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One word in conclusion as to the bearing of this discussion on our conception of the relations of the Gospels to one another in their highest aspect as sources of Divine knowledge. Christians have learned from an early time to speak and think of a "fourfold" Gospel. To speak more strictly and fully, we have a "twofold" Gospel, though the first division opens out into three subdivisions, the common point of view of the first three being qualified in the case of each of them by important individual characteristics. On the present occasion we have been mainly concerned with the limitations common to the first three. According to the account of the matter which has been adopted in this paper, these were the consequence of the fact that they have preserved to us the more popular and elementary instruction in the Church of the first days, concerning the mission of the Christ, which was designed to meet a real need then, and one that has not ceased to be felt. Such an account of the origin of these limitations seems not only, as I have endeavoured to show, far more probable, but also far worthier of the position which these records were destined to fill, than one which traces them to the idiosyncrasy of a single Church or region, where the fragmentariness of the teaching of a single apostle, and the partly superstitious reverence for a document founded upon it, had, late in the first century, produced a certain narrowness of view.

V. H. STANTON.

*THE PREFACE TO THE FIRST EPISTLE
OF JOHN.*

THIS is a homiletical Epistle, the address of an absent pastor to his flock, or to disciples widely scattered and beyond the reach of his voice. Substitute the word "say" in certain sentences for "write," and one might conceive the whole discourse addressed by word of mouth to the

assembled church. It is a specimen of apostolic preaching to believers, a master-piece in the art of edification. Assuming that the book of the Apocalypse proceeds from the same apostle and divine, and that "the seven churches that are in Asia" to which he there writes, formed the field of the later ministry of St. John, we naturally infer that the destination of this Epistle lay in the same region. The forms of Gnostic error to which in various passages the writer refers, originated, we have reason to believe, in the churches of this province and were growing rife at the close of the first century.¹

The address is based on the gospel history, which it presupposes throughout. Some have thought the Epistle written on purpose to accompany St. John's Gospel, in order to serve as its practical application and enforcement. The two lie so near to each other in their cast of thought and dialect and are connected by so many turns of expression, that it is evident they are the outcome of the same mind and, we may safely say, of the same stage and state of mind. Yet in addressing his "little children," the apostle refers surely not to a written book, but to his personal testimony to the Son of God, to the teaching they had received from his own lips and which was printed on their memory and heart. To this familiar and oft-repeated witness of the disciple whom Jesus loved—a witness embodied for us in the Fourth Gospel—the opening words of the letter relate. The preface to the Epistle is, in effect, a summary of the Gospel according to John, as we see at once when we compare it with the opening and closing words of that narrative (John i. 1-18, xx. 30, 31). The revelation of God through His Son Jesus Christ, a revelation entirely human and apprehended already by his

¹ The opening *Discourses* of Bishop Alexander's *Commentary on The Epistles of St. John* (Expositor's Bible) give a rich and vivid historical setting to this Epistle.

readers, is that which the writer desires to communicate and set forth in its living effect. This revelation is the spring of a new eternal life for all men, a life of fellowship with God Himself, in which St. John would fain make his fellows sharers with him.

It is this Preface that we have now to consider, consisting of chapter i. 1-4. Its subject is *the eternal life manifested*.

We adopt the revised translation of these four verses, preferring, however, in verse 1 the marginal "*word of life*," without the capital. For it is on *life*¹ rather than *word* that the stress of the sentence lies ("for the life was manifested," John continues); and *Word* must have stood alone to be recognised as a personal title, or could at most be qualified as it is in the Apocalypse (xix. 13): "His name is called the Word of God." John's "*word of life*" resembles the "*word of life*" that Paul bids the Philippians "hold forth" (ii. 16), "the words of life eternal" which Peter declared his Master to possess (John vi. 68), and "all the words of this life" which the apostles were bidden to "speak in the temple to the people" (Acts v. 20). It is synonymous with "the gospel," the message of the new life which those bear witness to and report who have first "heard" it and proved its living power. "Concerning the word of life" stands in apposition to the four preceding relative clauses ("that which we have heard . . . our hands handled") and states their general subject-matter and import; while the first clause, "That which was from the beginning," stands alone in its sublime completeness. The verse may be read by itself, as furnishing a title to the writing, a statement of the great theme of the writer's thoughts and that which forms the basis of his relations with his readers. He speaks of

¹ Comp. *bread of life*; *light of life*; *way, truth and life*, etc., in the Gospel.

“That which was from the beginning :
 That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes,
 That which we beheld and our hands handled :
 Concerning the word of life.”

Construing the first verse thus, we dispense with the brackets enclosing the second in our English Version. Parentheses and involved constructions are not after St. John's style. The common punctuation throws the second verse into the shade; and treats it as a mere aside, an idea striking the writer casually and by the way, an eddy in the current, whereas it belongs to the mid-stream of his thought. The sentence contains, in fact, the main assertion of the passage. And while verse 3 links itself with verse 1, repeating its second line, it does so with a difference, and with a scope beyond the intent of the former sentence. St. John reiterates “what we have seen and heard” not by way of resuming the thread of an interrupted statement, but striking once more, and for a third time, the key-note, on which he plays a further descant. We observe here, at the outset, the peculiar manner of our author. His thought progresses by a circular, or spiral movement, returning continually upon itself, but in each revolution advancing to a new point and giving a larger aspect and bearing to the idea that it seeks to unfold.

“Declare,” in verses 2 and 3 more precisely understood, signifies “report” (*ἀπαγγέλλομεν*). It is the carrying of tidings or messages from the authentic source: “what we have seen and heard we report also to you” (comp. ver. 5) —we are the bearers to you of the word we received from Him. So in verse 2: “we bear witness and report”; where, as Haupt acutely says, in the former expression the emphasis lies on the communication of *truth*, in the latter on the *communication* of truth.

Readers of the Greek will note the expressive transition from the perfect to the aorist tense and back again, that

takes place in verses 1-3. When John writes, "that which we *have heard*" and "*have seen* with our eyes," he asserts the abiding reality of the audible and visible manifestation of God in Christ. This is now the fixed possession of himself and of his readers, the past realized in the present; and to this immovable certainty he reverts once and again in verses 2 and 3. The sudden change of tense in the middle of verse 1, missed by our authorized translation, carries us back to the historical fact. We stand with the apostle in memory before the incarnate Son of God, gazing with wonder on His face and reaching out our hands to touch His form, as he writes, "that which *we beheld and our hands handled.*" This turn of thought is a fine trait of genuineness. It is the movement of personal remembrance working within and behind historical reflexion. "Handle me and see," the risen Jesus had said, "for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having" (Luke xxiv. 39). Looking with John's eyes upon this mysterious Person, feeling and grasping with his hands its flesh and blood reality, and pondering its meaning, we say with him: "The life was manifested, the eternal life that was with the Father, was manifested to us." While *ἑθεασάμεθα* (*we beheld*) implies an intent contemplative gaze, *ἔψηλάφησαν*, occurring, in the New Testament, only in Acts xvii. 27 and Hebrews xii. 18 beside these two passages, denotes not the bare *handling*, but the searching, exploring use of the hands, that *tests by handling*.

So much for the verbal elucidation of the passage. Let us look at its substantial content.

I. St. John had witnessed, as he believed, the supreme manifestation of God. The secret of the universe stood unveiled before his eyes, the everlasting fact and truth of things, the reality underlying all appearances, "that which *was from the beginning.*" Here he touched the spring of being, the principle that animates creation from star to

farthest star, from the archangel to the worm in the sod: "the life was manifested, the life eternal which existed with the Father, was manifested to us." If "the life" of this passage is identical with that of the Gospel prologue, it has all this breadth of meaning; it receives a limitless extension when it is defined as "that which was from the beginning."

The source of spiritual life to men is that which was, in the first instance, the source of natural life to all creatures. Here lies the foundation of St. John's theology. It assumes the solidarity of being, the unity of the seen and unseen. It contradicts and excludes, from the outset, all Gnostical, dualistic and docetic, conceptions of the world. This essential and aboriginal life, he tells us, became incarnate, that it may have fellowship with men; it was slain, that its blood may cleanse them from iniquity—for the cross is not far off, we shall find it in the next paragraph.

The sublime prelude of St. John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word," is not repeated here; it is assumed. *In the beginning* gives the starting-point of revelation: *from the beginning* carries us along its process. Throughout the creation and course of the natural universe, through the calling and history of ancient Israel and the former dispensations, the Word wrought and spoke "from the beginning," shaping itself into a message of life for men; and the incarnate revelation was its goal. It is the fourth verse, rather than the first of the Gospel, which supplies the text for the Epistle: "that which hath come to be, in Him was life; and the life was the light of men." (R.V. margin.) A stream running underground, while the roots of a thousand plants drink of its strength, and verdure and beauty mark out its hidden course; the electric current, most potent and subtle of inorganic forces, that runs silent and unsuspected through long dark and winding channels, till it reaches the carbon-points where it bursts into sudden light

and splendour—these are imperfect images of the disclosure of God in Christ, as St. John views it in its relation to the anterior ages. It was “the mystery,” as St. Paul expressed it, “hidden from times eternal,”—God’s secret lying deep at the heart of the ages, lodged and wrapped up in the world from its foundation, till it came to birth in the Virgin’s Son.

Such, in the first place, was *the life* coming from the Father, that was manifested to the eyes of the witnesses of Jesus, the one life and love that runs through all things, the source and root of being.

II. In the second place, observe the energy with which the apostle asserts *the actuality* of the manifestation of the life of God in Jesus Christ. Thrice in three verses he reiterates, “we have seen” it, twice “we have heard”; and twice he repeats, “the life was manifested.”

This stupendous fact has, naturally, always had its doubters and deniers. In any age of the world, and under any system of thought, such a revelation as that made in Jesus Christ was sure to be met with incredulity. It is equally opposed to the superstitions and to the scepticisms natural to the human mind. In truth, the mind that is not surprised and sometimes staggered by the claims of Christ and the doctrines of Christianity, that has not felt the shock they give to our ordinary experience and native convictions, has hardly awakened yet to their full import. The hesitation arising, like that of Thomas at the Resurrection, from a sense of the overwhelming magnitude, the tremendous significance of the facts asserted, is worthier than a facile and unthinking faith, which swallows enormous theological propositions without any sense of difficulty and treats the deepest mysteries of religion as a commonplace.

St. John feels that the things he declares demand the strongest evidence. He has not believed them lightly, and

he does not expect others to believe them lightly. This passage, like many besides in the New Testament record, goes to show that the apostles were well aware of the importance of historical truth; they were conscientious and jealously observant in regard to this cardinal requirement. Their faith was calm, rational and sagacious. They were perfectly certain of the things they attested, and believed only upon commanding and irresistible proof, that covered the whole extent of the case,—evidence natural and supernatural, external and internal, sensible and moral, scriptural and experimental, and practically demonstrative. But the facts they built their faith upon are so largely of the spiritual order, that without a corresponding spiritual sense and faculty they can never be absolutely convincing.

Already, in St. John's old age, the solvents of philosophical analysis were being applied to the gospel history and doctrine. The Godhead incarnate, the manifestation of the infinite in the finite, of the eternal in the temporal, was pronounced impossible and self-contradictory; we know beforehand, the wise of the world said, that it cannot be. And so criticism sets itself to work upon the story in the interests of a false philosophy. The incarnation, the miracles, the resurrection, the ascension,—what are they but a myth, a beautiful poetic dream, a pictorial representation of spiritual truth, from which we must extract for ourselves a higher creed, leaving behind all the supernatural as so much mere wrappage and imaginative dress! This we hear proclaimed loudly to-day; and this the Gnostics of the later apostolic age were already, in their peculiar method and dialect, beginning to make out.

So the Apostle John confronts them, and their like in every time, with his impressive and authoritative declaration. Behind him lies the whole weight of the character, intelligence and disciplined experience of the witnesses of Jesus. Of what use was it for men at a distance to argue

that this thing and that thing could not be? "I tell you," says the great apostle, "we have seen it with our eyes, we have heard Him with our very ears; we have touched and tested and handled these things at every point, and we know that they are so." As he puts it, at the end of his letter, "we *know* that the Son of God is come; and He hath given us *an understanding* that we may know Him that is true." The men who have founded Christianity and written the New Testament, were no fools. They knew what they were talking about. No dreamer, no fanatic, no deceiver, since the world began, ever wrote like the author of this Epistle. Every physical sense, every critical faculty of a sound and manly understanding, every honest conviction of the heart, every most searching and fiery test that can try the spirit of man combines to assure us that the apostles of Jesus Christ have told us the truth as they knew it about Him, and that things were even as they said and no otherwise. Ay, and God has borne witness to these faithful men through the ages since and has put His seal to their testimony, or you and I would not be speaking of these things to-day.

III. And now, in the third place, there is founded upon the facts thus attested, there is derived from the eternal life revealed in Christ, *a new divine fellowship for men*. To promote this end St. John writes: "that you also may have fellowship with us." To communicate these truths, to see this fellowship established and perfected amongst men, is the apostle's one delight, the business and delight of all those who share his faith and serve his Master: "these things we write, that *our joy* may be fulfilled."

We have a great secret in common, we and the apostles. The Father told it to Jesus, Jesus to them, they to us, and we to others. Those who have seen and heard such things, cannot keep the knowledge to themselves. These truths belong not to us only, but to "the whole world"

(ii. 2) ; they concern every man who has a soul to save, who has sins to confess and death to meet, who has work to do for his Maker in this world and a way to find for himself through its darkness and perils.

The Apostle John is writing to Greeks, to men far removed from him in native sympathy and instinct ; but he has long since forgotten all that, and the difference between Jew and Greek never once crosses his mind in writing his letter. He has risen above it and left it behind through his fellowship with Christ. The only difference he knows is that existing between men who "are of God" and men who "are of the world." In St. John the idea of the Church catholic as a spiritual brotherhood is perfected. He heads the grand procession of the confessors of Jesus, which marches along unbroken through the ages, gathering into its ordered and swelling ranks all that earth holds of goodliest and greatest. In that glorious array we rejoice to find our place ; in our turn we sing its songs, and repeat its undying witness.

But our fellowship is not with them alone—with prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints of God. We do not hold with the apostle merely such fellowship as we have with other great minds of the past ; nor was John's communion with his Lord that which we cherish with our beloved dead, the communion of memory, or at best of hope. If the facts the apostles attest are true, they are true for us as for them. If the life manifested in the Lord Jesus was eternal, then it is living and real to-day. As it "was from the beginning," it will be to the end. Jesus Christ had brought His disciples into spiritual union and fellowship with the living God. He had shown them the Father. He had made them individually children of God, with Himself for elder brother. He had passed away from their sight, to be with them for ever in His Spirit. In this way He had really *come* to them, and the Father with Him, when He

seemed to be going (John xiv. 18-23: R.V.). They felt themselves to be in direct communion and communication, every day they lived, with the Almighty Father in heaven, and with His Son Jesus Christ whom they had known and loved on earth. To this fellowship they invite and summon all mankind.

The manifestation of God in Christ makes fellowship with God possible in an altogether new and richer way. Does not the very distinction revealed in the Godhead render such communion accessible, as it could not be otherwise to human thought? The children in the house understand father *and* mother better than they could do either of them alone; they learn to know each through the other. "Our communion," writes John, "is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,"—with each distinctly, with each in and through and for the other. We have fellowship with Christ in the Father. He has explained the Father (John i. 18), and talked to us about Him; and we are entering into His views. We share Christ's thoughts about God. We begin to think and feel, in our poor finite, struggling way, about the Almighty Father as He does in His grand and perfect and everlasting way. "My Father and your Father," He condescends to say, as He steps upward to heaven. Believing this assurance, we have fellowship with Jesus Christ, God's Son; for we also are God's sons. God is to us, and life is to us, in some degree, what they were, and are, to our adorable Redeemer.

On the other hand, we have fellowship with God in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is God's; but He is ours as well! God has told us what He thinks about His Son, and wishes us to think with Him. Showing Him to the world, He says: "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I am ever well pleased." And we agree to that: we are well pleased with Him too! We solemnly accept the testimony of God concerning His Son. Then we are at

one with God in respect to Christ. And all harmony and peace centre there. So far as we know or can understand, there is nothing that occupies the mind of God so deeply, and touches so vitally His relations with the creatures, as the kingdom and honour of His Son Jesus Christ; there is nothing that pleases Him so much as our attachment to Christ. "The Father Himself loveth you," said Jesus to His disciples, "because you have loved Me, and believed that I came out from the Father." In Him God is reconciling the world to Himself. Upon faith in Him our individual destiny turns,—and the fate of society and nations. Only when we think aright of Christ are we in unison with God. Only when we think aright of Christ and are rightly disposed toward Him, can we have fellowship with each other, and work together with God for the world's redemption.

Life, manifestation, fellowship: these three words resume the teaching of the first paragraph of the Epistle.

GEORGE G. FINDLAY.

WELLHAUSEN'S "MINOR PROPHETS."¹

It must be confessed that there is something disappointing in the appearance presented by this book when one first opens it. The translation of the prophetic writings begins on the first page without a word of preface or introduction, and at the end of the translation the notes on the several books are found. To English readers this cannot but appear abrupt. They miss the help which is afforded by a general statement of the author's aims and views. They prefer to see the relations between the several parts of a work like this explicitly set forth. To the latter point it will be

¹ *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*. Von J. Wellhausen, Fünftes Heft. *Die Kleinen Propheten*. Uebersetzt, mit Noten. Berlin: Georg Reimer.