

"JOHN THE PRESBYTER" WAS "JOHN THE
APOSTLE."

THE majority of those who have questioned the authenticity of the Apocalypse have assigned it to a supposed younger contemporary of the Apostle, who, they say, was known in the early Church as "John the Presbyter". If it can be shewn that the very existence of "John the Presbyter" is in the highest degree problematical, great additional force will be given to the already strong proofs that the Apocalypse, the Gospel, and the Epistles are indeed the work of the Evangelist St. John. In recent times the supposed existence of this "nebulous Presbyter" has been made an excuse for denying altogether the work and the residence of St. John in Asia.¹

I have long doubted whether there ever was such a person as this "John the Presbyter," and I had arrived at this conclusion, and arranged my reasons for holding it, before I saw the paper of Prof. Milligan in the *Journal of Sacred Literature* for October, 1868.² The papers of Riggenbach (*Jahrb. für deutsche Theologie*, vol. xiii. p. 319), and of Zahn in the *Studien und Kritiken* for 1866, I have not yet seen, nor Zahn's *Acta Johannis* (1880). I have purposely ab-

¹ Vogel, *Der Evang. Johannes*, 1800. Lützelberger, *Die kirchl. Tradition über d. Ap. Johannes*, 1840. Keim, *Gesch. Jesu von Nazara*, vol. i, p. 160, ff. Scholten, *Der Ap. Johan. in Klein-Azië*, 1871. Holtzmann, *Eph. und Kolosserbriefe*, 1872. On the other side see W. Grimm, *Johannes*, in Ersch and Grüber. Baur, *Gesch. d. christl. Kirche*, vol. i. pp. 82-147, etc. Krenkel, *Der Apost. Johannes*, pp. 133-178. Strauss, Schwegler, Zeller, Hilgenfeld, even Volkmar all reject the new theory. Renan (*L'Antechrist*, pp. 557-589) only thinks that Scholten has succeeded in relegating the facts to a sort of penumbra.

² I differ from Prof. Milligan in his interpretation of the meaning of Papias.

stained from consulting them in order that I might state my argument in my own way and as it occurred to myself. I do not think that any one can charge it with being over-sceptical, and it will have been useful if it helps in ever so small a degree to get rid of "a shadow which has been mistaken for a reality," "a sort of Sosia of the Apostle, who troubles like a spectre the whole history of the Church of Ephesus."¹

The question of the separate existence of a "John the Presbyter" turns mainly upon the meaning of a passage of Papias quoted by Eusebius, and upon the criticism of that passage by Eusebius himself.

Let us first see the passage of Papias.

In his "Exposition of Oracles of the Lord" (*Δογίων Κυριακῶν ἐξήγησις*) Papias had assigned to himself the task of preserving with his best diligence and accuracy, and of interweaving in his five books, the apostolic traditions which were still attainable.

"I shall not scruple," he says, "to place side by side with my interpretations all the things that I ever rightly learned from the Elders and rightly remembered, solemnly affirming their truthfulness." Then, after telling us that, unlike most men, he was indifferent to mere idle gossip and second-hand information, and sought for direct evidence as to the words of Christ, he adds: "but also if at any time any one came who had been acquainted with the Elders, I used to enquire about the discourses of the Elders—what Andrew or what Peter said (*εἶπεν*), or what Thomas or James, or what John or Matthew, or any one of the disciples of the Lord; and what Aristion and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord say (*λέγουσι*). For I thought that the information derived from books would not be so profitable to me, as that derived from a living and abiding utterance."²

¹ Renan, *L'Antechrist*, p. xxiii.

² As the question turns on the meaning of this passage, I append the Greek.

The general meaning of this passage is clear. The good Bishop of Hierapolis tells us that he wished, in setting forth his "interpretations," to derive all the information he could from the fountain head. We learn from St. Luke himself that, before he wrote his Gospel, many had already attempted to perform a similar task, and the Evangelist evidently implies that he was dissatisfied with the majority of such efforts. It is even a fair inference from the expressions which he uses that some of these narratives were founded on insufficient knowledge and were lacking in carefulness. It is quite possible that these tentative sketches of the Gospel narrative—all of which have now perished—admitted apocryphal particulars or narrated true circumstances with erroneous details. Such documents would be sure to contain some contradictions, and would create much uncertainty in the minds of Christians. The Four Gospels were written in fulfilment of an imperative need. Now if imperfect or unauthorized works such as the sketches to which St. Luke alludes had come under the notice of Papias, he would naturally regard them with suspicion, and would feel that their uncertainties discredited their authority. He was indeed acquainted with the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, and perhaps, though I do not think that this can be regarded as certain, with the Gospel of St. John.¹ But stories were floating about, such for instance as that respecting the death of Judas

οὐκ ἀκνήσω δέ σοι καὶ ὅσα ποτὲ παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καλῶς ἔμαθον καὶ καλῶς ἐμνημόνευσα συγκατάξει ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις διαβεβαιούμενος ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀλήθειαν. . . .
 Εἰ δέ που καὶ παρακολουθηκῶς τις τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις ἔλθοι τοὺς τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀνέκρινον λόγους· τί 'Ανδρέας ἢ τί Πέτρος εἶπεν ἢ τί Φίλιππος ἢ τί 'Ιωάννης ἢ Ματθαῖος, ἢ τίς τῶν Κυρίου μαθητῶν, ἄτε 'Αριστίων καὶ ὁ πρεσβύτερος 'Ιωάννης ὁ τοῦ Κυρίου μαθηταὶ λέγουσιν. Οὐ γὰρ τὰ ἐκ τῶν βιβλίων τοσούτων με ὠφελεῖν ὑπελάμβανον, ὅσον τὰ παρὰ ζώσης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσης.—Papias, *Ap. Euseb. H. E.*, iii. 39.

¹ Eusebius does not quote any certain allusion of Papias to the Gospel of St. St. John, but in an argument prefixed to a Vatican MS. of the ninth century, we are told that he testified to its genuineness; and a quotation from "the Elders," in Irenæus, may be derived from Papias. Westcott, *On the Canon*, p. 77. Papias used the First Epistle of St. John.

Iscariot, and that about "a woman accused before our Lord of many sins," which diverged more or less from the accounts in the Gospels. Papias felt that he would be rendering a service to the Church if he collected from eye-witnesses all the *authentic* information which could still be gathered as to facts. It was even more important to him and to the Church to learn the accurate truth about asserted *doctrines*. If "the books" to which he refers included, as Bishop Lightfoot has conjectured,¹ some of the mystic heresies and absurdities of the early Gnostics, they fully deserved the tone of depreciation in which he speaks of them. He was acting wisely in endeavouring to bring to a focus the last glimmerings of direct Apostolic tradition.

It seems, then, that he had long been in the habit—perhaps even since his boyhood—of gleaning from every available source the testimony of the Twelve Apostles. His book was probably written after the last Apostle was dead, and he considered that it owed much of its importance to the old traditions which he had gathered while it was yet possible to do so. In the passage which I have quoted he is not speaking of present times, but is referring to what he used to do in the days of his youth and early manhood.

Now certainly if Papias had been a careful modern writer we should have inferred from this passage that the John mentioned in the first clause was a different person from the John mentioned in the second. In the first, he says, that it had been his habit to enquire from any who had known "the Elders"—of whom he specially mentions seven Apostles—what these "Elders" *said*; and also "what Aristion and John the Elder, the disciples of the Lord, *say*."

But although this would be the *natural* inference, it is

¹ *Contemporary Review*, August, 1867, and August, 1875.

by no means the *certain* inference. The antithesis may be between the past and present tense ("said" and "say"), and not between two sources of original information. There is nothing whatever to forbid the explanation that when Papias met any one who had known the immediate Apostles and disciples of the Lord—St. John among them—he made notes of what (according to their information) these Elders said; but while he was writing this clause he remembered that, at the time when he was making his notes of this direct oral information, two of the immediate disciples of the Lord were not dead but living; namely, Aristion—to whom, since he was not an Apostle, he does not give the title of "Elder"—and John, whom he identifies with those whom he has mentioned in the first class by calling him, as he had called them, "the Elder."

Certainly such a way of expressing himself would shew that Papias was a man who wrote in a very simple and loose style; but this is exactly what we know to have been the case. It is true that, in one place, if the clause be genuine, Eusebius calls him "a man in all respects of the greatest erudition and well acquainted with Scripture."¹ But the genuineness of this eulogistic clause is very uncertain, since it is omitted in several manuscripts, as well as by Rufinus, and (which is important) in an ancient Syriac Version. Three chapters further on Eusebius tells us that Papias was "a man of exceedingly small intelligence, as one may infer from his own writings."² Such a man might easily write in a confused style. One at least of the passages which Eusebius quotes from the "Exposition" bears out his unfavourable opinion of the ancient bishop's ability. Nor are we left to form our judgment of his style solely on the opinion of Eusebius. Another of

¹ ἀνὴρ τὰ πάντα ἐπι μάλιστα λογώτατος. Euseb., *H. E.*, iii. 36.

² σφόδρα μικρὸς ὦν τὸν νοῦν ὡς ἀν ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων τεκμηρῶμενον εἰπεῖν. *Id.*, iii. 39.

the passages which the historian quotes from Papias (and to which I have referred further on) is equally wanting in precision, and is therefore susceptible of more than one interpretation.

I. Now, first of all, no difficulty can arise as to the title given to St. John. Papias calls all the other Apostles "the Elders," and it is only natural to assume that he gives the same title to St. John in the same sense. The word "Elder," like the word "Apostle," had two different senses. In its ordinary sense it was applicable to many hundreds of persons, for it meant any Christian who was member of a Presbytery. But it had a *special* sense in which it meant one who belonged to the earliest generation of Christians. In this sense it is constantly used by Irenæus, and is applied to Papias himself, though he was not a Presbyter but a Bishop of Hierapolis, and though by the time of Irenæus the distinction between "Bishop" and "Presbyter," which is not found in the writings of the New Testament, had been gradually introduced. If the Second and Third Epistles of St. John be, as the Church has generally inferred, by the same author as the first, the case is strengthened for identifying "John the Elder" with "John the Apostle," for in both those Epistles St. John gives himself this very title. That it was in no sense inappropriate may be seen from the fact that St. Peter, in addressing Elders, calls himself their "fellow Elder."¹ Besides this, when used with the definite article, it would be a title of great significance, and yet would accord with the modesty and reticence which were habitual with St. John. There was no need for the last survivor of the Apostles to give himself the title of "Apostle," to which, in its loftiest sense, all men knew that he had an undisputed claim. He did not wish to assert his own immense authority. But in calling himself "the Elder"

¹ 1 Pet. v. 1.

he used a term doubly impressive. He implies that he was an Elder in a peculiar sense, both because he was entitled from his great age to respect and reverence, and also because he was raised above the rest of Elders by the dignity of his position as the last of the Twelve, and the last of those who could say "I have seen the Lord." So far then we see that, whether they were the same person or not, the John in the first clause and the John in the second are each characterized by two identical titles. Each is called an "Elder," and each is called "a disciple of the Lord." Surely if Papias had wished to describe two different persons, he would have given some separate and distinctive title to the second and inferior John. It is a reasonable inference that Papias is only mentioning the same person twice over in an intelligible, though loose and inartistic way, to distinguish between reports of his sayings which were brought to him when St. John was yet living and after he was dead.

But, besides this, I am far from sure that the sentence is not loosely constructed in another sense. By the figures of speech called *zeugma* and *syllipsis*, the same word, even in the most classical writers and in all languages, is often made to serve two purposes in the same sentence. A verb is often used with two clauses which is only appropriate to one of them, as in Pope's line—

"See Pan with flocks, with fruits Pomona crowned,"

where from the participle "crowned" we must understand the word "surrounded" to suit the first half of the line. In other instances we are compelled by the sense to borrow from one verb another which may be even opposite in meaning, as in St. Paul's—

*κωλύοντων γαμῆν, ἀπέχεσθαι βρωμάτων.*¹

"Forbidding to marry, [commanding] to abstain from

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 3, comp. *γάλα ὑμᾶς ἐπίτισα οὐ βρωμα*, 1 Cor. iii. 2.

meats," where from *καλλόντων* (forbidding) we must understand *κελεπόντων* (commanding) to suit the second clause.¹ It is then perfectly legitimate to understand Papias to mean that he *used to enquire* what Peter, John, etc., *said*, and when opportunity occurred *used to make personal notes* of what Aristion and John *say*. What he derived from St. John would, if such were his meaning, have been of two descriptions, namely, (1) Reports of his conversations from others, and (2), Actual notes of his living testimony taken down in intercourse with the Apostle himself when Papias was young. And that Eusebius is not guilty of mere carelessness in interpreting him to mean that he actually heard "John the Elder" is, I think, shewn by the words which follow, in which Papias, thinking mainly of his last clause, speaks of the importance of the "living and abiding voice." Indeed, he says in his opening sentence that some of his notes were derived from immediate intercourse with some of these "Elders" *as well as* (*εἰ δὲ καὶ κ.τ.λ.*) from trustworthy reports of what they had said to others.

There are, then, two strong arguments for construing the sentences of Papias as I have here proposed. They are all the stronger because they are both derived from Eusebius himself, though he may be called the original inventor of the theory about "John the Presbyter."²

(1) One of these arguments is that Eusebius so construed the sentence. He indeed makes the "John the Elder" of the first clause a different person from the "John the Elder" of the second clause, but he paraphrases the sentence thus: "Papias testifies that he had received the sayings of the Apostles from those who had been acquainted with them,

¹ This is called *zeugma*; in *syllipsis* the same word is taken in two different senses. Now *ἀνακρίνω* means "I examine," "sift," or "question."

² Dionysius of Alexandria had given a timid hint that there *might* have been such a person, but Eusebius, by a bold criticism, assumes that there was.

but says *that he had been himself a hearer of Aristion and of John the Elder.*" He has been accused of error and carelessness in thus understanding the sentence, but I think that I have shewn his construction of it to be, so far, perfectly justifiable.

(2) The other argument is that Eusebius, in an earlier book, the *Chronicon*, says without any hesitation, that *Papias was a hearer of St. John the Apostle.*¹ Now that this was the truer and more unbiassed conclusion seems clear on other grounds. I shall shew later on that "the Elder" is quoted for statements which could hardly have come from any but an Apostle. And besides the ancient and frequent *testimony* that Papias had seen and conversed with St. John the Apostle, it would be inconceivable *a priori* that one who was searching for first hand and authentic testimony should never have taken the trouble to go the short distance from Hierapolis to Ephesus to consult an Apostle of the highest authority, who was then living at Ephesus as the acknowledged head of the Asiatic Church.

The argument, therefore, that Eusebius was more likely than we are to have known whether there was or was not a "John the Presbyter," and whether Papias was *his* hearer or the hearer of St. John the Apostle, because Eusebius possessed all the writings of Papias, and we do not, falls signally to the ground. Indeed, it tells the other way. In his *History* he *reasons himself into the belief* that Papias was only the pupil of "the Presbyter;" but he had all the writings of Papias in his hand when he wrote the *Chronicon*, and there he says,² without any hesitation, that Papias was a pupil of the Apostle. "John the Presbyter" is the creature of Eusebius's later criticism. If he could have quoted from Papias a single other passage which in any way

¹ So, too, *Iren.*, *Hær.*, v. 33. Ἰωάννου μὲν ἀκουστής, Πολυκάρπου δὲ ἐταῖρος γεγονώς. It is monstrous to suppose that Irenæus would use the simple word "John" if he only meant the Presbyter.

² Euseb., *Chron. Olymp.*, 220.

countenanced his existence, there would have been no need to base his existence upon a mere conjecture.

On the other hand, the belief that Papias really had seen and heard the Apostle St. John rests not upon conjecture, but upon the distinct testimony of Irenæus, who says that Papias was "a hearer of John, and an associate (*ἑταῖρος*) of Polycarp."¹ That the John intended is the Apostle—the only John of whom Irenæus knew anything—is sufficiently clear, because Irenæus in his letters to Victor and to Florinus, distinctly says so.² Besides this, Apollinarius, who succeeded Papias as Bishop of Hierapolis, and was therefore specially likely to be well informed, says that both Polycarp and Papias were hearers of the Apostle. Jerome, in his *De Viris Illustribus*, says the same. Till very recent times no one ever breathed a doubt that *Polycarp* had been a hearer of the Apostle, and had by him been appointed Bishop of Smyrna.³ If then Polycarp was a hearer of the Apostle, there can be no difficulty in accepting the testimony that Papias, who was a friend and contemporary of Polycarp, had enjoyed the same peculiar privilege.

II. But now let us examine more closely the criticism of Eusebius (*H. E.*, iii. 39) upon the passage of Papias. He says "that Papias mentions the name of John twice, and in the first clause places him with Peter and the rest of the Apostles, clearly indicating the Evangelist; but that in the second clause he ranks him with others who were not Apostles, placing Aristion before him, and he distinctly calls him 'an Elder;' so that even in this way he indicates the truth of the statements of those who have said that there were two who had the same name in Asia, and that

¹ Iren., *Hæc.*, v. 33. So too Eecumenius, on Acts ii.; Anastasius Sinaita, *Hexæm.*, vii.; and Nicephorus, *H. E.*, iii. 20.

² *Ap. Euseb.*, *H. E.*, v. 20-24.

³ Tert., *De Praescr. Hæc.*, v. 30.

there were two tombs in Ephesus, and that each is still called 'a tomb of John.' We ought to attend to these facts, for it is probable that it was the *second* John who saw the Apocalypse which passes under the name of John, unless one wishes to believe that it was the first."

It should be most carefully observed that Eusebius does not here profess to know anything whatever about this "John the Elder," and that he is not quite fair in saying that Papias calls him "*an* Elder." Papias did not call him "*an* Elder," but "*the* Elder," which may be a very different thing. Eusebius also fails to notice that the "John" of the second clause is described by exactly the same two designations as the John of the first clause, namely, as one of the "Elders," and as a "disciple of the Lord." Eusebius is only led to infer that there was a John, who was not the Apostle, (1) by his interpretation of this single passage; (2) by the fact that "some" had said so; and (3) because these persons stated that there were still two tombs at Ephesus which were known by the name of John. Whatever may be thought as to the ingenuity of his reasoning, Eusebius furnishes the most complete refutation of his own theory by the inability to produce a single grain of testimony or even of tradition in favour of the view that this separate "Presbyter" had ever existed.

Two questions then arise:—

a. Why was Eusebius so anxious to believe in the existence of this "John the Presbyter"?

β. Who were the "some" on whose testimony he relies?

a. The answers to both questions are very easy. Eusebius disliked the Apocalypse. He seldom quotes it. In one passage he refers to it as possibly (εἰ γε φανεῖν) spurious, and in another as possibly (εἰ γε φανεῖν) genuine, leaving the decision very much to the reader himself. He was extremely opposed to the fanatical and sensuous Chiliasm, which

derived its sole support from perversions of that book; and on this ground he was inclined to look down upon the old Bishop of Hierapolis, with his credulous stories and Judaic sympathies. If the millennial traditions which Papias had collected in his "Expositions" could be dissociated from the authority of the Apostle, and made to rest on that of an unknown and sub-apostolic personage, it would be more easy to set them aside.

β. As to the "some" to whom Eusebius alludes, they probably reduce themselves to Dionysius of Alexandria, just as the "some" to whom Dionysius himself alludes as disparaging the Apocalypse probably reduce themselves to the Alogi. At any rate, the only trace of a conjecture as to the existence of "John the Presbyter" previous to Irenæus, is in the famous criticism on the Apocalypse by Dionysius. In that criticism, preserved for us only by Eusebius (*H. E.*, vii. 25), the learned Patriarch of Alexandria says that it is clear from the testimony of the book itself that a "John" wrote the Apocalypse, but that instead of calling himself "the disciple beloved by the Lord" (as in the Gospel), or "the brother of James," or "one who has actually seen and heard the Lord," which would have clearly indicated his individuality, he only calls himself "your brother and fellow in affliction," and "a witness of Jesus," and "blessed because he saw and heard these revelations." "Now I think," continues Dionysius, "that there have been many who bore the same name as John the Apostle, who loved that designation out of their love, and admiration, and emulation for him, and because they wished to be loved of the Lord as he was; just as many children are named after Paul and Peter. Nay, there is even another John in the Acts of the Apostles, who bore the surname of Mark. I cannot say whether this be the John who wrote the Apocalypse, for it is not recorded that he went with them (Barnabas and Paul) into Asia; but I think that it was

some other John of those who were in Asia, since some even say that there are two tombs in Ephesus each of which is called 'the tomb of John.'"

If the "some" to whom Eusebius appeals include any one except Dionysius of Alexandria, and those who had given him his information, we have at any rate no clue as to who they were. Had they been persons of special authority, or with special opportunities of knowing the facts, Eusebius would have told us something about them. And what does the evidence furnished by Dionysius amount to *Not* (be it observed) to the statement that *there were two Johns*, but only that John was a common name, and that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which was pointed out by the local ciceroni as a tomb of John! He does not even pretend to imply that they were the tombs of *two* Johns. On the contrary each was asserted to be the tomb of the Apostle.

III. Could any reader of modern German criticisms believe that beyond this we know absolutely nothing about John the Presbyter, as distinct from John the Apostle?¹ And how baseless a foundation is this for the superstructure which has been raised upon it! Dionysius wrote about the middle of the third century,² when John had been laid in his grave for at least a century and a half. There is no tradition worth the name as to the place and manner of the Apostle's death; and, in the absence of authentic information, it was believed or assumed that he died at Ephesus. Since this was the common belief, it was quite natural that the Christians who visited Ephesus should ask to be shewn the grave of John.³

¹ No importance can be attached by any one to the guess or invention of the *Apostolical Constitutions* (vii. 46), that the Presbyter succeeded the Apostle as Bishop of Ephesus.

² He succeeded to the Presidency of the Catechetical School at Alexandria in A.D. 231.

³ Similarly the "trophies" of Peter and Paul were pointed out at Rome as early as the days of the Presbyter Gaius (A.D. 213).

Now the duplicate sites of many other "holy places" in Palestine and elsewhere shew that if, in a case where there was no certainty, *one* supposed grave was pointed out, it was a very likely result that there should be *two*. The two graves were merely rival sites for a spot which, if either of them were genuine, would be full of interest. Yet from so small a basis, Dionysius—who, though he speaks reverently of the Apocalypse, could not persuade himself that it was the work of the Apostle—first infers that there were two Johns; and, secondly, that one of them may have been sufficiently famous to be the author of the Revelation.

That Dionysius is merely clutching at a theory is proved by his half suggestion that the author may have been John Mark the Evangelist; a suggestion in which, so far as I am aware, he had no follower for 1500 years, when the same theory found isolated supporters, first in Beza,¹ then in Hitzig.² St. Mark is traditionally connected with Alexandria, but there is no vestige of a trace that he had any connexion with the Churches of Proconsular Asia.

But, further than this, his suggestion proves a great deal more than he intended by it. This second John, if he existed at all, must have been an exile in Patmos, and a person of such immense and acknowledged influence as to be able to address the Seven Churches of Asia with almost more than Apostolic authority. But, as we can now prove, the Apocalypse was written about A.D. 68; and if John the Presbyter at that time exercised so powerful a sway over Asia, then there is little or no room left for the work of John the Apostle. Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus (A.D. 196), spoke of John the Apostle and Philip as the two great lights of Asia; but if John the Presbyter is the exile of

¹ Beza, *Prolegom. in Apoc.*, p. 744. "Quod si quid aliud liceret ex stylo conjiere, nemini certe potius quam Marco tribuerim, qui et ipse Joannes dictus est" (Lücke, *Einleit. in d. Offenbar.*, p. 780).

² *Ueber Joh. Markus*, 1843.

Patmos and the author of the Second and Third Epistles, he must have been, on the evidence of these writings, a "light of Asia" whose splendour was much more powerful than that of Philip, and one which makes the name even of the Apostle grow somewhat pale.

If the Presbyter wrote the Apocalypse, a large part of the evidence for the Asiatic residence of St. John falls to the ground. This is the actual result arrived at by Scholten, Lipsius, Keim, and other Dutch and German theologians, who fall back on the unauthorized and dubious quotation of a Papias by Georgius Hamartolos, to the effect that John the Apostle was martyred by the Jews. Dionysius shews no trace of such wild conclusions, though they would naturally spring from his own conjecture; and, as for Georgius Hamartolos, we have all the less scruple in setting aside his supposed quotation, because none of his predecessors for eight centuries know anything about it, and because in the very same sentence he has flagrantly mis-stated the known opinion of Origen.¹

IV. Keim dwells much on the fact that little or no mention is made of the Asiatic work of St. John till the close of the second century. It is not mentioned, he says, in the Acts of the Apostles, nor in the Ignatian Epistles, nor in Polycarp's letter to the Philippians, nor in the letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne. The answer to this difficulty, if it be one, is twofold. It is that, in the first place, there was no special reason why it should have been mentioned in any one of these documents; and that, in the second place, the "argument from silence" is always a most untrustworthy way of attempting to throw doubts on facts for which there is positive evidence. Are we to doubt the existence of Milton or of Jeremy Taylor—of Bacon or of

¹ Georgius Hamartolos not only quotes Papias for the assertion that St. John had been martyred by the Jews, but says that Origen thought so too, which is the reverse of the fact. (Orig. *in Matt.*, *Opp.* iii. 719, *ed.* Delarue.)

Shakspeare—because these contemporaries make no allusion to each other in their voluminous writings? Humboldt points out that in the Archives of Barcelona there is no trace of an event so important as the triumphal entry of Columbus; in Marco Polo's travels no mention of the wall of China; in the Archives of Portugal no allusion to the travels of Amerigo Vespucci.¹ Michelet, in his History of France, observes that the two chief historians of the Sicilian Vespers make no mention whatever of Procida, though he was undoubtedly the chief mover in that terrible event.² The *argumentum ex silentio* may be set aside as wholly unimportant. Moreover, in this instance, it is singularly inappropriate, since it tells with redoubled force against the very existence of any separate "John the Presbyter," who is passed over in still profounder silence by all sources of information alike.

It is quite certain that such an hypothesis as the denial of John's work in Asia would have appeared absurd to Dionysius. He was probably in possession of a stronger and more detailed tradition on the subject than we are. At any rate he would not have listened for a moment to the supposition on which this recent theory depends. It requires us to believe that Irenæus (A.D. 180) *actually confounded John the Apostle with John the Presbyter!* Such a supposition is—I fear it must be said—utterly absurd. Irenæus repeatedly refers to "John," and "John the Lord's disciple," and fortunately it cannot be asserted that he is referring to this second John, because in one passage he expressly calls him "John the disciple of the Lord who leaned upon his breast, and himself published the Gospel while living in Ephesus of Asia."³ There is in Irenæus

¹ *Gesch. d. Geogr. d. neuen Continents*, vol. iv. p. 160.

² Varnhagen von Ense, *Tagebücher*, vol. i. p. 123. These two instances are quoted by Krenkel, *Der Ap. Johan.*, p. 139.

³ See Iren., *Hær.* ii. 22, § 5; iii. 1, § 1; iii. 3, § 4; ii. § 1; v. 30, § 1; 33 §§ 3, 4; and *ap. Euseb., H.E.*, v. 24.

no trace of any other John; nor was there any such trace in the writings of Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, or Apollinarius, Bishop of Hierapolis,—two persons who were eminently likely to be well informed about the history of the Christian Church in those two cities. Irenæus tells us that Polycarp had been the disciple of St. John, and had always referred to him about disputed questions, and had felt for him an unbounded reverence. Now Irenæus too was of Asiatic origin, and knew the traditions of Ephesus. He had himself been a hearer of Polycarp, and has left a most graphic description of the manner in which the old man used to demean himself. And yet we are asked to believe that when he calls Polycarp "a hearer of John" he mistook John the Apostle for John the Presbyter, though of this John the Presbyter there is not so much as a tradition, however faint, until we come to the middle of the third century; and no trace even then except a vague report that there were at Ephesus two graves known as graves of John! But St. Jerome furnishes us with conclusive evidence of the extremely valueless character of this grain of supposed fact in the ever-widening ocean of theory. He says (*De Viris Illustr.*) that "another tomb is shewn at Ephesus as the tomb of John the Presbyter, ALTHOUGH SOME THINK THAT THEY ARE BOTH TOMBS OF JOHN THE EVANGELIST"! Had it not been for dogmatic reasons, it is probable that no one would have thought anything else.

There is overwhelming evidence that John the Apostle spent many of his last years in Asia. It is one of the most unanimous and best supported of Church traditions, and it can be traced in a continuous sequence of evidence from the days of those who were his contemporaries, and had enjoyed his personal intercourse. That there was any John the Presbyter *distinct* from the Apostle there is no evidence whatever. For to say that a second-hand report

about two graves in Ephesus is any evidence, is idle. We should never have heard a word about these two graves, or at any rate *this* is not the inference which would have been drawn from them, if Dionysius had not disliked to attribute the Apocalypse to St. John, and if Eusebius, in common with many others, had not felt a scarcely concealed desire to get rid of the book altogether. But if this imaginary "Presbyter" wrote the Apocalypse, he must, on the shewing of the book itself, have been a very great man indeed, and one whose position enabled him to adopt a tone more authoritative than was adopted even by St. Paul. Is it conceivable that of such a man there would not be so much as a single other trace except the report of a dubious grave conjecturally assigned to him a century and a half after he was dead?

The ancient Fathers, both Greek and Latin, were not to be misled either by the specious suggestion of Dionysius, or by the bold assertion of Eusebius more than seventy years afterwards. Neither of these great writers found any one to follow them in their theoretic inferences from the loose clause of Papias. The Fathers had the works of Papias in their hands and knew that he had nowhere disintegrated the individuality of the one and only "John" whom the Church would understand to be referred to when that name was mentioned. They also had in their hands the "Acts of Leucius," which are probably the chief source of Johannine traditions; and it is clear from the silence of Eusebius and Dionysius that there the Presbyter had no existence.¹ Accordingly Apollinarius, Anastasius Sinaita, Maximus, and many others, go on repeating that Papias was a hearer of *John the Apostle*, without so much as noticing that there was anything doubtful in the passage out of which Eusebius has conjured his shadowy Presbyter.

¹ This is an important fact, for Leucius was a pupil of St. John, and wrote in Asia Minor about A.D. 150. Epiph., *Hær.*, 51.

V. But some will say, have we not two Epistles which profess to emanate from "John the Presbyter"? Undoubtedly we have, and this is one of the strongest evidences that "John the Presbyter" was no other than "John the Apostle," for as St. John nowhere claims his Apostolic authority, he would least of all be likely to do so in two private notes to otherwise unknown individuals; notes which do not contain a single item of importance except where they exactly coincide with the thoughts and indeed the actual words of the First Epistle; notes which no separate "John the Presbyter" could possibly have written unless his mind were an echo of the Apostle's as well as his name. The Apostle calls himself "the Presbyter" in these little private letters, because the title sufficiently indicated his personality as the aged Head of the Asiatic Churches, and as one who belonged to a past epoch.¹ No other designation would have been so simple, so dignified, and so suitable. And most certainly Papias was not influenced by this circumstance; for, while he was acquainted with the *First* Epistle of St. John, he does not seem to have known of the existence of the Second or Third.

VI. But the use of this designation, "the Elder," is further illustrated by Papias himself. He prefaces one of his oral traditions with the words, "These things *the Elder* used to say." We have seen that he used the word "Elders" in its narrower sense as synonymous with "Apostles." He meant by the term those who were the oldest and the most venerated sources of tradition. He certainly would not have given this specific title to any one who belonged only to the second generation, and who would therefore have been a contemporary of his own. By "the Elder" he has been always and rightly understood to mean John who, as the last survivor of the Apostolic band, was

¹ I do not refer to the parallel case of St. Paul calling himself "the aged" in Philemon 9, because the word *πρεσβυτης* may there mean "an ambassador."

"the Elder" κατ' ἐξοχήν. He does not give this title even to Aristion, though he too was a living witness of facts connected with the life and ministry of Christ.

Again, the remarks ascribed to this intensely venerated "Elder" are such as we can hardly imagine that any one short of an Apostle, and such an Apostle as St. John, would have had authority to make. For instance, the Gospel of St. Mark is universally believed to have been written under the guidance of St. Peter. The numerous graphic and vivid touches in which it abounds, as well as many other circumstances, lend probability to this tradition. Now who is the original authority for this belief? None other than "the Elder" himself. He informs Papias that "Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately all that he (Peter) related."¹ Now, such being the case, what ordinary disciple even of the first generation would have ventured to criticize *ex cathedra*—to criticize as though from the standpoint of wider and more intimate knowledge—a Gospel which rested on the authority of the Chief of the Apostles? Surely there was no living man who would have ventured to do this unless he were one whose opportunities of information were greater even than those of St. Peter. Yet "the Elder" does so. He informed Papias that though St. Mark wrote truthfully, to the best of his remembrance, he did *not* write the events of Christ's life and teaching in "chronological order" (οὐ μέντοι τάξει). Now this we should have thought, apart from the Fourth Gospel, is exactly what St. Mark does. But yet "the Elder" is right, because the Elder is none other than the Apostle and the Evangelist. He can speak even of St. Mark in a tone of superiority, as of one who "neither heard

¹ Euseb., *H. E.*, iii. 39. Μάρκος μὲν ἐρμηνευτὴς Πέτρου γενόμενος ὅσα ἐμνημόνευσεν ἀκριβῶς ἔγραψεν. The words may mean, "Wrote accurately all that he (Mark) remembered;" or, "all that he (Peter) related." Westcott, *On the Canon*, p. 74. Here again we notice the ambiguity of the style of Papias.

the Lord nor followed Him." He knew, as perhaps no other man knew, that the Synoptic Evangelists were but imperfectly informed as to the events and discourses of that ministry in Judæa, as apart from Galilee, which it was his own special privilege to make known to the world. Hence he can even venture to say of St. Peter himself, that "he used to frame his teachings with reference to the present needs of his hearers, and not as making a connected narrative of the Lord's discourses." What mere secondary Presbyter would have spoken in terms of such familiarity and even equality of "the Pilot of the Galilean Lake"? In such criticisms do we not hear unmistakably the accents of an Apostle?

VII. There is, so far as I can see, but one slight objection to the arguments which I have here stated. It is that, if our conclusion be correct, Papias mentions *Aristion* in the same breath with St. John the Apostle, and even puts *Aristion's* name first.

I fully admit that this mention of *Aristion* is perplexing. Of this *Aristion* we know absolutely nothing.¹ It is startling, and it is a little painful, to find Papias referring to him as an eminent contemporary witness to the truth of the Gospel narrative, when we can give no information whatever respecting him. He is a *nomini's umbra* and nothing more.

So strongly has this been felt that some—and among them Renan—suppose, that instead of "the disciples of the Lord" in the second clause of the passage of Papias, we ought to read "*the disciples of disciples* (*μαθηταὶ μαθητῶν*) of the Lord," and that the word *μαθητῶν*, which would relegate *Aristion* and "John the Presbyter" to the second generation of disciples, has dropped out by the clerical

¹ There is no authority for the assertion of the *Apostolical Constitutions* (vii. 46), which speaks of his martyrdom, and connects him with the Church of Smyrna.

error known as *homœoteleuton*. Another suggestion is that the name of John in the *first* clause is simply interpolated. But, since neither Eusebius nor any one else knew or dreamt of such readings, the conjectures merely rest on foregone conclusions. If we may thus tamper with ancient authors, we may make them say anything that we please. Moreover, a person who belonged to the *second* generation of disciples would not have furnished the sort of authority which Papias required. To that second generation he himself may be said to have belonged, for he was a contemporary of the daughters of Philip, and (as we have seen reason to believe) had talked in his youth with John the Apostle. What he wanted for the purposes of his "Exposition," was oral testimony derived at first hand from the original sources.

I have sometimes thought, and still think, that Aristion is a name which conceals some well-known person.¹ The Jewish apostles commonly bore two names; one among their own countrymen, and one for use among the Gentiles. There is nothing to forbid the supposition that the otherwise unknown Aristion may in reality have been some Apostle or Apostolic man who, like St. John and St. Philip, had taken refuge in Asia from the storm of persecution and calamity which had burst over Judea, and who was known at Hierapolis by the Greek name Aristion. If this very reasonable and moderate supposition be allowed, all difficulty vanishes. What Papias then means to say is that, long before he wrote his book it had been his habit to gather all he could about the statements of the Apostles whom he calls "Elders"—and among them about the statements of John—from those who had seen them; and that he also

¹ When I wrote this I was entirely unaware that Krenkel in his *Der Apostel Johannes*, p. 117, had been led to make exactly the same conjecture. *Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt!* Polycrates tells us that John and Philip were at this time the "two great lights of Asia." If "Philip" were not a Greek name one might have suspected that Aristion was a local name borne by Philip.

took notes of the living "oracles" furnished to him *directly* by Aristion (who was evidently well-known to Papias's readers) and even—which is the reason why he keeps the name to the last as being the fact which he most wished to emphasize—by "John the Elder;" the same John—ὁ πᾶνν—the only John of whom any one knew anything—who so long survived his brother Apostles and to whose *indirect* testimony Papias has just referred.

VIII. We have, then, sifted to the bottom the whole of the so-called evidence for the existence of a "John the Presbyter" who was not John the Apostle.

It is—

1. A passage of Papias, perfectly capable of quite a different interpretation, and which seems to have received a quite different interpretation, not only for a full century after he was dead, but also (in spite of Eusebius) in subsequent times.

2. A hesitating and tentative guess of Dionysius, rising solely from his avowed inability to regard the Apostle as the author of the Apocalypse.

3. Some dubious gossip (*φασίν*) about two tombs at Ephesus, which, if trustworthy at all, was believed by some to be due to an attempt to reconcile the inventions of rival guides.

4. Eagerness on the part of Eusebius to support this inverted pyramid of conjectures, out of positive dislike to the Apocalypse caused by the abuses of Millenarians.¹

"Only this, and nothing more"! And these are the grounds on which we are now asked to set aside the positive testimony of Justin Martyr, of Polycarp, of Polycrates, of Irenæus, of Apollonius, of Clemens of Alexandria, of Origen,

¹ Speaking of the "certain strange parables and teachings of the Saviour, and certain other somewhat mythical things," which Papias recorded, "from unwritten tradition," Eusebius specially mentions "some millennium of years after the resurrection from the dead, during which the kingdom of Christ shall be established bodily upon this earth."

of Andreas, of Arethas, and in fact of unbroken Church tradition, and to assign the works of the last and one of the greatest Apostles, to an obscure and dubious Presbyter! It is on this evidence—so late and so tottering—evidence based on an awkwardly expressed but perfectly explicable passage of Papias, a simple writer who had no pretence to subtlety of intellect or grace of style,—and on a professed quotation from Papias by Georgius Hamartolos (in the ninth century) who, in the very same sentence, attributes to Origen an opinion which his own writings shew to be false,—that some critics have ventured to rewrite the history of the first century; to assert, in spite of overwhelming evidence, that the Apostle St. John never was in Asia at all; that Polycarp never saw him; that the John for whom Polycarp expressed so profound a reverence was only a "Presbyter" who, like himself, belonged to the second generation of Christians; that Irenæus was mistaken in supposing that Polycarp meant the Apostle when he only meant the Presbyter; that, if this be thought impossible, the letter of Irenæus to Florinus must be regarded as a forgery;¹ that this "Presbyter," whose very existence was only conjectured a century later, is quoted as an oracle by Papias; that Polycrates, himself Bishop of Ephesus less than a century after John's death, made the same preposterous mistake which is attributed to Irenæus;² and that nebulous as he is, unknown as he is to early writers, utterly as every fact about him has perished, the "Presbyter" was still the

¹ This entirely baseless suggestion of Scholten does not at all help his cause, for, apart from the letter to Florinus, the testimony of Irenæus in his great work, *Contra Hæreses*, is quite distinct.

² Scholten sets aside the testimony of Polycrates because he calls John "a priest wearing the *petalon*." But, (1) It is by no means impossible that St. John, who, at one period, was so fond of symbols, may have adopted this symbol to express the truth which he so prominently states (Rev. i. 6; v. 10). (2) It is not clear that Polycrates, in this highly rhetorical passage, meant his words to be taken literally. (3) Even if he did, he may have been misled by giving a literal meaning to some metaphor of St. John.

author either of the Gospel and Epistle, or of the Apocalypse, or of the Second and Third Epistles, or of all these writings alike. *Credat Judæus Apella—non ego!*

But the impugnors of St. John's Asiatic work raise one or two chronological difficulties. They say that if Irenæus knew Polycarp, who knew St. John, all three must have attained to extraordinary longevity. The longevity need not have been very unusual. Tradition has always supposed that St. John reached extreme old age. Supposing that he died as early as A.D. 90, and that Irenæus wrote about A.D. 180, then, as M. Renan remarks, the difference which separated the two would be the same as that which separates us from the last years of Voltaire. Yet, without any miracle of longevity, M. de Rémusat had often conversed about Voltaire with l'Abbé Morellet, who had actually known him. If the martyrdom of Polycarp took place, as Mr. Waddington seems to have proved, in A.D. 155, Polycarp was then 86 years old. Consequently he must have been born in A.D. 69, and would have been at least 21 years old when St. John died; and there is not the least difficulty in the supposition that Irenæus, as a boy, had seen and known a man who had conversed with the Apostle who had laid his head on Jesus' breast.

A credulous spirit of innovation is welcome to believe and to proclaim that any or all of St. John's writings were written by "John the Presbyter." They were:—but "John the Presbyter" is none other than John the Apostle.

F. W. FARRAR.
