

## ARTICLE II.

## PUBLISHING THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

BY THE REVEREND HANS C. JUELL,  
HANKINSON, N. D.

## I.

"THIS is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true" (John xxi. 24). Dr. James Moffatt says of this verse that this as "an editorial note vouches for the beloved disciple as the authority and author of the Gospel," and "opens up at a stroke the problem of the Gospel's origin and authorship."<sup>1</sup> In reference to the same verse, Professor William Sanday says: "I accept . . . this last verse as weighty testimony to the autoptic character of the Gospel. It is easy to see that the two concluding verses are added on the occasion of its publication by those who published it. They, as it were, indorse the witness which it had borne to itself."<sup>2</sup> These two high-class authorities on the Fourth Gospel, though they differ on the value of the evidence, agree as to the testimony borne by this verse. The testimony is that the Gospel was published by other parties besides the author, and that these publishers declare that the beloved disciple was its author.

Who these publishers were we are not told; nor do we know whether or not they signed the first copy that was is-

<sup>1</sup>The Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, p. 571.

<sup>2</sup>The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel, p. 81.

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sued. It would seem reasonable to suppose that they did. And if the publishers were some of the officers of the Ephesian church they would probably give their official position.

The question may be raised as to the reason for this indorsement of the Gospel. It may be argued that if "the disciple" was John, he would need no indorsement. His own testimony would be stronger than the testimony of the elders of the Ephesian church.

The time had come when those who had witnessed what Jesus said and did in the flesh were very few. The testimony of an eyewitness was considered very valuable. Men had risen in the Ephesian church who had falsely claimed to be apostles (Rev. ii. 2). Since the first qualification of an apostle was to have seen Jesus (Luke xxiv. 48; Acts i. 8, 22; 1 Cor. ix. 1),<sup>1</sup> this their claim to being apostles must have been based on their assertion that they had seen Jesus. This their deception had, however, been discovered; but it may be that they had caused some harm before the fact that they were false was discovered. It is safe to say that this was not the first Gospel, so called, that had appeared within the Ephesian church which had claimed apostolic authorship. Since the former writings had proved to be false, there would be some hesitation by the people of Ephesus in accepting this Gospel unless it was properly indorsed by people well known by them. This indorsement by reliable persons insured these people against deception in receiving this Gospel. These men declare that they know that the beloved disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ, wrote this Gospel.

The purpose of this paper is to present the facts connected with the publishing of the Fourth Gospel as they are given in the Johannine writings. Where facts are not given, cer-

<sup>1</sup> Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. i. p. 126a.

tain assumptions based on facts given will be made use of to carry us on to the next facts. Here, as elsewhere, the imagination is necessary to reconstruct history when the attainable facts are meager; but we hope that this imagination is of the same nature as that with which the scientist reconstructs the prehistoric animal from the few scattered bones discovered.

## II.

It will be assumed in this paper that the beloved disciple is the Apostle John. We do not, however, base our argument on the truth of this statement; but we consider the known facts, and see if these do not point to the truth of this assumption.

The Apostle John was a Jewish fisherman who probably had not received a scholastic training; for he had not been in this occupation, had he received good intellectual training. He used the native language, the Aramaic, and was unfamiliar with the Greek. This inability to use effectively the language of the Gentiles may well have been the reason why Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, when they consecrated Paul for the work among the Gentiles, themselves decided to work with the Jews (Gal. ii. 9). But later on John disappeared from Palestine. "It is possible that he had been laboring in Palestine, and, when the Jewish war broke out and made successful work among the Jews there no longer possible, he found his way to Ephesus, which was a natural place for him to choose as the centre of his future labor."<sup>1</sup>

When John reached Ephesus we do not know; but he probably was well along in years,—too old to master the Greek language. But he found Jews in the city who spoke the Aramaic language who became his companions.

<sup>1</sup>The Apostolic Age, McGiffert, p. 608.

The Fourth Gospel was written at Ephesus during the last decade of the first, or the first decade of the second, century. The religious life of Ephesus at that time would naturally have some influence on the writing of the Gospel and the other Johannine writings. It is true that an historical account of the life of Jesus might have ignored these conditions, but the Gospel was not written merely as a history, but "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (John xx. 31).

The state religion of this great city, great largely from its temple of Diana, was the worship of Diana. But the city and nation granted full religious liberty. There were, therefore, many kinds of religions in the city more or less akin to Christianity. The Jews, the Docetic Gnostics, and the disciples of John the Baptist, were quite numerous, and they all claimed that Jesus was not the Christ as he was held to be by the orthodox Christians. Who the Nicolaitans (Rev. ii. 6) were we do not know, but they probably were Gnostics. It seems that the main business of the Ephesian church had been heresy-hunting, and seeking to get rid of these enemies of the true faith (Rev. ii. 1-7). In their continual struggle against heresy the church had not only failed to make progress, but had gradually lost ground.<sup>1</sup>

John was unable to exert a broad and effective influence in the church because of his inability to use the Greek language, but there had gathered around him some of the leading members in the church who were Jewish Christians. They had often gathered to hear John tell of his fellowship with Jesus and what that had meant to him. They felt the need of presenting these facts to the Christians everywhere,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Apostolic Age*, McGiffert, p. 626.

but especially to the members of their church. True, they had the Synoptic Gospels; but they did not come out as definitely as they might on the divinity of Jesus, nor were they written by eyewitnesses.

At the suggestion of these Jewish Christians the Ephesian church requested John to write a Gospel which would meet the present need. This John did; but since he did not use the Greek language he dictated to an amanuensis who translated into Greek as he wrote the Gospel. When the Gospel was written it was presented to the committee on publication for their consideration.

The question as to the length and nature of the Gospel as it was first presented to this publishing committee may be raised. It is hard to tell what may have been its nature, but it is safe to say that these men, recognizing the fact that John had been with Jesus; would not be very critical. They probably did not strike out much, if any. But they may have offered suggestions of some additions. Of one thing we feel quite certain, that is, that the Gospel as first submitted ended at its logical conclusion (John xx. 31).

John i. 15 was probably added at this time for doctrinal reasons. Most likely these men had heard John make the statement that John the Baptist said what is here quoted. And this would be of importance in meeting the opposition of the disciples of John the Baptist. They suggested, therefore, that this saying might well be added. These men also had heard John tell the post-resurrection story, and they suggested that he might with profit add this to his Gospel. At their request he does it. His amanuensis is not with him; so the secretary of the committee writes this down at his dictation, translating it as he writes. This may account for the fact that "even within the brief space of the appendix, idio-

syncretisms of language and style appear which are practically sufficient to indicate another hand"<sup>1</sup> When the secretary finished the account, he added verse 25 as a flourish. He may also have added xxi. 20b, which offers a problem in the acceptance of the Johannine authorship of this chapter.

### III.

The purpose of this Gospel has been to establish more firmly the fundamental faith of the Christian church,—the fact that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and that faith in him, not knowledge of, and obedience to the law, brought eternal life. But this was not the only point at issue. There were other difficult questions asked by the opponents of the Christian church; and problems presented themselves which needed a solution. These questions and problems were considered freely in this meeting of the publishing committee. John took notes at this meeting and then went home and wrote the First Epistle of John.

One criticism offered at this meeting was that John had not been specific enough in his claim to having witnessed what he had written. They knew that the statement to this effect made in the Gospel might be taken in the spiritual sense, and the Gospel not be considered as historical.

To guard against this John wrote 1 John i. 1–4. This introduction cannot apply to the Epistle; since, in that writing, the author does not deal with what he has seen and heard, but with doctrinal problems. This paragraph must, therefore, refer to the Gospel, or some writings of that nature. In the Epistle the verb *ὀράω* (John xix. 35), which means "to see with the mind, to perceive, to know," gives place to the

<sup>1</sup>The Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, Moffatt, p. 572.

verb *θεᾶσθαι* (1 John i. 1), which has been "used twenty-two times in all the New Testament, including the present passage; and in every one of the bodily and not the mental or spiritual vision."<sup>1</sup> The author takes the pains to make it as clear as he well can that he had seen and heard what he has written in the Gospel. But his purpose is not merely to convince his readers of the truth of his assertions, but to win them into a saving fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Though Gnosticism had not developed into the system it assumed during the middle of the second century, the central ideas of this heresy were receiving considerable attention among the thinking people of that day. They claimed that Jesus when born was not the Christ; but that at the baptism the Christ entered into him, and left him before the suffering on the cross. They held that the world was evil for the very reason that it was material. God was perfectly good, and could not come in touch with the evil world. It became necessary, therefore, for Him to have emanations, or eons, to do his work in the world. There was something divine in the human soul which sought fellowship with God, with the world of light where God dwelt. Man could enter into this fellowship only when he gained the right knowledge. Hence knowledge (*γνῶσις*) became the essential element in the salvation of man; hence the name Gnosticism.

A comparative study of the Gospel and the Epistle reveals the fact that the Gospel looks from God down to men, while the Epistle looks from men up to God. The Gospel tells us what God has done, and is doing, to save men. The Epistle tells us what men must do to be saved.

In their consideration of the Gospel these men of the publishing committee have called John's attention to the fact that

<sup>1</sup> *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, Sanday, p. 76.

he has mentioned the saving qualities of faith (John xi. 26) and knowledge (John xvii. 3). The heretics might claim that he in this Gospel was claiming that the moral attitude of man was a subordinate factor in the religious life. Ought he not come out clearly in stating that the moral life, rather than the mental attitude, was the prime essential in his entering into fellowship with God?

In 1 John i. 5-ii. 17 John contrasts Christianity with Gnosticism, and shows the superiority of the former.

We, too, believe that God dwells in the realms of light (i. 5); but we hold that our entrance into this realm is not dependent on knowledge, but on fellowship with God, which we may have, while still dwelling here on earth, through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ which has cleansed us from sin (i. 6, 7). Sin, not ignorance, shuts us out from God. Repentance and open-heartedness toward God have made it possible for Jesus to cleanse our lives from sin. Since all have sinned, all need the cleansing power of Jesus Christ, that they may have the true fellowship with God. But this fellowship is dependent on confession of our sins, rather than on perfect knowledge (i. 8-10).

But Jesus not only cleanses us from sins, he also secures forgiveness for our past sins (ii. 1, 2).

In place of considering knowledge as the first essential in the plan of salvation, knowledge becomes the culmination of the moral life. The way is, obedience (ii. 3-5a), service (ii. 5b-6, walking as God walks means rendering the service God wants us to render), and love (ii. 7-11). Only when a person has learned to love God sincerely can he know him fully (cf. iv. 8, John xvii. 3).

We will go a step farther than this, and say that it is unfair to place first a proper intellectual conception of God in



the plan of salvation. The little children "whose sins are forgiven for his name's sake" are incapable of knowing properly (ii. 12). They need only trustfully to accept the gift of God. The young men are "strong," and because of their strength "have overcome the evil one" (ii. 14). The glory of the young man is in his achievements. The fathers, the older men, find their glory in knowledge (ii. 13, 14). So it may be seen that God does not make the same demand on all. But he does ask that they give their best in the right time, — trust when children, work when young men, knowledge when fathers.

It may be seen, then, that the separation from the world is not necessary to the saved life; but that a person may live in the world, obey God, and love and serve his fellow men, and be saved. But this does not mean that the world is good. The world and the things of the world — the things that appeal to our lower nature — are evil. But the world needs not harm us; for, in the nature of the case, the evil in the world will not harm us unless we permit it to do so. It is by love for the world that this evil gets a grip on us. A man may live in the world and not become a part of it. Therefore, "love not the world, neither the things of the world" (ii. 15-17).

Certain members of the Ephesian church had assumed a hostile attitude toward Jesus Christ (ii. 22). They had denied his divinity, and tried to lead the people of the church away from him. They had been turned out of the church for advocating these heretical views, but this fact had not been known generally (ii. 19). Thus their teachings had led many to claim that even the Ephesian church had disclaimed the divinity of Jesus.

John sets them right in this regard in ii. 18-29. These

false leaders, these antichrists, did not belong to the church. It was even unfair to lay the blame of their appearance to the church, since they had been sent as a sign of the end of the world (ii. 18). But the people who heard them ought to have known that they did not belong to the church, if they had taken trouble to investigate. After this let every one raise the question as to the genuineness of a teacher by questioning him on his attitude toward Jesus.

The discussion now turns to some of the doctrinal points which have been raised by the Gospel, and which were questions of special interest at that time.

In John i. 12-13 it has been stated that before the Logos became flesh he had given to men the right to become children of God. The question is asked, Since this is true, was there really any need of the Logos becoming flesh? Does the fact of the incarnation play an important part in God's plan of salvation?

John gives his reply in the third chapter. It is no small thing, says he, to be called children of God. This privilege reveals God's great love (iii. 1). But man has by no means reached the summit of human achievements when he has become a child of God. The greatest hope and possibility of man is not to be a child of God, but to become Christlike. And still the full meaning of Christlikeness is not realized by us. But "we know that, if it [cf. marg., i.e. "what we shall be"] should be fully understood by us, then we shall be like him; for [because we are like him in character, same reasoning as in John xvii. 3 and 1 John ii. 4] we shall see [*ὄψομεθα*, "to see with the mind, to perceive, know"] him even as he is" (iii. 2). If a person wants to know Jesus Christ, or, what is synonymous with this, to know what one may be, he must start a moral cleaning up in his life, — he must try

to live as clean a life as Jesus lived (iii. 3). This is possible since sin, or evil, is not what it is claimed to be by the Gnostics, inherent in matter, but is the violation of known laws (iii. 4). This brings us to the first reason why Jesus was manifested in the flesh, — that he might take away sin (iii. 5). The lofty and interesting character of Jesus makes us want to know him and be like him. And it may also be said that our attitude toward Jesus Christ reveals our moral life (iii. 6–8a).

In the second place, “the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (iii. 8b). Not only did he come to cleanse the inner life, but he also came to destroy the institutions which were leading men to sin. He came to set our environment right. This he did by establishing a society of brotherly men (iii. 11). Such a society is based on love, love one for another that is deep enough to express itself in deeds of kindness, not merely in words (iii. 18). And this love was created in Jesus’ followers by his self-sacrificing death (iii. 16).

And we know that this doctrine of the incarnation is true: (1) because, in holding it and living by it, our conscience testifies to its truth (iii. 19–21); (2) when holding this doctrine, if we pray to God he will give us whatsoever we ask (iii. 22); and (3) because we experience that God abides in us when we obey the commandments he has given us, that we should believe on Jesus Christ and love one another (iii. 23–24).

There was a Baptist party at Ephesus<sup>1</sup> which probably had accepted some of the Gnostic doctrines. They are referred to in iv. 1–v. 12. We infer this from the statement in v. 6: “This is he who came by water and the blood, even

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *The Apostolic Age*, McGiffert, pp. 285 f.

Jesus Christ: not with the water only, but with the water and the blood." The party opposed evidently held that water baptism was sufficient.

The leader of this party had done wonders (iv. 1) like Simon Magus (Acts viii. 10, 11), and for this reason many of the outsiders had joined him (iv. 5). This party taught that Jesus was not the Messiah, and considered John as the greater one (iv. 3).

But this leader who claimed that he knew God (iv. 8) hated his brother (iv. 20). It may be that his brother had joined the Christian church at Ephesus, and for that reason he had shown this hatred for him.

The Committee in their study of the Gospel come to the statement in iii. 16. They realize that this is a comment by John. They turn to him, saying, "That is a good statement, but can you prove it? Here is the Baptist party, their leader is doing wonders, and the people believe that no man can do these signs except God be with him. But they disclaim the incarnation, and would not accept this statement. Wherein, would you say, are they mistaken?"

John then proceeds to prove his statement: (1) by showing that these works of wonder did not prove that they were right (iv. 1-6); (2) that God had sent Jesus into the world (iv. 7-21); and (3) that faith in him was the one saving power (v. 1-12).

1. They should not believe every spirit (iv. 1), for there was a "spirit of antichrist" (iv. 3), or a "spirit of error" (iv. 6) in the world, as well as "the Spirit of God" (iv. 2). The way they had of testing which spirit was at work was to find out, first, whether the person who did the wonder claimed that Jesus came in the flesh or not (iv. 2); and, secondly, whether those who were of God, godly people, heard

these preachers (iv. 6). The fact that outsiders followed them proved nothing.

2. The theme of iv. 7-21 is found in the fourteenth verse: "And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." This is the same in meaning as John iii. 16a.

We find by personal experience that God is love. It is through love that we are born into the spiritual life, and gain knowledge of God (iv. 7, 13). This love of God has expressed itself through Jesus Christ. We have personal knowledge, not merely an inner experience, of the fact that God has sent Jesus (1) to give life (iv. 9); (2) to set sinful men right with God (iv. 10); and (3) to save the world (iv. 14). But the truth of this statement is not based on my personal experience alone. Anyone who will confess Jesus as the Son of God will have this birth into the spiritual life (iv. 15), and so will have personal knowledge of the truth of my statement. And this spiritual experience leads men into love (iv. 16), and removes the fear of judgment (iv. 17, 18). It will be seen that we base our claim that God sent Jesus as his Son into the world on the facts: (1) that it was a loving act of a God of love; (2) that we have seen Jesus personally, and have experienced this transformation in our lives which is here described; and (3) that this is not a personal matter alone, since every one may reach the same conviction if he does as I have done.

On the other hand, the leader of the Baptist party who claims that he knows and loves God, and disclaims the Messiahship of Jesus, hates his brother (iv. 20). This in itself disproves this love (iv. 21) and knowledge (iv. 8) of God. This fact would naturally discredit his testimony against Jesus Christ.

3. The theme of v. 1-12 is in verse 5: "And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" This is the same in meaning as iii. 16b.

The next question raised is, How can faith in Jesus Christ save, and how do you know that this is true?

Let us consider this from the logical standpoint. Any one who has true faith in Jesus Christ is born into the spiritual life. This new birth creates in the individual a love for God and for the children of God (v. 1). But the test of our love for men is whether we keep the commandments of God or not (v. 2, 3). And it is considered by the Baptist party that keeping the law is the way to be saved, to have life. Here then we find that faith in Jesus Christ brings about this same result that they demand for salvation. This it does by creating in us through the new birth a power which overcomes the world (v. 4). And I doubt if any one else has been able to overcome the world but he who has won the victory through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 5). But Jesus does not accomplish this merely by the cleansing power of water, represented by his baptism, but also by the life-giving power of his blood, represented by his death (v. 6). (Since v. 7, 8 is a gloss,<sup>1</sup> we will not consider that here.)

But we do not depend on the logical conclusion alone. God has given us a direct witness to the fact that Jesus gives life. This is the personal experience "that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (v. 11).

It is in reference to iv. 1-v. 12 that John makes the statement in v. 13. Since we are assured of eternal life we have boldness to ask what we desire (v. 14, 15). But there are things which God will not grant, however much we pray (v.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Canon and Text of the New Testament*, Gregory, pp. 508 f.

16). So failure to receive everything we ask for does not disprove the basis of our faith.

In closing we may say that we are in a sense Gnostics, for there are certain things we as Christians know. We know (1) that whatsoever is begotten of God sinneth not. If any one continueth in sin he cannot be called a child of God (v. 18). We know (2) by this test, not only that we are children of God, but that the world is evil (v. 19). We know (3) that the Son of God has come, and that we have understanding and eternal life through him (v. 20). Since we have this knowledge, we should worship no one else besides the only true God, Jesus Christ (v. 21).

In this our study the facts discovered apparently bear witness to the traditional view of the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel.