done to the organic character of the Gospel? The solution here suggested presents the composition of the Gospel not as a literary labour, but as a living growth; the reminiscences of the eye-witness gathering around them the reflexions of the teacher; and the reflexions and reminiscences of the teacher forming the report of the scholar, in the spontaneity of thought, and the vitality of experience. This is the process of which these notes will seek to collect and present the indications in the Gospel. The reader is asked not to accept or dismiss the hypothesis so barely stated, only as showing the direction of the inquiry, until all the evidence for or against has been presented; as the writer himself desires to deal with the question with the utmost candour, admitting objections to, as well as offering evidence for his view, which he holds subject to all corrections that the further study of the subject may demand, and only until a more satisfactory solution has been found.

## I. THE PROLOGUE (John i. 1-18).

(1) The prologue has a twofold interest: (a) to assert the identity of the Word with Jesus, and (b) to deny the superiority of John the Baptist to Jesus. With reference to the second and subordinate interest, a note from Dr. Peake's *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* may be quoted, as, although the writer read the work referred to on its appearance, he has not now access to it for verification of his remembrance of it. "This has been argued with great originality and acuteness, but also with much violent exegesis, by Baldensperger in his *Der Prolog des vierten Evangeliums*, 1898. His views have met with little acceptance, though the brilliance and suggestiveness of his discussion have been amply recognised. Pfeiderer and E. F. Scott think he has made out his point for the first three chapters of the Gospel. On the other hand, see Jülicher and Loisy, also an article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. xx., 1901, part i., by Prof. C. W. Rishell" (p. 224). Without at all discussing Baldensperger's view, we may ask, why should the Gospel throw into the very forefront and interrupt the presentation of the primary and dominant purpose by the denial that John is not to be identified with the Logos, as Jesus is, if there was no party or school which exalted John above Jesus? The report of John's witness to Jesus, and of the abandonment of John for Jesus by the first disciples gains greater significance, if such a contention had to be met.

(2) But we may ask, Was this interest characteristic of the teacher or the scholar, or, as for convenience we may throughout the Gospel distinguish them, the Evangelist (including reminiscences and reflexions) or the Editor? If the evangelist was, as is probable, one of the earliest disciples (verse 37) he would have a personal interest in justifying his preference for Jesus. But, if he was a Judæan

disciple, is it likely that he would himself have so identified John with the Logos, as to be expressing a personal interest, a result of individual experience, in the denial of the identity? Does not the Prologue gain a living power if it is the confession of the experience of the editor? He had been influenced by Philo's teaching; he had for a time sought in what he had learned about the Baptist the realisation of this ideal. What the evangelist had done for him was by the presentation of the life and teaching of Jesus to convince him that the Word had become flesh not in the Baptist but in the Christ. As doubtless in his former view he had not stood alone, so in reporting the evangelist's teaching which had so changed all things for him he was not merely confessing his own personal experience, but was making his personal appeal to his former associates to follow in the path into which he had been led. Apollos, who knew only the baptism of John, came from Alexandria (Acts xviii. 24, 25), and Alexandria was Philo's home. The disciples who had been baptized only "into John's Baptism" (xix. 1-3) were met with in Ephesus. Do not these two facts suggest a possible connexion of the teaching of Philo and the baptism of John in a school or party, which was at a later date still represented in Ephesus? If the editor was won by the teaching of the evangelist from this party the prologue gains in personal interest.

(3) This conclusion would also solve the problem of the relation of the prologue to the rest of the Gospel, regarding which scholars have been divided in opinion. Does the identification of the Word with Jesus dominate the whole of the Gospel? While Scott affirms this, Harnack denies it. (Compare *The Fourth Gospel* of the one, pp. 163-170, and *The History of Dogma* of the other, vol. i., p. 329, note.) A study of the Gospel as a whole and of the Prologue itself has led the writer to agree entirely with Harnack. What

impressed the evangelist in the earthly life of Jesus was "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (verse 14). It is this glory that shines in every page of his record. The interest of the Gospel is not cosmic, but ethical and spiritual; and so Son expresses the meaning he finds in Jesus and not Word. Doubtless, it was the testimony to the Son in the teaching of the evangelist which persuaded the editor that Jesus was the Word; but the interest in the Logos was to begin with the latter's and not the former's. This explanation removes the difficulty of the otiose introduction of the idea of the Logos, which the current view involves.

It also answers another question regarding the source from which the conception was derived. If the editor has contributed this conception we need not ask whether a Palestinian origin can be proved, as we should if the conception was characteristic of the evangelist, a Judæan disciple. As the case of Apollos shows, a teacher from Alexandria might carry the teaching of Philo to Ephesus. We need not assume that the editor had a first-hand knowledge of Philo's teaching, nor that when he was led to identify the Logos with the man Jesus he transferred even the conception he had of the Logos unmodified by the new association. Even at the risk of repetition, for the sake of clearness, the position here maintained may be stated in a few words. The evangelist's presentation of Jesus was dominated by the conception *Son of God*, and this is the characteristic feature of the Gospel as a whole. The editor had accepted the Philonian idea of the Logos as the solution of his intellectual problem, and what the evangelist as teacher did for him as scholar was to lead him one step further, to find in Jesus the Word as well as the Son of God. Just as the more cosmic side of Christ in the *Epistle to the Colossians* was not native to the mind of Paul, but was forced upon him by the incipient



Gnosticism of the heresy he was combating, so this new cosmic idea of the Logos was not congenial to the evangelist, the Judæan disciple of Jesus; but it found its way into the Fourth Gospel on account of the editor, to whom it had been a tutor leading to Christ.

(4) Regarding the presentation throughout the Fourth Gospel of the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, it may at this stage of the discussion be said that it is not such a distortion of history by doctrine that we cannot get back from faith to fact. For (a) in the Synoptics Jesus is represented as the Son of God, and in one passage (Matt. xi. 25-27=Luke x. 21) Jesus is reported as making a claim for Himself beyond which the Fourth Gospel does not in the substance of its teaching go. (b) As a subsequent study will show, the context of the passages in which a more supernatural endowment seems to be assigned to the person of Jesus than in the Synoptists allows us to correct the representation so as to get back to the facts. (c) While the Fourth Gospel does not expressly teach that the becoming flesh of the Word was a *Kenosis* or self-emptying, yet the Sonship is presented as an ethical and spiritual relation, such a dependence on and submission to, as well as knowledge of and fellowship with the Father as excludes the metaphysical attributes of absolute deity from the earthly life. (d) A commentary such as Westcott's reads into the Fourth Gospel the theology of a later age, and so finds in it the Christological dogma, which certainly does not do justice to the historical reality of Jesus; but a more historical exegesis yields a very different impression of the teaching of the Gospel. (e) The teaching about pre-existence, peculiar to the Gospel, is not necessarily only a deduction from the Logos idea, but may be brought into relation with Jesus' religious consciousness.

(5) It may be more convenient, as the doctrine of pre-

existence is taught in the Prologue, to deal with this conception already at this stage of the discussion. We need not now concern ourselves with the pre-existence of the Logos, as that idea has been already shown to be not decisive for the representation of Jesus throughout the Gospel. But in verse 15 John the Baptist is represented as already testifying to the pre-existence of the man who was to come after him. "After me cometh a man, which is become before me; for He was before me (*ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν*)"; the personal superiority is based on the temporal priority. Was John the Baptist likely to know of the pre-existence of the Christ; and was he the man to express himself in such subtle language? That John bore witness to the superiority of Jesus the Synoptists testify (Mark i. 7), and on this matter the Fourth and the other Gospels are in agreement. But the form in which John's testimony is here given reflects the evangelist's rather than reproduces the Baptist's standpoint. When in iii. 13 it is stated that "no man hath ascended into Heaven but He that descended out of Heaven, even the Son of Man which is in Heaven," it is possible that this is (with the exception of the last clause) an utterance of Jesus of later date; but verse 31 is undoubtedly a reflexion of the evangelist. The allusions to descent from Heaven in the discourse in Capernaum (vi. 33, 38, 50, 58, 62) are entirely improbable in the historical conditions, and in this discourse also we must recognise the development in the evangelist's mind of pregnant sayings of Jesus. The challenge to opponents in viii. 14, "I know whence I am and whither I go," does not explicitly assert pre-existence. But the words in viii. 58, "Verily, verily I say unto you, before Abraham was I am," may well be regarded as an authentic reminiscence. The self-consciousness of Jesus might include a distinct and certain intuition that His relation to God was not, and could not be temporal, but must be eternal

as God Himself. This subject cannot, however, be pursued any further here ; but so much must be said to vindicate the trustworthiness of the Gospel at this point. While, for reasons to be afterwards shown, we cannot accept the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel as the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, for a theological definition as in verse 3 is incredible in His actual prayer, yet the dominant conception of His death as a return to the glory that He had before the world was (xvii. 5) is not improbably a reminiscence of what Jesus did say to a disciple who could understand His deeper thoughts as the twelve, according to the Synoptic testimony itself, could not. This inward certainty need not, and cannot be represented, as by Tholuck in an extreme metaphysical form as "a continuity of the consciousness of the historical Christ with the Logos." If such an idea was present to the evangelist, it belongs to his reflexions, and does not necessarily result as the only possible explanation of his reminiscences.

(6) The statement in i. 17, "the law was given through Moses ; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," may also be taken as an indication of the authorship. It is to be conjoined with the other fact that the opponents of Jesus are throughout the Gospel spoken of as the *Jews*. Both facts indicate a violent reaction on the part of the evangelist against his own nation and its religious life, similar to that of which we possess so much fuller a record in the case of the Apostle Paul. It seems more probable that a Judæan rather than a Galilæan would so disassociate himself from the section of the nation primarily responsible for the rejection of the Messiah. By a Judæan, resident in Jerusalem, and in some way connected with the priestly order, the contrast between the law of Moses and the grace and truth of Jesus Christ would be more vividly realised than by a Galilæan, especially a fisherman like the son of Zebedee,

whose laxer practice made the law less a burden and a bondage. Other indications that the evangelist was a Judæan, and even a Jerusalemite, will be noted at the proper places.

## II. THE WITNESS OF JOHN (i. 19-34).

This can be dealt with very much more briefly than the Prologue. (1) In verses nineteen to twenty-eight the writer at least does not find anything that need be regarded as in substance unhistorical. If the evangelist was a disciple of John the Baptist, it is probable that he was more fully informed regarding the witness borne to Jesus than was Peter, the probable source through Mark of the Synoptic account. With that account there is general agreement.

(2) In verses twenty-nine to thirty-four two statements emerge which demand explanation: (a) The description of Jesus as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" is in so marked contrast to the description of the function of the Messiah in the Synoptists' account of the Baptist's teaching, that it has often been dismissed as unauthentic. In his *Inner Life of Jesus* the writer has tried to show that Jesus thought of His vocation as presented in the picture of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah lii. 13-liii. 12); and has suggested that Jesus had had some conversation with John, and had raised him for a time at least to the height of His own ideal, and that John in this declaration was echoing the words of Jesus. No more satisfactory explanation has since presented itself to his mind. (b) In Mark's account of the Baptism (i. 10) the opened heavens and the descending dove are seen, and the voice of approval is heard by Jesus alone. The account of the heavenly utterance in Matthew suggests rather that the voice was heard by, and addressed to others, and not Jesus alone (iii. 17). Luke appears to substitute an event for a vision (iii.

21, 22). In the Fourth Gospel the Baptist claims that he recognised Jesus as the Messiah by the descent of the Spirit (verse 32). Is it intrinsically improbable that the vision was granted to the Baptist to instruct him as well as to Jesus to confirm His sense of His calling? The statement need not in itself cast doubt on the trustworthiness of the evangelist's record of John's teaching.

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