

The Fourth Gospel and Lazarus.

BY THE REV. W. K. FLEMING, M.A.

IN an article on "The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel," contributed last year to the *CHURCHMAN* by one (Dr. Redpath) who alas! is no longer with us, some mention was made of a theory that the writer of the Gospel, or the source of its information, was Lazarus, whom our Lord raised from the dead. It may be of interest to supply in fuller detail the grounds on which this theory is based. Let it be premised that it is but a suggestion, to which the present writer was led by certain features and facts of the Gospel itself. That which recommends it is the curious exactitude with which it fits in with the circumstances of the Gospel, if once the sacrifice can be made of all the world of thought and sentiment that centres round the name of the Apostle John.

All hinges, to begin with, on the identity of the "beloved disciple" (*εἰς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν . . . ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς*), for we are told (John xxi. 24), "This is the disciple that testifieth of these things and wrote these things" (*οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μαθητῆς ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ τούτων, καὶ γράψας ταῦτα*). Who was this disciple? Tradition has answered "John." But whether this John was the son of Zebedee, or another John, the "Elder," who was that "disciple of the Lord" living at Ephesus towards the close of the first century, tradition leaves undecided. The very name of John may, it has been suggested, be merely the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek phrase, "the beloved disciple," viz., Johanan—"he whom Jehovah favours." Can we, then, find in the Gospel itself any hints as to the identity of this beloved disciple? And we shall naturally inquire first, Was there any disciple of whom it is actually written that Jesus loved him? Outside the pages of the Fourth Gospel, there is, of course, the young ruler of whom St. Mark speaks; but it is at least curious that, while speculation sometimes glances at him, no stress has apparently been laid on the fact that in

the Fourth Gospel itself there is a disciple of whom we are emphatically told, and told thrice, that Jesus loved him. In John xi. we read (ver. 3): "He whom thou lovest (*ὃν φιλεῖς*) is sick"; in ver. 5, "Now Jesus loved Lazarus" (*ἡγάπα δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς . . . τὸν Λάζαρον*); in ver. 36, "Behold, how he loved him" (*Ἴδε, πῶς ἐφίλει αὐτον*). Now, whoever the writer was, he knew Lazarus with so curious an intimacy that he was able to speak of the affection that Christ bore to him as *ἀγάπη*, the highest love, the love of moral choice. Add to this that in the Fourth Gospel only we have the account of the raising of Lazarus with its wealth of minute detail as to the actions and speech of the two sisters on the occasion. And finally, most significant of all, it is *not till after chapter xi.*, with its reiterated emphasis on the love of Jesus for Lazarus, that we find in the Gospel the mention of the "disciple whom Jesus loved."

Let us take, then, the hypothesis—bold as it seems—that Lazarus was the writer of the Gospel. Does it bear working out? Can it be fitted into the framework of the Gospel?

Now, first we note that it has a strange spiritual appositeness, if we regard the Gospel as a whole. Life and death are again and again set over against each other in the Fourth Gospel; who would be so likely to reflect on their mystery and to seek to communicate their true interpretation as the "man raised up by Christ"?

He would carry about with him all his days the strange knowledge that came to him in his four days' trance of death; and of something like such knowledge we are more conscious in this Gospel than in any other. It is the Gospel, pre-eminently, of the Resurrection life. Not only so; it is the Gospel that tells us how that life gave signs of its triumphant victory even in the weakness and dereliction of the Cross itself. Alone of the men that companied with Jesus, the "beloved disciple" can bear to stand near the Cross. Death had less of terror for him than for the others.

Now let us take in turn the four—perhaps five—passages where the mention of the beloved disciple occurs, assume that

under this name Lazarus is meant, and see how the idea works out.

1. He reclines on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper (*ἦν ἀνακείμενος εἰς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, δὲ ἡγάπα*). There is some difficulty as to the exact meaning of the order of places at the Supper; but in any case, his position is of one high in favour. We are reminded at once of a phrase in chapter xii., where Lazarus and his sisters entertained our Lord in the supper of Bethany: "Lazarus was one of those who reclined with Him" (*ἐκ τῶν ἀνακειμένων σὺν αὐτῷ*). On that occasion, perhaps, the host of Christ and His disciples, he would now be an honoured guest in turn at their table. It has always been recognized that others besides the Twelve may possibly have been present at the meal of John xiii.—St. Mark, for example—or, indeed, this supper may not have been the Passover meal at all.

2. It is usually taken for granted that the "beloved disciple" and the "other disciple" of chapter xviii. were one and the same person. If so, and if the former were Lazarus, all is as we should expect, and far more so than if we have to imagine John, son of Zebedee, as "known to the high-priest" (*cf.* Acts iv. 13). For evidently Lazarus was possessed of some property, and belonged to a fairly influential and well-known family, if we may judge by the number of Jews who came out from Jerusalem to mourn with Martha and Mary. He was buried, too, in a tomb of his own, and not in the public cemetery. Now, all this agrees very well with an acquaintance with the high-priest, and also with the detailed knowledge shown in the Gospel of the inner counsels of the ruling party in Jerusalem—knowledge which a Galilean, an "ignorant and unlearned man," would not be likely to possess. It might, too, account for his being allowed afterwards to remain so near to the Cross without molestation.

3. This brings us to chapter xix., where the "beloved disciple," standing beneath the Cross, receives the legacy of the care of the Lord's Mother from His dying lips. And, on our

supposition that that disciple was Lazarus, to what more perfect home could Christ commend His Mother in her hour of sorrow than the household of Bethany, near at hand, yet retired, and full of the love and care of the two women saints, Martha and Mary?

4. As it is Lazarus alone who can watch the dying of the Lord, so it is Lazarus who, at the first rumour of a Resurrection, runs with, and outruns, the Apostle Peter to the Sepulchre. In any case, it is remarkable how the account seeks to recall to our minds the memory of the other raising from the dead. Were it indeed Lazarus who entered the tomb, how fresh would be his memory of the grave-clothes in which his own limbs were bound, and of the napkin (*σουδαρίφ*, John xi. 44) about his face, when he saw here the linen clothes lying, and the *σουδάριον* "folded" apart from them, but their prisoner freed without mortal aid, and gone from the grave. It is easy now to conceive why he at least "saw and believed."

5. The most crucial test of all remains. It is in the twenty-first chapter that a very detailed reference to the beloved disciple occurs. He is present at the lake-side, his favoured position at the Last Supper is recalled, and some mysterious words of the Lord as to his future are recorded, together with the legend built upon them by the Church. All this is the more interesting, seeing that an almost complete list of the disciples present on the occasion is given. We have the two "sons of Zebedee," Peter, Nathaniel, Thomas; but also "two others of His disciples," unnamed. This, again, makes the identification of Lazarus with the beloved disciple possible, the more so, surely, since the mention of the "sons of Zebedee" would be somewhat strange if one of them, John, were really the disciple in question, and the writer of the account; anyhow, it would break through the silence as to his identity, which on the ordinary showing is part of the plan of the Gospel. Our point is that there is room for Lazarus' presence, and if the rumour that the beloved disciple should not die (almost incredible, one would think, as gaining currency amongst

rational men, with regard to one of their number) were concerned with such a one as Lazarus, it immediately gains a meaning. "Would he die twice?" might be the query of mere curiosity—but of a very natural curiosity, after all.

One other point of interest may be mentioned as bearing indirectly on the whole question. The probable date of the Gospel requires that its author as an eye-witness should be, at the time of the events he narrated, a very young man. Now everything that we know of Lazarus points to his being a youth, perhaps not long past boyhood. His name is the diminutive form of Eleazar. He is mentioned after his sisters in chapter xi., a very unusual order in the East, unless he were considerably younger than they. It is almost certain, moreover, that he was unmarried, and the marriageable age of Jewish youths was extremely early. In each of the other cases of recorded raising from the dead, it is remarkable that the dead were very youthful—the little daughter of Jairus, the young man at Nain—as if the Lord's "indignation" (John xi. 33, *ἐνεβριμήσατο*) were not against the natural process of death, but against death as untimely and premature. With this supposed youthfulness of Lazarus agrees the "beloved disciple's" posture of impulsive affection towards our Lord at the Last Supper, and his out-running of St. Peter as they went to the Sepulchre on the Easter morning.

One word with regard to the tradition of the Church. Space does not permit more than to point out that the tradition does not necessarily put our theory out of court, unless by "John the disciple of the Lord" is meant the son of Zebedee. And in the way of his authorship of the Gospel, there are, it will be admitted, difficulties. Apart from problems of style, it is hard to understand why a Galilean, and one of the chief members of the Twelve, should say so comparatively little about Galilee, scarcely mention the Twelve, and have nothing at all to tell of events of which he was particularly a witness—the Transfiguration, the raising of the daughter of Jairus, the Agony in the Garden. On the other hand, if the "John" of

the traditional authorship were some other disciple, he might be identical with Lazarus. Instances of twofold naming are not rare in the New Testament. Johanan (the favoured) might be also Eleazar (the God-succoured), or, indeed, as its symbolic meaning seems to suggest, the name Lazarus, used by the Lord Himself in a parable as typically common among the Jews, might have been assumed in the Gospel narrative from motives of humility or for allegorical reasons.

To sum up, then: we need as author of the Gospel one who knew much of Jerusalem and its neighbourhood, well informed as to the counsels of its rulers, and perhaps personally known to the high-priest; one versed in the mysteries of life and death; above all, beloved by Jesus, and able to tell much of His inmost mind. And we have all this precisely in Lazarus, a dweller near Jerusalem, rich and influential, raised to life after four days' experience of death; above all, one whom Christ, we are significantly told, named as *φίλος ἡμῶν*; whom He loved not only with an earthly friendship (*ἐφίλει*), but also (*ἡγάπα*) with the deepest spiritual intimacy.



Mr. Moulton's "The Witness of Israel."¹

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR JAMES ORR, D.D.

IT is pleasant to meet with a work which, while accepting the results of the newer critical analysis of the Pentateuch, can treat the religious history of Israel, and its message to the world, in a positive and reverent spirit, discarding most of the negative results with which the critical treatment is generally associated. Mr. Moulton's book does not, indeed, enter into much detail, and presents broad aspects of his subject, which leave many important facts untouched. It will be seen that we differ from him in thinking that his constructive work is quite as independent of his critical views as he supposes, but we are grateful for the general trend of the volume, in showing the fallacy of much of the modern theorizing on the religion of Israel, and demonstrating how, from the beginning, there has

¹ "The Witness of Israel." The Thirty-Ninth Fernley Lecture. By Wilfrid J. Moulton, M.A., Headingley College, Leeds. London: Robert Culley. Price 3s. 6d.