

XV

SYNOPSIS

THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORSHIP

THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

The verse, xxi. 24, which asserts that the Gospel was written by the Beloved Disciple, is not by the original author ; it represents a later, and probably erroneous, identification.

The Beloved Disciple is the Apostle John idealised ; the writer of the Gospel a disciple of the Apostle.

JOHN THE ELDER

The writer of the Epistles 2 and 3 John styles himself " The Elder " : Papias speaks of an " Elder John, a disciple of the Lord." The hypothesis that this John was the author of the Gospel adequately explains the phenomena of the internal evidence ; it also accords with (a) evidence that John the Apostle was martyred in Jerusalem ; (b) the silence of Ignatius as to his connection with Ephesus ; (c) the hesitation in some quarters to accept the Gospel as Apostolic. The tradition that the Apostle lived in Ephesus easily explicable. Not only John the Elder but also John the Seer (who wrote the Apocalypse) lived in Asia ; the works of both were regarded as inspired, and by the end of the second century inspiration and apostolicity had become almost convertible terms.

THE HESITATION OF ROME

Hippolytus, c. 200, wrote a *Defence of the Gospel and Apocalypse of John*. A defence implies an attack. Evidence that the attack came not from heretics outside but from a conservative group within the Church. A scrutiny of the argument of Irenaeus against those who would make the Gospels either more or less than four in number leads to a similar conclusion. Similarly the Muratorian

fragment on the Canon goes out of its way to defend the Fourth Gospel.

The hesitation of Rome explicable from the popularity of the Gospel with Gnostics and a suspicion of the Logos doctrine. Probability that Justin Martyr (who was converted in Ephesus) reconciled the Roman Church to the Logos doctrine. Justin quotes the Fourth Gospel sparingly, as if it was an authority more valued by himself than by his readers. Possibility that, though he attributed the Apocalypse to the Apostle, he regarded the Gospel as the work of the Elder.

IRENÆUS AND POLYCARP

The letter of Irenæus to Florinus conclusive evidence of a connection between Polycarp of Smyrna and John "the disciple of the Lord." Was this John the Apostle or the Elder? Considerations pointing to the Elder are: (1) Irenæus heard Polycarp preach as a boy, but was probably not a personal pupil. (2) Irenæus always calls John "the disciple of the Lord," never, except by implication, "the Apostle." (3) For apologetic reasons he would wish to ignore the distinction between the two Johns, supposing he had heard of it. (4) Irenæus states that Polycarp was consecrated Bishop by "Apostles" — doubtless meaning John — the Eastern tradition contradicts this. (5) *The Apostolic Constitutions*, possibly drawing on the traditional local list of Bishops, names Timothy and a John, other than the Apostle, as the first two Bishops of Ephesus.

PAPIAS

Conflict between the evidence of Irenæus and Eusebius (who quotes Papias against Irenæus) as to whether Papias was "a hearer" of the Apostle or of the Elder John. Eusebius is undoubtedly right; but how account for Irenæus' mistake? Explicable on the hypothesis that Papias quoted the Fourth Gospel, which Irenæus accepted as Apostolic, under the title "The Memoirs of the Elder." Arguments in support of this hypothesis.

POLYCRATES OF EPHEBUS

Ambiguities in his evidence. Fragments of a tradition originally appropriate to the Elder survive in a (probably recent) identification of him with the Apostle.

ANTIOCH

The Gospel accepted under the name of John and as inspired Scripture (doubtless, therefore, the Apostle is meant) by 180. Probably known to Ignatius, but by him not accepted as Apostolic.

DATE OF WRITING

John the Elder had "seen the Lord." Supposing he did so as a boy of twelve, he would be 77 years of age in A.D. 95. The Epistle 1 John implies that the writer was a very old man. Works of genius have often been produced at a great age; no difficulty in dating the Gospel A.D. 90-95.

The Logos theology not inconsistent with this date.

THE AUTHOR'S SIGNATURE

Undoubted genuineness of 3 John—by the Elder (author also of 2 John). If the Gospel and the Epistles are not by the same writer, then we must assume two—one of whom is the pupil of the other. Reasons for rejecting this assumption. The two epistles of the Elder are thus the author's signature to the Gospel and the first epistle.

CHAPTER XV

THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORSHIP

THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

FROM the literary point of view the way in which the Fourth Gospel ends is curious. Elsewhere it is written in the third person, but in the last two verses this suddenly changes to the first person. What is still more strange, while in the last verse but one the person is in the plural, in the last verse of all it is in the singular.

xxi. 24. "This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things; and *we* know that his witness is true."

25. "And there are also many other things which Jesus did the which if they should be written every one, *I* suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written."

We are compelled to ask, Did these verses stand in the Gospel when it left the hands of the original author?

In the note in his Commentary, Westcott—in matters of criticism the most cautious and conservative of scholars—answers No.

"These two verses appear to be separate notes attached to the Gospel before its publication. The form of verse 24 contrasted with that of xix. 35 shows conclusively that it is not the witness of the Evangelist. The words were probably added by the Ephesian elders, to whom the preceding narrative had been given both orally and in writing. The change of person in verse 25 (*I suppose* compared with *we know*) marks a change of authorship."

It is notable that the second of the two verses is omitted by the Codex Sinaiticus, and a double change of person in three successive verses is so remarkable that—especially as the verse is merely a somewhat magniloquent repetition of the simple and natural “Many other signs did Jesus . . . which are not written in this book” of xx. 30—we are perhaps justified in holding on the evidence of this single MS. that it is an addition by a very early scribe. But for the omission of verse 24, which is the one that guarantees the authorship, there is no such MS. evidence.

But why, we ask, *at the time when the Gospel was first published*, was any guarantee by the Ephesian elders of its authorship and general credibility required? Early Christian writings (cf. p. 221) were not addressed to a general reading public, but to particular communities within a secret society frowned upon by the Law. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark are anonymous; so are the three epistles which appear to be by the author of the Fourth; these obviously were addressed to a church or churches in which the prestige and competence of the author were sufficiently well known. If, then, in the Fourth Gospel we find an addition to the text, admittedly not by the original writer, which makes a definite statement as to authorship, is it not more probable that it was made at some later date, perhaps also in some other locality, and was intended to assert a view as to the authorship of the book from which certain persons at that time or place dissented? And that such dissent did exist in the second century we shall see shortly. That being so, the addition of the words “this is the disciple which . . . wrote these things” is to be interpreted as an attempt to settle a debated question, and is, therefore, additional evidence of the existence of doubts in regard to the authorship of the Gospel.

Apart from these last two verses—which, on the admission of so conservative a scholar as Westcott,¹ cannot be by the original author—there is not a word in the whole Gospel to suggest that it is, or claims to be, by the Apostle John. Quite the

¹ I note that Bishop Gore accepts Westcott's view, *Belief in Christ*, p. 106 n.

contrary. That John should speak of himself, in contradistinction from all the rest of the Apostles, as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," would be, to say the least of it, remarkable. But it would not be unnatural for a devoted follower and admirer of one particular Apostle so to speak of his idealised master. If the Fourth Gospel had come down to us, as originally published, without the last two verses, every one everywhere would have taken it for granted that the author intended to distinguish himself from the Beloved Disciple, and we should have inferred that its author stood in much the same kind of relation to the Beloved Disciple as Mark, the author of another of our Gospels, stood to Peter.

But if the verse (xxi. 24) which identifies the actual author with the Beloved Disciple is a later insertion, it is open to us to surmise that it is a mistaken identification—indeed, in face of the phenomena discussed in the last chapter, it is hard to suppose that it is correct. We are, then, almost compelled to the conclusion that the Gospel was written, not by the Beloved Disciple himself, but by some one to whom that disciple was an object of reverent admiration.

There has been a great battle of the critics as to whether the Beloved Disciple is intended as a synonym for the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, or whether he is meant to be understood as a purely ideal figure—the perfect disciple who alone really understood the mind of Christ. Our previous discussion of the author's conception of the relation of the historical and the eternal in all things concerning the earthly life of Christ makes it reasonable to suppose that he intended *both*. It would have seemed to him that the Revelation of the Word made flesh would not have been completed unless at least one of the Twelve had understood it. The Beloved Disciple, then, will be an Apostle; but he is that Apostle transfigured into the ideal disciple. And that the Apostle the author had in mind was John can hardly, I think, admit of serious doubt. Peter, James and John in the Marcan story repeatedly appear as a kind of inner circle of the Twelve—

and the disciple that understood must have been one of these. And since the Beloved Disciple was one whom the Church had expected to tarry till the Lord's coming, James is ruled out by his early death; while Peter's infirmities are too conspicuous a feature in the tradition to make it possible for him to be selected as the ideal; only John is left.

There is indeed no reason why the author of the Gospel should not in his youth have come into personal contact with John, who, even if he was martyred (as some suggest) shortly after the outbreak of the Jewish War in A.D. 66,¹ may well have been the last survivor of the Twelve. If so, one of his temperament might easily come to conceive a mystical veneration for the aged Apostle who had leaned on the Lord's breast at the Last Supper. We need not suppose that he had seen a great deal of John, or that more than a small number of the facts recorded in the Gospel were derived from him; most of them, indeed, we have seen reason to believe came to him by way of Mark or Luke. We need only postulate for him a connection with the Apostle and an attitude to his memory comparable to that of Irenaeus towards Polycarp. A brief and, as it seemed in the halo of later recollection, a wonderful connection with the Apostle—perhaps also a few never-to-be-forgotten words of Christ derived from his lips—would make the attitude towards the Beloved Disciple expressed in the Gospel psychologically explicable.

JOHN THE ELDER

A critical study of the evidence afforded by the Gospel itself has led us to the conclusion that the author, while making no pretence of being an Apostle, did nevertheless claim to write with authority, that he was certainly familiar with Jerusalem and probably with a cycle of tradition current there, and lastly that he may have had some personal connection with the Apostle John.

¹ Cf. B. W. Bacon, *op. cit.* p. 127 ff., and R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (T. & T. Clark, 1920), xlv. ff.

Now we learn from Papias of the existence of a person who seems to fulfil all these conditions—the Elder John. The Elder John he describes, in the passage quoted above (p. 18), as a “disciple of the Lord.” Since Aristion and the Elder John are distinguished by this description, both from the Apostles and from the generality of less well-informed Christians, it must at least imply that they had seen the Lord in the flesh. In another passage (quoted p. 17 above) Papias speaks of “the Elder” without the addition of the name John, as if the title—the Elder, *par excellence*—was in some way distinctive.

It is impossible not to connect the evidence of Papias with that afforded by the three Epistles of John, which in style and point of view are so closely connected with one another and with the Fourth Gospel.

Dr. Charles, in his Commentary on *Revelation*, gives an analysis of the language of the Epistles and the Gospel,¹ which materially strengthens the impression made by a first reading that the three Epistles and the Gospel are by the same author. It is thus of extraordinary interest to note that in the second and third Epistles the writer styles himself “the Elder,” as though that were a sufficient and a distinctive title, and in the first he writes to the Church as an old man to his “little children,” and claims emphatically to have seen with his own eyes the Word incarnate. 1 John iii. 7; i. 1-3.

If the only evidence available were that afforded by the Gospel itself and by the fragments of Papias, the hypothesis that it was written by John the Elder would satisfy all the data. But there remains to be considered the ecclesiastical tradition—of which the addition “This is the disciple . . . which wrote these things” (xxi. 24) is perhaps the earliest evidence—that the author was the Apostle John who lived on in Ephesus until (says Irenaeus) the reign of Trajan.

But tradition is not quite unanimous on the point. According to the “De Boor fragment” of Philip of Side, Papias in his

¹ *Op. cit.* i. p. xxxiv. ff.

second book says that John the Divine and James his brother were killed by the Jews;¹ and the Syriac Martyrology states that he was martyred in Jerusalem, which, if a fact, must have happened before A.D. 70. And it would certainly give an added point to the story in Mk. x. 35 ff. of the request made by those two, with the prophecy by our Lord, "The cup that I drink ye shall drink," if, at the time when Mark wrote, the prophecy had been fulfilled. Certain minor pieces of evidence pointing in the same direction are conveniently summarised by Dr. Charles.² The amount of evidence that can be summoned in support of the tradition of an early martyrdom of John is not considerable; but of two alternative traditions the one which would be the more acceptable would be likely to prevail. *Homines facile, id quod volunt, credunt esse*, and the wonder is that any evidence at all should survive of a tradition apologetically so inconvenient as that of John's early death.

This positive evidence is further supported by two pieces of negative evidence of a somewhat striking kind. (a) Of the seven letters written by Ignatius of Antioch on his road to martyrdom, two are addressed to the Apostolic Sees of Ephesus and Rome. The letter to Rome contains a possible allusion to the connection of that church with Peter and Paul; the letter to the Ephesians goes out of the way to emphasise their special claim to be an Apostolic foundation on account of the peculiar affection shown to them by Paul. If Ignatius had ever heard of a long residence and death of the Apostle John at Ephesus, it is very remarkable that he should make no allusion to it in that particular context. (b) The hesitation, in some quarters, of which I shall speak

¹ Similarly George Hamartolus, a late chronographer, writes: "Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, who was an eye-witness of this, in the second book of the Oracles of the Lord says that he (John) was killed by the Jews, and thereby evidently fulfilled, with his brother, Christ's prophecy concerning them . . ." and proceeds to quote Mark x. 39. It is probable that George is here dependent on Philip of Side, but may have quoted him more fully than the De Boor fragment, which is possibly an abbreviated excerpt. Both passages are printed in full among the "Fragments of Papias" in Lightfoot and Harmer, 518 f.

² *Op. cit.* vol. i. p. xlv. ff.

shortly, to accept the Ephesian Gospel as Apostolic, is hard to explain if all the world knew that the Apostle John was still living there in A.D. 96.

The tradition that the Apostle John lived and wrote in Asia is presupposed in the Gnostic romance known as the Acts of John, which Dr. James thinks may be as early as 150. It is also implied in the precedence given to John in the *Epistula Apostolorum* (which places him first in the list of the Apostles) which *may* possibly be no later than that date. But the tradition is one of which the origin is easily explained. John the Seer, the author of the Apocalypse—as was pointed out as long ago as Dionysius of Alexandria (248–265)—must have been quite a different person from the author of the Gospel, but he wrote from Patmos, and addressed his work to the seven churches of Asia; and this John is already identified with the Apostle by Justin Martyr. And if John the Elder also lived in Asia and wrote the Gospel which, already by A.D. 180, was generally regarded as inspired, it would be almost impossible for tradition to keep these two Asian Johns distinct from one another and from the Apostle of the same name; more especially in an age when the double conflict with Gnosticism and Montanism was forcing the Church to make inspiration and Apostolic authorship more and more nearly identical terms.

THE HESITATION OF ROME

The view that the Fourth Gospel was the work of the Elder John explains more easily than any other theory the evidence of a certain hesitation in accepting the Gospel as authentic in certain quarters. This otherwise complicated problem becomes comparatively simple if, pursuing the clue previously found fruitful, we study *separately* the history of the reception of the Gospel in each of the Apostolic Sees—Antioch, Ephesus and Rome. We may begin with Rome.

The most notable theologian of the Church of Rome during the period A.D. 190 to 235 was Hippolytus. On his death a

statue of him seated was set up, and this was discovered in an old cemetery at Rome in 1551, and is still preserved in the Lateran Museum. On the chair of the statue is inscribed a list of his numerous works. Near the beginning of the list is mentioned a "Defence of the Gospel and Apocalypse of John."¹ No one defends what nobody attacks. We must, then, infer that there were people who rejected both. The only question is, were these heretics or members of the Church? Hippolytus was a vigorous opponent of the Montanists and the various Gnostic sects. But the Montanists not only accepted but attached special value to the Fourth Gospel, for it was their authority for the doctrine of the Paraclete, whom they believed to be specially manifested in their own prophet. Most of the Gnostics accepted the Fourth Gospel. Heretics who, like Marcion, rejected it, rejected other Gospels also. The Ebionites accepted only Matthew, other heretics only Mark. But, so far as we are aware, there was no heretical sect which in any special way impugned the Fourth Gospel. But in Hippolytus' Defence the Fourth Gospel and Apocalypse are classed together; there is thus a slight presumption that the attack on both books was made by the same persons. And in regard to the Apocalypse, we have long known of a very vigorous attack made on it inside the Church by an apparently orthodox Roman presbyter named Gaius.

Gaius, in this respect like Hippolytus himself, was a zealous opponent of the Montanist heresy; and, in a book against the Montanist leader Proclus, he went so far as to say that the Apocalypse was written, not by the Apostle, but by his notorious opponent the heretic Cerinthus. Two late fourth-century writers, Epiphanius and Philaster, both of whom had access to works of Hippolytus now lost, speak of persons who ascribed both the Gospel and the Apocalypse to Cerinthus, and who, among other arguments to discredit the Gospel, stressed the discrepancy in order between it and the Synoptics. Epiphanius names these

¹ ὑπὲρ τοῦ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγελίου καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως. Cf. Lightfoot, *Clement*, ii. p. 325.

persons *Alogi*. In Greek this is a quite tolerable pun—since *ἄλογοι* may be translated equally well by “Anti-Logosites” or “Irrationalists.” Obviously they did not call themselves by such a nickname, and we never hear of them anywhere else either by that or any other name. This suggests that they were not a sect at all, but merely a group within the Church who held their own private opinions on a subject in regard to which no one view was yet regarded as *de fide*. That the Gospel also was ascribed to Cerinthus by Gaius himself is now known;¹ thus the opposition to it can be definitely localised in orthodox circles in Rome.¹

The existence within the Church of individuals who rejected the Fourth Gospel explains the emphasis laid by Irenaeus in the passage already quoted (p. 8) on his argument for the *a priori* and eternal necessity that the Gospels could be neither more nor less than four. The main object of this elaborate construction is to establish a major premiss from which can be drawn later on the conclusion that “all those are vain, unlearned and also audacious, who represent the aspects of the Gospel as being either more in number than four or fewer.” He proceeds to condemn Marcion who had only one Gospel; Valentinus who admitted more than four; and, along with them, certain others whom he does not name. These, he complains, “in order to make void the gift of the Spirit which in the last times at the Father’s good pleasure was poured out on mankind, do not admit that aspect presented by John’s Gospel in which the Lord promised that he would send the Paraclete; but set aside at once both the Gospel and the Prophetic Spirit.” Since by the phrase about “the Prophetic Spirit” he evidently means the Apocalypse, it seems that Irenaeus, like his pupil Hippolytus, had occasion to defend both the Gospel and the Apocalypse of John. But Irenaeus makes it clear that the motive of the opposition to both these works was hostility to the idea of the outpouring of the Spirit in the latter days, *i.e.* to the Montanist movement towards which, at any rate

¹ From the discovery of two passages in a commentary of Barsalibi. The evidence is conveniently summarised by H. J. Lawlor, *Eusebius*, vol. ii. p. 208.

in its more moderate form, he himself had considerable sympathy.¹ Thus, whether or not Gaius himself rejected the Fourth Gospel, it is fairly clear that others who rejected both it and the Apocalypse did so because the doctrine of the Paraclete in the one, and of the Millennium in the other, seemed to give support to Montanist extravagances. But the objectors are nowhere accused of being heretics, and it is implied that they recognised the other three Gospels; and, as no sect is known which accepted these and rejected John, we should naturally conclude that they were a party inside the Church.

We turn now to the Muratorian fragment on the Canon. This may well, as Lightfoot argues,² be from another work of Hippolytus. In any case it seems to represent the official view of the Roman Church about A.D. 200.

In this document the Gospel of Luke, about which no one at Rome had any doubts, is dismissed in seven lines; but twenty-five are given to John. Of Luke it is asserted "neither did he (*ipse*) see the Lord in the flesh and he too (*idem*), as he was able to ascertain (wrote)." Of what the author said about Mark only the last line is preserved, which reads, "but at some he was present, and so he set them down"; but we must infer from the emphatic *ipse* and *idem* in his somewhat disparaging remarks about Luke that they are more or less a repetition of a similar statement made about Mark, another Gospel accepted at Rome. But while he goes out of his way to insist that Mark and Luke are *not* eye-witnesses, in speaking of John the emphasis is all the other way: "It was revealed to Andrew, one of the Apostles, that John was to write all things in his own name, and they were all to certify. And, therefore, though various elements are taught in the several books of the Gospel, yet it makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by one guiding Spirit all things are declared in all of them. . . ." A little later, quoting the opening words of the first Epistle of John, the writer proceeds: "For so he declares himself not an eye-witness and a hearer only,

¹ Cf. Bacon, *op. cit.* p. 241.

² *Clement*, ii. p. 411 f.

but a writer of all the marvels of the Lord in order." Surely all this looks like a reply to arguments that the Fourth Gospel was not by an Apostle on account of its divergences, especially in the matter of order, from the Synoptics, which Epiphanius tells us were put forward by the Alogi. The author says, in effect: there are no real contradictions between the Gospels; and if they differ in the matter of order, John is to be preferred, since he was an eye-witness, while the others were not.

At Rome, then, by the end of the second century, the Fourth Gospel was accepted by the Church; but there had been opposition. Some of the opposition had been unintelligent—the attribution of the Gospel and Apocalypse to Cerinthus is grotesque. It had not denied the antiquity, only the apostolicity, of the works in question; for Cerinthus was a contemporary of John. And the opposition was from a group of orthodox and conservative leanings; for it was not only anti-Montanist in intention, it was equally (since the Gnostic Cerinthus was to these zealots a name of reproach) anti-Gnostic. All the same, the fact that it was possible to attribute the Fourth Gospel to an arch-heretic and yet to regard oneself as championing orthodoxy is eloquent. It could not yet have been one of the Gospels which the Roman Church accepted as authoritative.

Some hesitation of the Roman Church to accept the Gospel is less remarkable than would at first sight appear. It was partly the result of the cautiously conservative attitude which it habitually adopted in such matters, and of which its attitude towards the Epistle to the Hebrews—which was known at Rome by A.D. 96 but not accepted as Pauline till the fourth century—is the classical example. But it was probably more affected by a general suspicion of the traditions of the Church of Ephesus, due to the fact that the Ephesians were in the habit of quoting Apostolic authority for a date and method of observing Easter which Rome believed to be the reverse of Apostolic. Strange, too, as it seems to us, the doctrine of the Logos would by some be regarded as a hazardous speculation, savouring

of that Gnostic theory of Emanations which threatened to destroy belief in the Unity of God, against which the main battle of the Church was directed in the second century. And it cannot be said that the phrase *δεύτερος θεός*, "a second God," used by Justin Martyr, the great champion of the Logos doctrine at Rome, was altogether reassuring. Yet again, the fact that the Fourth Gospel was highly appreciated by Gnostics would tell against it. Heracleon, the Valentinian, is known to have written a commentary upon it in Rome about A.D. 160. Thus when, a little later, the Gospel and the Apocalypse became the principal authorities quoted by the Montanists in support of their view that their own prophets had a new revelation from the Paraclete which superseded that of the official Church, we can understand the desire of some conservatives to discredit them completely.

There is a good deal to be said for the hypothesis that it was Justin Martyr who first effectively commended both the Fourth Gospel and the Logos doctrine to the acceptance of the Roman Church. Justin had been converted to Christianity at Ephesus, and his whole philosophy is based on the doctrine of the Logos. But, apart from the Logos doctrine, he has only two quite certain, along with half a dozen more doubtful, reminiscences of the Fourth Gospel. But of Matthew and Luke he has over a hundred reminiscences or quotations; and even to that small part of Mark which has no parallel in either Matthew or Luke he has two allusions. Moreover, there are cases where he quotes to support his argument texts from the Synoptics very badly adapted to prove his point, while forbearing to quote sayings of Christ recorded in the Fourth Gospel which would have been quite conclusive. In fact, he acts like a modern apologetic writer trying to establish the pre-existence of Christ, but, in deference to critical objections, attempting to do so without reference to the Fourth Gospel.

Justin quotes the Apocalypse, and definitely refers to it as the work of the Apostle John, but we may not infer that he

attributed the Gospel to the same author. In his First Apology he refers to the "Memoirs of the Apostles which are called Gospels," and in the Dialogue with Trypho¹ he speaks of the "Memoirs which were composed by them (the Apostles) and their followers." This certainly would be an appropriate description of the four Gospels known by the names of the two Apostles, Matthew and John, and two followers of Apostles, Mark and Luke. But in another context he gives two statements, both of which are found in Mark and one in Mark only, as being derived from the "Memoirs of Peter" (cf. p. 447). If, then, that was the title by which he referred to the Gospel of Mark, the phrase "Memoirs of the Apostles and their followers" would be equally applicable to Gospels attributed to the two Apostles Matthew and Peter and to the two followers of Apostles, Luke and John the Elder. But whatever view we take on this point we are not entitled to infer from Justin that all four Gospels were as yet recognised in the Church of Rome. Justin is writing a defence of Christianity in general, and is not concerned with local diversities; hence his language would be perfectly justified if, in his time, John was publicly read in Ephesus but not at Rome. Moreover, in view of the statement, quoted in the Acts of his Martyrdom, as to his paucity of following (to which attention has been already called (p. 71)) and of the fact that he wore the gown of the professional philosopher, it is not unlikely that Justin himself, the Logos doctrine, and the Gospel which he had imported from Ephesus, were all regarded with some suspicion by the conservative element in the Roman Church. And it may have required the glory of martyrdom, as well as a growing appreciation of the apologetic merits of the Logos doctrine, completely to dispel this.

IRENAEUS AND POLYCARP

We must now consider the evidence with regard to the reception of the Gospel in Asia. For this we possess three

¹ *Apol.* i. 66; *Dial.* 103.

authorities—the fragments of Papias, some statements by Irenaeus, and the letter of Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, to Victor of Rome, A.D. 195. Of these much the most important is the letter of Irenaeus written *c.* 190 to his old friend Florinus, then resident in Rome, in which he endeavours to recall him from Gnostic vagaries to the Apostolic faith that he had learned from Polycarp in his youth. I extract the important passage :

For I saw thee, when I was still a boy, in lower Asia in company with Polycarp, while thou wast faring prosperously in the royal court, and endeavouring to stand well with him. For I distinctly remember the incidents of that time better than events of recent occurrence ; for the lessons received in childhood, growing with the growth of the soul, become identified with it ; so that I can describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp used to sit when he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings in, and his manner of life, and his personal appearance, and the discourses which he held before the people, and how he would describe his intercourse with John and with the rest who had seen the Lord, and how he would relate their words.¹

The letter to Florinus would be conclusive evidence of the residence of the Apostle John in Asia, were it not that we know from Papias, who according to Irenaeus was a contemporary and friend of Polycarp, that there was at the time another John who was commonly spoken of as a “disciple of the Lord.”² That being so, we must be cautious of drawing hasty conclusions. There are a number of considerations which lend plausibility to the suggestion that Irenaeus may have confused the two Johns.

(1) Clearly, Irenaeus is making the most of his connection with Polycarp. Hence, in the absence of any express statement to that effect, we are not entitled to infer that he was in any sense

¹ Eus. *H.E.* v. 20.

² Prof. Bacon makes two suggestions: (1) that John the Elder never lived in Asia at all, but in Jerusalem; (2) that the text of Papias should be emended so as to make the Elder the disciple, not of the Lord, but of the Apostles. It is curious that so acute a critic should not perceive how much the acceptance of these, in themselves improbable, hypotheses intensifies for him the difficulty of explaining away the evidence of Irenaeus for the residence in Asia of the Apostle himself.

a personal pupil of Polycarp. Nor is there any reason to suppose that Irenaeus was born, or long resident, in Asia; his language would be justified if he had been at Smyrna on a visit for only a few months. While there, a keen and earnest lad, he would have listened, as one of the congregation, to the sermons of the famous Bishop. Since Papias calls John the Elder a "disciple of the Lord," it is probable that Polycarp used the same phrase. In opposition to new-fangled Gnostic theories, he would recur again and again with passionate emphasis to what had been handed down by this "John, the disciple of the Lord," or by "John, and the others who saw the Lord." Polycarp may even have read passages as from a Gospel by this John—in his extant letter there is clear allusion to the first epistle and a possible one to the Gospel. We ask, then, would it ever occur to a lad, perhaps lately come to Smyrna, that this aged Bishop—a boy's chronology is of the vaguest, and every greybeard is a Methuselah—meant any one but the Apostle? Of course, if Irenaeus had continued to live in Asia, he must sooner or later have corrected such an impression. But if, after a short visit, he left for Gaul, he would have found no one there able to correct his error.

(2) There is a curious fact about Irenaeus, which would be explained by the hypothesis that he confused the Apostle with the Elder John. He speaks of John (the son of Zebedee) some sixteen times as "the disciple of the Lord," but only twice, and that indirectly and by implication, applies to him the title Apostle. It has been suggested that Irenaeus has ringing in his head the description by the author of the Fourth Gospel of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." But surely in this description the distinctive element is not the word "disciple," but the characterisation "whom Jesus loved." A more natural explanation of the usage of Irenaeus would be that the actual words of Polycarp which were printed on his youthful mind were "John, the disciple of the Lord."¹

¹ Dr. Burney, indeed (*op. cit.* p. 138 ff.), argues that Irenaeus recognises a distinction between the Apostle and the Elder, and attributes the Fourth

(3) The argument that the tradition of the great Churches, founded by Apostles, guaranteed the doctrine of the Catholic Church was the very basis of the case against the Gnostics developed in Irenaeus' great book. And the tradition of Asia, guaranteed by Polycarp's connection with John, was, next to that of Rome, the strongest point in it. If in boyhood Irenaeus had taken it for granted that the John whom Polycarp had spoken of was the Apostle, he had the strongest temptation to continue to believe it. Thus his evidence is not that of an impartial, nor, it would appear, of an exceptionally well-informed, witness. But the less weight we lay on the value of the testimony of Irenaeus to Apostolic authorship, the greater becomes its value as evidence for the existence of another John in Asia who had "seen the Lord"; for only by a confusion in his mind between two such Johns could so gross a misunderstanding of Polycarp be explained.

(4) There is, moreover, a definite reason for suspecting that Irenaeus' connection with, and knowledge of, Polycarp was slight. He states quite definitely that Polycarp "received his appointment in Asia from Apostles as bishop in the Church of Smyrna."¹ Says Lightfoot, "We need not press the plural," and Tertullian—who had read Irenaeus, and is probably dependent on him here—definitely names John. But the Eastern tradition knows nothing of all this. In the Life of Polycarp ascribed to Pionius he is ordained deacon by the Bishop of Smyrna, Bucolus; and on his death-bed Bucolus, admonished by a vision, indicates him as his successor. And even Bucolus is not the first Bishop of Smyrna; that distinction belongs to

Gospel to the latter. His argument is attractive, but this interpretation does not seem to me quite to satisfy all the passages. But I could readily believe that in the controversies about the Apostolic authorship of the Gospel, which we know were still recent when Irenaeus wrote, some one had called attention to a possible distinction between the Apostle and the disciple, and that Irenaeus, though himself rejecting it, uses language which on either view would be admissible.

¹ *Adv. Haer.* iii. 3, 4; Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, part ii. vol. i. p. 441; Tertullian, *De praescr.* 32.

Strateas (a brother of Timothy), and there were others between him and Bucolus.¹ Not much of the Pionian Life of Polycarp is sober history, but that only makes it the more remarkable that an author concerned to extol and magnify the Saint in every possible way should not breathe a word of his connection with the Apostle.

Another and quite different tradition is embodied in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a fourth-century document, but largely based on older materials, which appears to belong to Caesarea or Antioch. In this work² are given the names of the bishops of all churches appointed in the lifetime of the Apostles, *i.e.* before A.D. 100, the reputed date of the death of John.³ For Smyrna the names given are "Ariston the first, after whom Strateas, the son of Lois, and the third Ariston." Since the author can hardly have been ignorant of the existence of so famous a saint as Polycarp, we may presume that he supposed Polycarp did not become Bishop until after the death of John.

Pionius and the author of the *Apostolic Constitutions* concur with one another only in the name Strateas; but, if Asiatic tradition had definitely connected the name of Polycarp with that of the Apostle John, it is strange that neither of them had heard of it. The tendency of later writers is always to enhance, not to minimise, the connections between the Apostles and the early Bishops.

(5) It is remarkable that in the same context the *Apostolic Constitutions* names as the contemporary Bishops of Ephesus—Timothy ordained by Paul, and John ordained by John. The addition "ordained by John" may be due to the "tendency" of the author; but, as there is a slight presumption that, at any rate for the more famous Churches, the author had recourse to the traditional lists of Bishops (with which the Churches had already before A.D. 200 begun to provide themselves), it may be that the Elder had already attained in Asia a position comparable to that of Ignatius in Syria a little later. Certainly

¹ Lightfoot, *Ignatius and Polycarp*, vol. i. p. 463.

² vii. 46, 8.

³ So Jerome, *De Vir. Illustr.* 9.

2 and 3 John read appropriately as from the Bishop of the mother, to a daughter, Church.

— PAPIAS

As regards Papias there are two standing difficulties: (a) Irenaeus¹ says that Papias was a hearer of John—meaning apparently the Apostle—and for this Eusebius takes him to task, quoting against him the opening words of Papias' own Preface, but suggests that Papias may mean that he was a hearer of the Elder John. But how came Irenaeus to make the mistake? (b) Eusebius expressly tells us that Papias used "testimonies," *i.e.* proof texts, from the First Epistle of John; if then, as is on chronological grounds probable, Papias also used the Fourth Gospel, why does Eusebius say nothing about it?

Both these difficulties, I believe, can be solved by the simple hypothesis that Papias used the Fourth Gospel, but quoted it under the title "Memoirs of the Elder." Justin Martyr² seems to quote Mark under the title "Memoirs of Peter," but this was not the ordinary Roman usage; otherwise (such was the desire to attach apostolic authority to books accepted as canonical) it would certainly have prevailed. But if at Ephesus Mark was commonly known as the "Memoirs of Peter," then "Memoirs of the Elder" is just the kind of title by which we should expect the Fourth Gospel to be then known.

Once assume a confusion in the mind of the youthful Irenaeus between the Apostle and the Elder John, it follows that, when in later life he first read Papias, he would take it for granted that on all points connected with the apostolic tradition of Asia there could be no essential difference between Papias and his contemporary and friend Polycarp. Hence any reference to John which Irenaeus found in Papias that was in the slightest degree ambiguous he would invariably interpret on the assumption that Papias, like Polycarp, when speaking of the personality or the writings of John, the disciple of the Lord, in Asia, could

¹ *Adv. Haer.* v. 33, 4.

² *Dial.* 106 ἀπομνημονεύματα αὐτοῦ (sc. Πέτρου).

only mean the Apostle and author of the Gospel. Besides, Irenaeus, we know, accepted 2 John as the work of the disciple of the Lord who wrote the Gospel, whom he identified with the Apostle. The author of 2 John styles himself "the Elder." By Irenaeus, then, "the Elder" would naturally be taken as an *alternative title* of the Apostle. If, therefore, he found in Papias a text from the Fourth Gospel quoted as from the "Memoirs of the Elder," even if it was clear from the context that Papias meant the Elder John, it would only strengthen his belief that the Elder John, so often spoken of by Papias, was identical with the Apostle, and would only serve to counterbalance the *prima facie* meaning of the passage quoted by Eusebius from Papias' Preface as evidence that there were two Johns.

That Irenaeus did find in Papias an allusion to the Fourth Gospel by the title "Memoirs of the Elder" is suggested by a remark of Eusebius. He states that Irenaeus, presumably in some work now lost, mentions the "Memoirs of a certain Apostolic Elder,¹ whose name he passes over in silence." Probably the longer phrase "Memoirs of the Apostolic Elder" did not stand in Papias, or Eusebius would hardly have noticed it as characteristic of Irenaeus. But since Irenaeus identified the Elder and the Apostle, he might naturally add the adjective "apostolic" to Papias' phrase the "Memoirs of the Elder" in order to indicate that the reference was to the canonical Gospel written by the Elder who was also an Apostle.

The same hypothesis explains "the Silence of Eusebius."² Volumes have been written on this theme. But suppose Papias did quote the Fourth Gospel, but with some such words as "The Elder in his Memoirs says," what would Eusebius have made of it? Long before Eusebius was born the tradition of the Church

¹ ἀπομνημονεύματα ἀποστολικῶν τινῶν πρεσβυτέρων. *H.E.* v. 8.

² In regard to Luke, the silence of Eusebius in regard to any mention by Papias would be easily explained if Papias—whose allusions to the Synoptics I suggest were all in the course of a discussion of the discrepancies between them and John—had alluded to Luke in terms similar to those used in the Muratorian Canon, emphasising his negative qualifications as an evangelist, in a way which would be of no interest to Eusebius or his readers.

had become firmly established that the author of the Fourth Gospel was the Apostle John, and also that that Apostle had lived in Ephesus. Since, then, Eusebius, unlike Irenaeus, distinguishes the Elder from the Apostle, the last thing that would occur to him, if he came across an allusion in Papias to "The Memoirs of the Elder," would be to identify this work with our Fourth Gospel. Eusebius expressly says that Papias "was evidently a man of very mean capacity to judge from his own arguments." If, then, Papias quoted as from the "Memoirs of the Elder" a passage that occurs in the Fourth Gospel, Eusebius would have thought it quite in keeping with Papias' usual stupidity not to recognise a quotation from that Gospel when he saw one.

We must never forget that in the matter of the identification of the Elder with the Apostle John, Irenaeus and Eusebius have precisely opposite interests. Indeed, it is merely in order to confute Irenaeus on this point that Eusebius quoted the passage from Papias' own Preface (printed p. 18). He does this expressly that he may show that Papias distinguished John the Elder from John the Apostle, and to demonstrate that Papias was not "himself a hearer and eye-witness of the Holy Apostles." Eusebius had a double motive for this. First, Papias taught a millenarian doctrine which Eusebius strongly disapproved of; it was, therefore, worth while to prove that Papias was *not* an actual pupil of the Apostles. Secondly, Eusebius, like most of the Greek Fathers of his time, disliked the Apocalypse, and sympathised with the attempt—which, so far as the Greek Church was concerned, was for a time successful—to exclude it from the Canon of the New Testament. But that was only possible if its apostolic authorship could be impugned; and this could only be done by accepting the theory of Dionysius of Alexandria that it was the work, not of the Apostle, but of another John, who also lived at Ephesus. But this passage in the Preface of Papias was, by the third century, the only evidence that could be produced for the existence of such a person.

Irenaeus, on the other hand, revered the Apocalypse and enthusiastically accepted the millenarianism of Papias. He had, therefore, no motive for distinguishing the two Johns. On the contrary, the identification of the John of Asia, of whom Polycarp and Papias had spoken, with the Apostle had become by his time the sheet-anchor of the claim of the Churches of Asia against the Gnostics to be the true depositaries of the apostolic tradition, as well as the main evidence for the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Incidentally it left the personality of Polycarp the single link in the chain between himself and the Apostles. By the time of Eusebius Gnosticism had ceased to be formidable, and nobody any longer disputed the apostolic authorship of the Gospel. Thus Eusebius had nothing to lose, and much to gain, by distinguishing the two Johns. Irenaeus, given that other passages of Papias admitted of their being identified, would find some means to explain away his language in the Preface—as has been done in modern times by no less learned apologists than Provost Salmon and Dom Chapman.¹

The view that Papias regarded the Fourth Gospel as the

¹ It would seem probable that Irenaeus was mistaken in inferring from Papias that Papias was himself actually a hearer even of the Elder John. The language of his Preface clearly implies the contrary, though if the present tense "what Aristion and the Elder John say" (λέγουσι) is to be pressed, these worthies were still alive when Papias was making his inquiries. And Eusebius, who had read the rest of Papias' book, after remarking that he "says that he was himself a hearer of Aristion and the Elder John," adds significantly, "at all events he mentions them frequently by name, and besides, records their traditions in his writings." Certainly few of the surviving fragments of Papias (including an undefined number preserved by Irenaeus as "Sayings of the Elders"), which are mainly crudely millenarian in character, suggest intimacy with the author of the Fourth Gospel; but we may probably infer that this material came mainly from Aristion, for it is noticeable that Papias puts his name first. Indeed Eusebius, if we press the strict meaning of the language used, appears to imply a distinction between "words of the Lord" derived from Aristion and "traditions" (? about other matters) derived from John. After alluding to a materialistic millenarian statement attributed by Papias to our Lord, he adds that Papias "gives in his own work other accounts of words of the Lord (τῶν τοῦ κυρίου λόγων διηγήσεις) on the authority of the aforementioned Aristion; and traditions (παραδόσεις) of the Elder John." Then he at once gives, as an example of such παραδόσεις from the Elder, the famous statement about the origin of Mark.

work of the Elder John explains another curious fact. Papias puts the names John and Matthew together at the end of the list of the Apostles mentioned as those whose teaching he tried to collect from tradition. Lightfoot argues that this implies that the names of these two Apostles were connected with Gospels read in the Church in his day. To my mind it implies the contrary. "For I did not think," says Papias, "that I could get so much profit from the contents of books as from the utterances of a living and abiding voice." But if Papias possessed two Gospels, which he *felt sure* had been actually written by these Apostles, it would have been too incredibly foolish of him to suppose that such second-hand oral tradition as he could himself collect would be a more accurate record of their teaching. His attitude would be perfectly rational if he knew of works attributed to Matthew and John of which the authenticity was a moot point. I have argued above (p. 19 ff.) that Papias' allusions to Matthew and Mark imply that the problem of the divergence between the Gospels had already within the lifetime of the Elder John given rise to the question whether the first Gospel, said to be by Matthew, really gave a reliable account of what Matthew himself taught about the Parousia, or was only a translation of doubtful accuracy. If this question was still being discussed when Papias, as a young man, was collecting traditions, it would be very natural for him to think that people who had actually met Matthew might settle the point. But Papias mentions John along with Matthew. If then we hold that he speaks of Matthew because there was attributed to that Apostle a Gospel whose complete authenticity some were inclined to question, must we not say the same thing of the Gospel of John? Not necessarily, for there was another book bearing the name of John current in Asia about the authorship of which a similar question must have been raised—the Apocalypse. Its millenarianism was so completely in accordance with Papias' own views that there is no doubt that he would have liked to accept it as apostolic; but he would be aware

that there were people in Asia who took another view. These would allege the tradition, which Irenaeus repeats—and which, since it is almost certainly correct, must ultimately rest on Asian tradition—that “the vision was seen under Domitian,” and probably connected this with the other tradition which, according to the De Boor fragment, was also referred to by Papias, that “John and his brother James were killed by the Jews.” What solution Papias arrived at we do not know; possibly he may be the ultimate source of the extraordinary suggestion that John’s exile to Patmos took place before Paul had written his earliest epistles (*i.e.* about the year A.D. 50), which appears in the Muratorian Canon.¹ Perhaps, however, Papias’ reference to the death of John contained no *explicit* reference to the time and place; in that case it would be open to readers of his book, who, like Irenaeus, wished to effect an identification of the author of the Ephesian Gospel with the Apostle John, to suppose that John was killed by Jews in some riot at Ephesus in his old age.

POLYCRATES OF EPHESUS

This stage had certainly been reached in Asia by the time of Polycrates, probably several years earlier. Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, in his letter to Victor of Rome A.D. 195, says, “Moreover John, who was both a martyr and a teacher and who leaned upon the bosom of the Lord and became a priest wearing the sacerdotal plate (*τὸ πέταλον*)—he fell asleep at Ephesus.” Polycrates must have read Papias and probably, like Irenaeus, identified the two Johns. He doubtless found there, besides the statement that John and James were put to death by the Jews, references to the great teacher John who wrote “the Memoirs” and died in Ephesus. The description of John as both martyr and teacher is a necessary inference from the identification of the two Johns. Quite possibly in the last part of the sentence

¹ “The blessed Apostle Paul himself, following the order of his *predecessor* John, writes only by name to seven churches.”

Polycrates is substantially reproducing Papias, only with the substitution of the words "leaned upon the bosom of the Lord" for some phrase of the original like "wrote the Memoirs." But Polycrates is hardly an unbiassed witness. He is writing to Victor of Rome, who had just excommunicated the Churches of Asia for declining to conform to the Roman practice in regard to the keeping of Easter. Victor, presumably, had touched on the possession of the tombs of Peter and Paul—we know these were shown near the Vatican and on the Ostian road before A.D. 200¹—as guaranteeing the apostolic priority of the Roman tradition. It was hard lines on the Ephesians that Rome should possess—in repute, if not in fact—the body of their own particular Apostle Paul. But Polycrates will put up a good fight. "Great lights," he replies, "have also fallen asleep in Asia . . ." and he proceeds to claim for Asia the graves of Philip and his daughters, John, Polycarp, and various lesser worthies. He describes Philip as an Apostle; John has no title but is identified as one "who leaned on the bosom of the Lord." But it is a curious coincidence that both Philip the Apostle and Philip the Evangelist, one of the Seven, should have had daughters who were prophetesses; and, if we remember that as late as the Didache the title "apostle" was in some parts of the Church applied to many outside the number of the Twelve, the possibility that tradition has effected a confusion in the name of Philip as well as John is not remote. We must not forget that Asia and its customs had been on the defensive against Rome for many years. The controversy about the date of Easter goes back as far as the time of Xystus, who became Bishop of Rome c. 114. Of one stage in it, the friendly "agreement to differ" by Polycarp and Anicetus, 155, we are sufficiently well informed to know that the controversy depended on the antiquity, and therefore apostolic authority, which could be claimed for the custom of the several churches. How could Asia defend its ancient usage against traditions said to derive from Peter and Paul unless it too could quote Apostles among its

¹ Gaius, *ap.* Euseb. *H.E.* ii. 25.

founders? And it was historic fact that a disciple of the Lord named John had ruled the Church of Ephesus till Trajan's days; it was indisputable that an apostolic person named Philip had moved from Palestine to Hierapolis and died there. Ninety years had elapsed between the death of this John and the letter of Polycrates, and for more than threescore of these the claim of Asia to inherit apostolic custom had been at stake. Tradition always errs on the patriotic side, and in much less time than that would have contrived to identify both the "Evangelist" with the Apostle Philip, and John of Asia with the one Apostle who could compare with Peter in prestige.

But there is a tell-tale point in Polycrates' defence. Philip stands first, then his daughters, then John. Does not this look like a survival of a traditional order of precedence among the Saints of Asia which dates from a time when the John in question was not yet supposed to be an Apostle and was therefore inferior in years and importance to Philip?

ANTIOCH

Our evidence for the Church of Antioch in the second century consists of the Epistles of Ignatius c. 115, and the treatise of Theophilus, *ad Autolyicum*, c. 181. Theophilus, we have seen (p. 7), in this, his sole surviving work, quotes the Fourth Gospel under the name of John as inspired scripture. Bishops of Metropolitan Sees are not the kind of men who rush after the latest thing in doctrine; and in the second century the preservation of the ancient tradition of the Church against infiltration from outside was regarded as the supreme function of the Bishop. We are entitled, then, to infer that at Antioch the Fourth Gospel had been recognised as an authority, even if not actually attributed to an Apostle, for a good many years before Theophilus.

This probability is raised almost to certainty when we study the reminiscences of the language and thought of the Gospel and

First Epistle already occurring in Ignatius. These are discussed in all books on the subject ; but their extent and significance can only be duly weighed if the student has before him, printed in parallel columns, both those where the actual resemblances are close and those where they are less so.¹ The conclusion forced upon my own mind by a survey of the parallels is, that the relation of Ignatius to the Fourth Gospel is exactly the same as that ascribed above to Justin Martyr. His whole outlook and his theology have been profoundly influenced by the study of this Gospel ; but his use of it suggests that it is not yet recognised in his own Church as on the same level of authority as Matthew. And this is just what we should expect if the Gospel had reached Antioch but was not yet attributed to an Apostle. But seeing that, as the use made of it by Ignatius shows, John was already known and valued at Antioch, it is at least probable that Antioch, while still regarding Matthew as the highest authority, would have been inclined to accept John as on the same level as Luke. But once it was accepted and regularly "read" in the Church, in order to distinguish it from the other Gospels, it must be known by the name of John. Even in A.D. 120 there would be very few at Antioch who had ever heard of John the Elder ; in another thirty years there would be none at all. Thus before very long it would be taken for granted that the John who wrote a work of such stupendous merit, so long accepted as authoritative by the Church, was the Apostle. At Rome the Logos doctrine was an obstacle to some, but at Antioch the doctrine had been welcome as early as Ignatius. Its apologetic value dawned slowly on the mind of the prosaic Roman ; but it was obvious at once to the philosophic mystic mind of the Graeco-Oriental East. Thus it is probable that at Antioch, earlier even than in Ephesus, the attribution of apostolic authorship would become, first an accepted belief, then an immemorial tradition.

¹ Cf. the passages set out in *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, and more fully and conveniently in an appendix to Dr. Burney's *Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*.

DATE OF WRITING

John the Elder is described by Papias as a "disciple of the Lord," by Polycarp as one "who had seen the Lord." He may have known Him (1 Jn. i. 1) in Jerusalem; he may have done little more than "see" Him, brought by his father as a boy of twelve years old on pilgrimage to the Passover. And he may have been among the crowd that looked on at the Crucifixion—people in those days were not careful to keep such sights from children. In that case, by A.D. 95 he would have reached the age of seventy-seven. The First Epistle of John was obviously written by a man of advanced years, who can pass quite naturally from "brethren" to "my little children" in the same paragraph (1 Jn. iii. 13 and 18). This last phrase would hardly have been written by a man under seventy. Again, the Fourth Gospel is clearly the summary of a lifetime of thought and mystic communion. It is the sort of book that might indeed have been actually written *currente calamo* in a mood of inspiration—but it embodies the concentrated meditation of a lifetime. Great men sometimes die early, but, when this does not happen, their latter years are often marked by extraordinary vigour. Gladstone at the age of eighty introduced the second Home Rule Bill into the House of Commons in a four hours' speech not inferior to the oratorical triumphs of his middle age. Temple did not become Archbishop of Canterbury till he was seventy-five, and yet had the energy to leave a permanent mark upon the Church of England. Titian, to quote the classic instance, died at the astounding age of ninety-nine, producing masterpieces to the very end. There is, then, no difficulty on this score in supposing that John the Elder wrote the Gospel A.D. 90–95 at the age of seventy or more.

But is it possible that the theological standpoint of the Fourth Gospel could have been reached by A.D. 90? At first sight it seems a far cry from the theology of Thessalonians to the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. But so far as the theological

development is concerned, Paul himself has gone almost all the way in the epistles of the captivity. Hebrews is a stage farther on than Paul, or, at least, its Christology is more defined—and Hebrews is fully accepted in Rome, always far slower to move than Asia, before the time of Clement. The difficulty which the Logos doctrine is an attempt to meet is one which must have arisen at a very early date. The ordinary Gentile would find no intellectual difficulty in worshipping Christ as “Kyrios” or “Lord,” that is, as a Divine Being other than the Supreme—“Gods many and Lords many” were being worshipped in the various cults of the period. But the Christian was committed to the Old Testament with its central emphasis on the doctrine, “The Lord thy God is One.” And the Jew, the bitterest of all the opponents of the Church, was always there to “rub this in”; he was for ever challenging the Christian to explain why and how to worship Christ did not mean the abandoning of monotheism. What a triumphant reply it was to say, “But did not your own great Philo, the most famous Jew of the age, the man the Jews of Alexandria chose as their spokesman to Caligula in A.D. 40, at a crisis affecting the whole Jewish race, himself distinguish between God and the Divine Word? Was Philo a polytheist? And if not, then neither are we, when we worship the Word made flesh.” The question we have to ask is, how many years of further theological development must be allowed to a Church which already possessed Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians, to reach the point when it could make this reply? And the answer is a conditional one—five hundred years in a community that could produce no single mind above the commonplace; five years, if a man of genius should arise so soon. The category of development, in the slow, patient, biological sense of that term, does not apply in cases of this sort. The Logos doctrine is consistent with almost any date for the Gospel.

THE AUTHOR'S SIGNATURE

There can be no doubt that 3 John is a genuine letter of some one who was regarded by his contemporaries as a person of importance. It cannot possibly be a forgery, for it would be a forgery without motive. It maintains no special doctrine, it enforces no general moral duty, it tells no interesting story. It alludes obscurely to a rebuff received by the author from a certain Diotrephes (who we may infer must have been a local bishop, since he had the power not merely to exclude from the Church brethren travelling with recommendations from other Churches, but also to "cast out" resident members), and it commends a certain Demetrius who appears to be on the side of the writer. But no hint is given of the name of the Church or of the upshot of the affair. That such a document should have been preserved at all is strange; indeed it is only explicable if it was cherished as a kind of relic of a person regarded by some section of the Church with special reverence and affection.

But the writer of this obviously genuine personal letter calls himself simply "the Elder"—that is its importance, for the three Epistles and the Gospel of John are so closely allied in diction, style, and general outlook that the burden of proof lies with the person who would deny their common authorship. The minute differences in thought or temper which some scholars think they have detected between the Gospel and the first Epistle are far less than those which divide the earlier, middle and captivity epistles of Paul, or the *Dialogues* written by Plato at different periods of his life. It is only a dead mind that shows no change. In regard, however, to the two epistles—2 John is obviously by the same hand as 3 John—which bear the Elder's name, it is clear that, if they are not by the same author as the Gospel, then the relation between the two authors is that of teacher and pupil.

But if they are by two authors, which of the two is the teacher and which the pupil? and to which of the two are we to assign the First Epistle? The opening verses of the First Epistle presuppose the main ideas of the author of the Gospel; they are the work of the same man or his pupil. Again, the author of the Gospel is one of the world's creative minds, and if there is dependence, the shorter epistles are secondary. The Gospel and First Epistle cannot be explained as a development of creative ideas found already in germ in the shorter letters. These two brief notes are *either* by the author of the longer works himself, recurring almost incidentally to ideas which are of the very texture of his mind, *or* they are a mere echo by a docile pupil of that mind. But a pupil who is dominated, not only by the ideas but by the actual language of his master, to the extent that, on this hypothesis, the Elder who writes 2 and 3 John is dominated by the author of the Gospel and First Epistle, must be a man considerably the junior of his master, or else one lacking sufficient initiative to develop any individual thought and style of his own under the overmastering influence of the older and stronger mind.

But neither is it possible to date the author of the Fourth Gospel a generation *earlier* than John the Elder; nor do the two shorter letters leave on one the impression of being written by a man dominated by some other master mind. On the contrary, he is evidently a leader of outstanding prestige and position, for the one is addressed to a Church which he takes it upon him to congratulate on the purity of its doctrine and to warn against false teachers, the other implies the claim to an authority which Diotrephes (apparently the local bishop) has ventured to flout.

It is often said that the similarity in style, in thought, and in general outlook can be explained on the assumption that the authors belong to "the same school." The word "school" is one of those vague seductive expressions which it is so easy to accept as a substitute for clear thinking. In the sphere of art

in all ages there have been schools; and in antiquity examples can be found in philosophy. But these two Epistles are not treatises in philosophy or theology; they are actual letters called forth by an actual crisis¹—occasioned by an insult to certain friends of the writer which to his mind constituted, not only a challenge to his own authority, but an attempt to suppress the propagation of true doctrine. That is to say, they are the product of wounded feeling and therefore reveal character. It is a highly individual character, quite as individual as that of Paul, and it is the character of a man who could have written such a Gospel. This is not the kind of thing that is covered by the phrase “a school.” Besides this, “a school” in art or philosophy only comes into existence when there is a considerable body of work by the founder which serves as a model and a standard for the pupils. But 2 and 3 John are not long enough to have been the model for the writer of the Gospel and 1 John, nor, as we have seen, can the writer of the shorter letters be the pupil of the other author. Must we then assume that a model—some work greater and nobler than the Gospel—once existed and has since disappeared? It must have been a marvelous production! Moreover, a “school” of Johannine literature did as a matter of fact arise, something of which survives in the Acts of John—and this is obviously what artists call “school work,” an inferior imitation. We are forced to conclude that all four documents are by the same hand. And few people, I would add, with any feeling for literary style or for the finer *nuance* of character and feeling, would hesitate to affirm this, but for the implications which seem to be involved. For the admission that the second and third Epistles are by the same hand as the Gospel and the first Epistle does lead to very far-reaching consequences. It means that *we do really know*

¹ Dr. Stanton (*op. cit.* p. 107 f.) doubts their being by the same author as the Gospel, since there are several of the great Johannine doctrines to which they make no allusion. But in letters written to announce a visit on urgent business, and respectively 13 and 14 verses in length, one does not expect theology.

who wrote the *Fourth Gospel*, and therefore, approximately, the date at which it was written.¹

Sabatier speaks of the Epistle to Philemon, which is so closely interwoven with Colossians (and Ephesians), and which is itself so obviously genuine, in these words :² " This short letter to Philemon is so intensely original, so entirely innocent of dogmatic preoccupation, and Paul's mind has left its impress so clearly and indelibly upon it, that it can only be set aside by an act of sheer violence. Linked from the first with the two epistles to which we have just referred, it is virtually Paul's own signature appended as their guarantee, to accompany them through the centuries." When the Elder penned the little notes we speak of as 2 and 3 John, did he not similarly affix to the Gospel and First Epistle the author's signature ?

¹ The identification of the author of 2 and 3 John with the Elder John is no modern idea. Jerome (*De Vir. Illustr.* 18) states it as the official tradition; and it is authoritatively affirmed in the Decretal of Pope Damasus A.D. 382, which, if genuine (cf. Turner and Howorth, *J.T.S.* i. p. 544 ff., and xiv. p. 321 ff.), is the first official pronouncement on the Canon of the N.T. ever made in the Western Church. *Johannis apostoli epistula una, alterius Johannis presbyteri epistulae duae.* The apparent separation in the Muratonian Canon between the first epistle, mentioned along with the Gospel, from "the two," is perhaps earlier evidence of the same view—possibly a compromise between those who wanted to identify the Elder with the Apostle, and those who clung to the tradition that he was the author of all four documents.

² A. Sabatier, *The Apostle Paul*, p. 227.