

to see God and to hear Him speak to us is one of the primitive, inherent, and deepest intuitions and necessities of the human heart. No student of Job can well believe that anything short of a supernatural revelation, and a mediator both human and Divine, can satisfy the needs of such a creature as man in such a world as this.¹ S. COX.

THE WRITER OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND
ST. JOHN.

ARE these one and the same person, or are they not? The question is too large and too important to be adequately discussed in the pages of THE EXPOSITOR, but it seems to the present writer that there are some aspects of it which may profitably be dwelt upon at no great length and in a common-sense way.

Let us take the Gospel simply as we find it, and endeavour to make out what it says, or seems to say, of itself. In so doing there are one or two preliminary matters which we must decide about. For example, we must assume the substantial integrity of the Gospel; by which we mean that the opening verses are part of the original document, that the closing chapter is not an addition from another hand, but that the *final* original and authoritative form of the Gospel was that in which we have it now. This does not affect the narrative of the woman taken in adultery, which has no bearing on the present argument, though we believe that narrative also to be original. We

¹ This argument has already been stated at greater length in the pages of THE EXPOSITOR. (See article on "Morality *versus* Revelation," in vol. i. pp. 470, *et seq.*)

must assume, moreover, that the writer, whoever he was, wished and intended to be believed. He professed to be recording what was true, and to do so in order that the truth might bring forth living fruit in those who received it. (Chap. xx. 31.) In other words, he was not indifferent as to whether or not he was believed, whether or not he was supposed to be uttering what was false or what he did not know to be true.

We may allow that this was the case even if we adopt the most extreme position and declare the Gospel to be a forgery. At least it was *awilful* forgery, the work of a man who desired and intended his work to pass for authentic narrative, and not be treated as a forgery. But a forgery it most undoubtedly would have been if, writing with such professed intentions, the author nevertheless stated what he did not know to be true merely for the sake of securing the generally beneficial results that he conceived would follow from his work. This is the sense in which we use the word "forgery:" a work is forged if it is written in the name or under the character of one who did not write it, or if, professing to be a narrative of facts, the facts it narrates are found to be fictions. In the one case a writer forges the name and style of an author, in the other he forges his own facts and incidents. We shall try to shew that if St. John's Gospel is not the work of St. John, this is in both cases what the writer has done: he has forged the style and character of St. John, and, therefore, invented his facts.

But we assume further, that, in order to secure this avowed object, the writer, whoever he was, intended

his readers to understand that he had himself a part in several of the incidents he records. He seems to imply no less in Chap. i. 14, when he says that "the Word was made flesh and *we* beheld his glory." It is, of course, possible to understand the *we* otherwise, but not so natural. Again, mention is made in Chap. xiii. of a certain disciple whom Jesus loved, who was present at the Paschal supper, at which there was no one else but Jesus and the Twelve; and this disciple is afterwards spoken of as "that other disciple," and the like, when incidents are related in which he was concerned. The question at once arises, Who is meant by this disciple? It is vain to inquire from any allusion in the Synoptical Gospels, or in the Acts, or in the Epistles of the New Testament. There is nothing there to explain it. The "other disciple," therefore, must remain a hopeless mystery, unless there is something to identify him in some way with the writer, and unless it can be discovered who the writer was. It is stated that this "other disciple" was present at the last hours of Jesus, and that his mother was consigned to his care. He was also one of the very first to believe in the resurrection of his Master, and was present at the incidents of the twenty-first chapter, from which it would seem that he was one of the seven there specified. In verse 24 of the same chapter we are assured, however, that this same disciple was the writer of the Gospel, and unless we assume, without a shadow of reason, that chapter xxi. is by a different hand, or that the last two verses were subsequently added, and form no part of the original Gospel, we cannot set this evidence aside as a proof either that "the other disciple" was

the author of it, or that the writer of the Gospel intended to pass for that other disciple whom Jesus loved.

We now come to Chapter xix. 35, which speaks of one who saw the piercing of our Lord's side, and identifies him with the narrator. It has been affirmed that this narration or witness-bearing does not refer to the authorship of the Gospel, but to the information of the circumstance which the author received. When we bear in mind, however, the use of the perfect, *hath borne witness*, and read this passage with an unbiassed mind, there can scarcely be any doubt that it is strictly after the manner of our writer, and that in it he does claim to have witnessed what he records, and therefore to identify himself with that other disciple to whom he has so frequently and so obscurely referred. Our assumptions, therefore, which do not seem to be very unwarrantable, have carried us thus far: we have in the Fourth Gospel a work of whose integrity there is no reasonable doubt; the writer had every wish and intention to be believed; he declared himself to have been one of the Twelve, the particular disciple whom Jesus loved, and the very one who had been present at and had witnessed the piercing of the side; and he mentioned these facts because they gave additional force and weight to the credibility of his statements. One does not see why these various circumstances should have been specified of "the other disciple" if the reader was not intended to understand that the writer's connection with him was very intimate, that, in fact, the two were identical. And this would equally be the case whether the Gospel were the

work of the first century, or had not been written till late in the second. Indeed, on the latter supposition, we can only account for the apparent confusion between the writer and the disciple whom he specifies but does not name, or the evident *trap* thus laid for the reader. on the supposition that it was designedly laid, and that he was intended to fall into it, and conclude that they were identical ; and in all considerations of this kind it is requisite to bear in mind that there are two positions, and two positions only, that are tenable : The Gospel must be the work of the first century, or it was not written till late in the second, and we must be careful not to mix up the conditions of the two hypotheses. If it was written in the first century, there can be little room for doubt that the writer intended to represent himself as an eye-witness, and, therefore, there is even less possibility that he was not what he pretended to be. The earlier we place the Gospel the more likely it is to have been the genuine and authentic document of an original disciple, and probably of St. John. If, on the other hand, we relegate it to the latter half of the second century, while the difficulty as to authorship is indefinitely increased, it remains equally manifest that the writer did resort to certain indications which were intended to mislead the reader, if they were not genuine tokens of his identity. He plainly threw over his work an air of verisimilitude, of simplicity and truth, which may shew, indeed, that he was the more conscious of a deep falsehood ; but if so, there can only have been one object with which this was done, namely, to impose upon the reader, which means in this case

that he was intended to believe the writer had lived a hundred years before, that he was the chosen companion of the Lord, and an original witness of his death and resurrection. But, then, we are confronted with this difficulty: Let us suppose that a person entirely unknown, and desiring in his own person to remain unknown, sat down to write this Gospel about A.D. 170, and in doing so resorted to these means of disguising his identity and seeking to give his work the appearance of an ancient and original document by one of the first disciples. He represents himself as the beloved disciple of our Lord, and as one who lay on his breast at supper. How, then, would it appear who this disciple was, or that it was St. John? Because prior to the supposed date of this Gospel there is no vestige of any tradition on these points. Apart from this Gospel we do not know that there was any beloved disciple, we do not know that John was he who lay in his Master's bosom. Every allusion to these circumstances is known to be also an allusion to this Gospel, and is recognized as a token of its existence at that time. But we find none of an earlier date, while it is obvious that a comparison of the other Gospels, or, indeed, the other writings of the New Testament, gives us no clue whatever. Now we may say that it is, in the nature of things, impossible that any one writing fictitiously in the person of another should assume such characteristics as would be incapable of recognition. Because it was not enough for this writer to be taken for some one prominent disciple, he was clearly desirous of being taken for one of the Twelve; he was clearly

desirous of being taken for the most favoured and beloved of the Twelve ; he was even desirous, as we shall presently see, of being taken for one of the seven referred to in Chapter xxi. 2.

And let this be clearly understood : the position is entirely untenable which supposes the writer of the Fourth Gospel to have wished to pass for some one disciple while he did not care which. He would not in that case have represented himself as the beloved disciple. He did not mean his readers to understand that our Lord regarded one of his disciples with feelings of exceptional love while he left them at a loss to know who it was. He did not wish them to believe that one of the Twelve lay on his bosom and to be uncertain which. For he certainly wished to be identified with this particular disciple whom he so described, and the value of his testimony depended upon it, inasmuch as uncertainty upon this point would leave his own personality obscure, and therefore his own authority uncertain. He would have defeated the object he confessed to have at heart. (Chap. xx. 31.) He virtually declares that his testimony is valuable because he is one of the Twelve, that it is the more valuable because he was the beloved one of the Twelve ; but if it was not known who this beloved one was, the special value of his testimony is thereby destroyed—nay, the value of it altogether is destroyed, because there is no evidence but his to shew that there was any such person as the beloved disciple, or that any disciple lay on the bosom of his Master. This writer wishes to be believed, he advances peculiar personal claims to such belief, and yet the claims he advances are unsubstan-

tial and imaginary, as they turn out to be nothing but his own invention. He comes before the world as a writer of special credibility upon certain grounds, but these grounds are discovered upon investigation to be altogether illusory, and to exist only upon the supposition of previous knowledge in the reader's mind, which we are able to shew to demonstration could not have been there. That is to say, no reader of the Fourth Gospel in A.D. 170 could have known or understood from that Gospel alone who was meant by the beloved disciple, or who had lain on Jesus' breast, because no tradition to that effect was anywhere to be found, and the Gospel itself could not have created it, for from the Gospel itself it was anything but clear. The Gospel did indeed leave its readers with the information that the beloved disciple was its writer, and on that account was entitled to their acceptance; but for the solution of the previous and inevitable question, who that disciple was, it gave no information, and in the minds of its readers there was none whatever to solve it.

And yet the universal and unfaltering tradition of the Church since the last quarter of the second century has been that the beloved disciple was St. John, and even Mr. Tayler allows ("Fourth Gospel," p. 163) that there can be no doubt that St. John was meant to be understood by the disciple who lay on Jesus' breast. (Chap. xiii. 23.) We ask, then, How understood? How was it possible to be understood? On the hypothesis, up to A.D. 170 the Church had no knowledge whatever of any such person as the beloved disciple—had no knowledge or recollection of any one disciple having lain on his Master's bosom. About

that period a work appears, professing to be written by this very disciple, and constructed on the assumption that some one disciple was especially beloved and did lie on his bosom. And even after the appearance of that work, for a period of some sixteen hundred years there never was so much as a doubt breathed that this particular disciple was St. John. How was it possible that such a belief could arise? how was it possible there should be no variation in the belief?

Impugnors of the genuineness of the Fourth Gospel, then, who take this ground, namely, that the writer intended it to be understood that St. John was the disciple in Chapter xiii. who lay in Jesus' bosom, but that his Gospel was nevertheless a forgery, seem altogether to have overlooked some of the necessities of their position, which virtually render it untenable. If, from other sources, there was any reason to believe that a knowledge had obtained in the Church prior to A.D. 170 that John had been a favoured disciple, and had lain on his Master's bosom, then we can conceivably suppose that a work appearing at that date, and purporting to be written by that disciple, might have been able to maintain its ground as his, and for the simple reason that it claimed to be his. But if there is no trace of any such knowledge or belief prior to the assumed date of the Gospel, how could this be? The Gospel could not create the basis upon which itself existed. Had the basis been there, it might have been reared upon it; but not being there, what was there for the assumption of the Gospel to appeal to, or how was it to explain itself? Unless the existence of adequate tradi-

tion to that effect can be shewn, it is suicidal to maintain that by the beloved disciple St. John was meant, and that the first work which so designated him, and appeared about A.D. 170, was a forgery.

More difficult to deal with is the position taken by many that the writer of the Gospel intended to represent himself as the beloved disciple who lay on Jesus' bosom, and as the witness and recorder of the piercing of the side, but that there is not sufficient evidence to shew that he was intended to be taken for John the son of Zebedee. We ask, then, for whom did he intend to be taken? If it was not generally known in A.D. 170 who the beloved disciple was, it is certain that he could not have intended to be taken for John the son of Zebedee on the ground of that designation, because the same reasons are of force which had weight in the previous case. But upon closer investigation it will appear that the writer in all probability knew what he meant, and intended others to know what he meant, by the beloved disciple. For there are two points in this matter which appear to be tolerably clear—one that the writer did intend darkly to indicate himself, and the other that he did not intend wholly to disclose his identity. On the latter there can be scarcely any room for doubt, as even if he intended to pass for St. John, he nowhere so much as mentions his name, any more than he mentions the name of James or of Mary the mother of our Lord; while on the former it is inconceivable that any one speaking as this writer did should have said what he said for any other purpose than to give the colour of that identity which, on the supposition of forgery, he did not care

to assume more openly, though he was quite in earnest in going so far as he actually went.

We proceed to shew, then, that this writer has actually left but little doubt, and therefore we suppose designedly left but little doubt, whom he meant to personate by professing to be, as he clearly did, the beloved disciple. In Chapter xiii. the beloved disciple is certainly one of the Twelve (Chap. vi. 70), but in Chapter xxi. it is almost absolutely certain that he is one of the seven mentioned in verse 2. Unless this is the case we must arbitrarily and unnaturally assume that he suddenly appeared upon the scene at verse 20. It is just possible that this may be so, but it is, we may safely say, in the highest degree improbable that it should. It is almost certain that no other persons were included in the action of Chapter xxi. than those enumerated in verse 2 ; and thus it is no less certain that the beloved disciple of verse 20 and the writer of verse 24 was one of the seven there named.

But which of these seven ? Again, we observe in passing that, if it is clear from the narrative itself who he was or was not, that degree of clearness must be ascribed to the deliberate intention of the writer and to nothing else. Now, it is certain he was not Peter, because Peter is named in verse 20 *with* the beloved disciple. It is certain also that he could not have been Thomas, because the beloved disciple was the first to believe in the Lord's resurrection (Chap. xx. 8), and Thomas would not believe on the testimony of him and the rest (verse 25). As Nathanael of Cana in Galilee is nowhere else mentioned but at the end of Chapter i., it is in the highest

degree improbable, if not absolutely certain, that he could not have been Nathanael, as, indeed, on other grounds he could not, unless Nathanael was identical with Bartholomew; for the beloved disciple was certainly one of the Twelve. We are reduced, then, to the two sons of Zebedee and the two other of his disciples who are not named. The fact that the phrase, "the other disciple," in which the writer, we assume, speaks of himself, is common to these two, might lead to the inference that the writer intended us to identify him with one of them, but studiously declined to reveal his identity any further. As, however, this Chapter seems to aim at disclosing this identity and not leaving the reader in darkness, it is plain that if the writer wished us to adopt this conclusion he would defeat his own object. We conclude, therefore, that the writer was certainly not one of the "two other of his disciples." There remain, therefore, only the two sons of Zebedee. Now, it is quite certain that any one writing in A.D. 170 could not have intended to represent himself as the Apostle James, or to suggest the inference that *he* was the author of this Gospel. It is all but absolutely certain, then, that the writer intended us to arrive, by this exhaustive process, at the conclusion that he was the other son of Zebedee, the Apostle John himself. At all events, we may say that a fictitious writer of A.D. 170, who left it capable of being thus demonstrably shewn that he might be reasonably accused of a design of passing himself off as the Apostle John, is justly and truly responsible for such a conclusion being drawn. And we may estimate, if we care to do so, the possibility there is of affirming that the writer of this Gospel

did certainly represent himself as the beloved disciple, and at the same time declaring that he did not intend to pass himself off or be taken for the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee. In fact, we cannot halt between the two conclusions. It is as certain as anything that can be proved by internal evidence that the writer of the Fourth Gospel professed to be one of the Twelve, that he professed to be that disciple whom Jesus loved, that he professed to have witnessed the piercing of the side, to have been one of the first at the sepulchre, and to have been one of the seven at the Sea of Tiberias after the resurrection, with no one of whom he can possibly have been identified with half the degree of probability there is that he was St. John himself. The position, therefore, that we are brought to is this : If the Gospel is a forgery, it is a forgery in everything but the actual name of the Apostle John. The writer was so ambitious, that, not content with passing for one of the Twelve, he must actually pass for one of the favoured three who, we know from the other records, were often admitted to closer nearness to their Master, and, indeed, for the only one of the three with whom he can be confounded. We may safely affirm, therefore, that the internal evidence of the Fourth Gospel, so far as its testimony to its own authorship goes, is distinctly and demonstrably in favour of its Johannine authorship. If it is a fictitious composition, there is and can be no mistake as to the nature of the fiction. If it is a forgery, it is a forgery of the deepest dye. It is a work which leaves it to be almost certainly concluded that it was the production of that St. John who was the beloved disciple of Jesus, and lay on his

breast at supper ; and it has thrown upon the Church and the world the onus and the responsibility of disproving its claims. And it has concealed its design so artfully and worn its disguise so skilfully that for sixteen hundred years no doubting or ambiguous voice was ever heard. And yet, let us not suppose that even then the difficulty of our position is at an end. All we have said so far only tends to shew that, if the Gospel is not genuine, it is the greater and more deliberate forgery. But we must not yet abandon the assumption that it was written about A.D. 170. We have still, on that supposition, to account for the universal belief of the Church that the beloved disciple was St. John. And this, as before, has to be accounted for in the absence of all tradition to that effect earlier than the supposed date of the Gospel, so that the previous dilemma still recurs. As far as the present writer is aware, this method of arriving at the testimony of the Gospel to its own authorship has not been adopted by any one else. But we must suppose that all those who first became acquainted with the Gospel in the last quarter of the second century arrived at a knowledge of its author, and at the discovery of the problem who the beloved disciple was, in this and in no other way. Certainly what has been done once may have been done before, and may be done again ; but it is not too much to say that any such method would seem to have been altogether alien from the modes of thought prevalent in the Church of the second century. Indeed, we may question whether, had there been no earlier tradition to solve the mystery, the tradition itself would ever have arisen. Supposing

the Gospel to have been written about A.D. 170, we do not say that no one could have found out from the Gospel itself who the beloved disciple was, but that it is in the highest degree improbable that this was the way in which the tradition of John having been the beloved disciple, and having lain upon his Master's breast at supper, was first presented to the belief and knowledge of the Church; and that, on its being so presented, the Church at once and unanimously and continuously accepted the invention as a fact, and ever afterwards identified the author of the Gospel with him concerning whom he had himself originated the tradition.

And yet this is the position, and the only position, to which we are reduced if we accept the more modern theory as to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. The matter, therefore, resolves itself into a choice of greater or less improbabilities. Is it more improbable that John the son of Zebedee, being really the beloved and favoured disciple of our Lord, and being known from the first to be so, but being naturally backward in claiming the high distinction and the great honour so conferred upon him, and being naturally desirous of obtruding it to his own glory as little as possible, should in advanced life have felt it incumbent upon him to record his own personal and cherished recollections of his Master and his Master's teaching and his Master's love, and that in such a way as to give the work all the higher authority it would derive from connection with himself, and in so doing should have sought in every conceivable way to withdraw himself, as far as possible, from the reader's notice,—as far as possible,

that is, as would be consistent with the obvious requirements of duty and the needs of his time and of the Church;—or that an absolutely unknown writer, in an age singularly barren of great writers, should have produced fictitiously, and indeed have forged a work of absolutely unequalled literary merit; and, not content with any such literary achievement, should have endeavoured to impose upon the world for all time, and have successfully imposed upon it, by the most delicately insinuated suggestion that the imaginary record of the life and teaching of Christ which he had produced was the veritable work of one of the Twelve, though he left it to the ingenuity of an unlearned and unskilful age to discover which of the Twelve could be meant, while he further designated and described his own particular and elect disciple by epithets and attributes which appear to have been entirely unknown in the Church till he called them into existence and secured their adoption for ever afterwards as part of the most cherished heritage of the Christian society? Is it, in fact, more improbable that a writer who disguises his identity with St. John so carefully, and yet reveals it so perceptibly to the critical eye as the author of the Fourth Gospel does, should have been unknown and undiscovered for all time, or that the writer of that Gospel should have been one and the same individual with St. John, as he most undoubtedly claims to be? ¹

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¹ The reader is referred further to a paper entitled "The Disciple whom Jesus loved" (*THE EXPOSITOR*, vol. ii. pp. 453-64), and to the present writer's "Boyle Lectures" for 1870.