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THE
FOURTH GOSPEL

AN OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM AND EVIDENCE

BY
THE REV. H. P. V. NUNN, M.A.



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FOURTH GOSPEL
AN OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM AND EVIDENCE

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THE FOURTH GOSPEL

I

THE PROBLEM OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

IT is obvious to anyone who studies the Gospels with care that the Gospel of St. John differs in many respects from the other three. The Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke all give the same general picture of the life of Jesus. If one of them records a parable, such as the parable of the Prodigal Son, which is not found in the other two, we feel that it is quite in keeping with the teaching recorded in them. For this reason these three Gospels are called "the Synoptic Gospels,"* because they look at the life of Jesus from the same point of view. They deal with the teaching of our Lord as it was given to the people of Galilee. With the exception of His visit to Jerusalem when He was a boy, they record no visit to that city and no teaching given there until we come to the last week of His life, when they all unite in giving somewhat different versions of His dealing with the rulers and learned men of Jerusalem.

The teaching of Jesus both in Galilee and Jerusalem is cast into the form of short sayings, often called out by particular events, and into the form of parables dealing with scenes and people familiar to those whose homes were in villages or in the country. It deals principally with the conduct which will fit men to enter the kingdom of heaven and describes the manner of the coming of the kingdom and its nature. Little is said about the teaching which Jesus gave to individuals, although this is not entirely left out of account. He is presented as saying little that is explicit about His person, but the way in which He teaches with authority, and the claims that He makes on His hearers to

* This name appears to have been given to them first by J. J. Griesbach towards the end of the eighteenth century because they contained so much common material that they could be arranged in a parallel harmony or synopsis and thus be conveniently studied together.

follow Him at the cost of all that makes life dear, are founded on an assumption that He is far more than the most recent in a long line of prophets. In the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, He expressly distinguishes between the servants of the owner of the vineyard and his son, and no one acquainted with the imagery of the Hebrew prophets could possibly doubt what His meaning was (Mark xii. 1-12 ; Isaiah v. 1-8).

The Gospel of St. John deals mainly with the teaching of Jesus in Jerusalem. It expressly states that He went there several times, and His ministry is represented as lasting at least three years. The Synoptic Gospels give us no certain information about the length of the ministry. They have few notes of time : almost the only chronological statement in which all the Gospels agree is that the ministry ended in Jerusalem at the feast of the passover.

The teaching in St. John's Gospel is generally cast in the form of conversations or of long discourses delivered either to " the Jews " or to the disciples, but it contains some sayings as short and pregnant as any to be found in the Synoptists. By the expression " the Jews " we are intended to understand that portion of the people who were hostile to Jesus or, at best, very doubtful about the truth of His claims.

The discourses addressed to " the Jews " are generally addressed to the educated part of the nation, for Jerusalem was not only the capital of Judea, but also, if the expression may be allowed, its university. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should differ from those given to country people in Galilee who, if not altogether illiterate, were certainly not learned in the sense that the scribes in Jerusalem were. Jewish commentators on the Gospels tell us that the methods of argument preserved in some of these discourses are quite in keeping with the methods of argument known to have been used in the schools of the Rabbis of that date. They often deal with the relationship which existed between Jesus (in His position as Messiah) and God, which is only lightly touched on in the Synoptic Gospels. They are sometimes called forth by His assumption of a right to set on one side the rules of the Rabbis about keeping the sabbath, and in this respect they bear a close resemblance to certain passages in the Synoptic Gospels in which fault is found with His healing on the sabbath, or with

His disciples rubbing ears of corn in their hands on that day.

Several accounts of His dealing with individuals, such as the first-called disciples, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman and the blind beggar, are recorded at what seems to be disproportionate length when compared with the scale of the Gospel, but, even so, it is obvious that they are presented in a compressed form and that only the outline of the conversation is given. This is especially the case in the record of the interview with Nicodemus. The fact that this Gospel records so much which is cast into the form of argument familiar to first-century Jews, but unfamiliar to us, and the fact that so much of it is reported in a very compressed form, make many passages in it difficult to understand. At the same time it is full of sayings which seem to be readily intelligible, and which have retained their hold on the minds of the simplest Christian believers from the time when the Gospel was first written to the present day.

The accounts of the trial, death and resurrection of Jesus in all four Gospels agree in the main outline. The differences, or rather additions, found in the fourth Gospel have generally been considered to be so vivid and life-like that they may reasonably be regarded as the recollections of an eye-witness, except among the dwindling band of critics who will accept nothing in the Gospels as having any pretence to be historical, except certain parts of the second Gospel with a few additions from the matter common to the first and third Gospels.

The differences which exist between the fourth Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels present a peculiar interest and a peculiar difficulty. They are interesting, because the fourth Gospel has preserved for us a part of the teaching of Jesus not recorded elsewhere, a part to which the Church has assigned the greatest importance in framing its doctrinal system. They are difficult to account for, because it is reasonably certain that the account of the teaching of Jesus contained in the Synoptic Gospels was the first to be written down in the form in which we now have it.

Moreover writers for the first 150 years after the death of Jesus made use of the Synoptic version of the teaching of Jesus to the almost total exclusion of any reference to the Johannine teaching, as far as we can judge from such of their books as have come down

to us. We have other reasons to suppose that the Johannine teaching was known and valued during this period, which will be brought forward later in this book, but these are generally ignored by "those who consider themselves entitled to speak in the name of criticism."

They assert that if the Synoptic Gospels present a picture of the life and teaching of Jesus which is at all reliable and which is in any sense the product of some of His immediate disciples, we cannot accept much of the fourth Gospel as the work of one who "had seen the Lord." It is urged that no one who had had personal acquaintance with the carpenter of Nazareth as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels could have had his personal recollections of him so changed, even after a lapse of sixty or seventy years, as to give such an account of Jesus as is found in the fourth Gospel.

One consequence of this opinion is that, although the external evidence for the apostolic authorship of the fourth Gospel is at least as strong as the evidence for the authorship of the other Gospels, its reliability has been called in question by every possible and impossible argument. Even such an orthodox writer as the late Sir Edwyn Hoskyns described this evidence as "wholly elusive," and in many modern books dealing with the Gospel it is either dismissed in a few lines or not mentioned at all.

This is not because any new discoveries have been made during the last hundred years which have discredited the ascription of the Gospel to the apostle. The few discoveries that have any bearing on this question have rather confirmed the external evidence for this ascription than discredited it. But it has become the fashion to say either that it matters very little who wrote the Gospel, or else to attribute it to some imaginary or quasi-imaginary disciple of Jesus who is supposed to have been called "John" and to have been confused with the apostle in what is assumed, on quite inadequate grounds, to have been "an uncritical age."

Our object here is to state as briefly, as clearly and as completely as possible the external evidence for the authorship of the fourth Gospel, and to give some explanation of the differences which exist between it and the other three Gospels.

II

THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

We mean by "external evidence," evidence found in other writings of the period in which the book was produced, or in the writings of the period immediately following it, that it was written by its reputed author, and that the book as we now have it is substantially the same as the book which his contemporaries say that he wrote.

Let us take an example from another field of ancient literature. The plays of Aristophanes make it quite plain that he greatly disliked the poet Euripides and his writings. The plays of both these dramatists were publicly performed at Athens about the same time, in the fifth century B.C. When, therefore, we find that Aristophanes parodies lines in plays which we ascribe to Euripides, we have as good external evidence as can be expected after such a lapse of time that Euripides wrote these plays. The audience before which the plays of Aristophanes were produced had probably seen or read the plays of Euripides, and knew that they were ascribed to him by common consent. If this had not been so, the parody would have been quite ineffective for the purpose for which it was intended, namely to ridicule the poetry of Euripides.

HERETICS

In the same way we find that a heretic named Heracleon, of the school of Valentinus, which existed between A.D. 140 and 180, accepted the fourth Gospel without hesitation and wrote a commentary on it. Another member of the school, named Ptolemy, ascribed it to "the apostle,"* and there is no evidence that it was ever ascribed to any apostle other than the son of Zebedee.

Now it is not possible to reconcile the teaching of the Gospel with the teaching of the heretics of the school of Valentinus without putting a strained interpretation upon it. If these heretics could have given any good reason for not ascribing it to the

**Epistle to Flora.*

apostle John, they would certainly have done so, as its teaching was so plainly contradictory to their tenets.

This is excellent external evidence for the apostolic authorship of the Gospel, for the immediate followers of a man who was living when the Gospel was written not only accepted it as the work of a personal follower of Jesus, but also commented on it and treated its text with as much reverence as the peculiar nature of their opinions permitted.

Marcion was the only heretic living in the early part of the second century who refused to accept the Gospel. He rejected all the Gospels, and made up one of his own out of a mutilated version of St. Luke's Gospel. But even he did not deny that the fourth Gospel was written by the apostle John, but he tried to discredit its author by putting a perverse interpretation on the account given of him in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians. There it is stated that Peter and John seemed to be pillars of the Church of Jerusalem, but nothing more is said of John. We are told that Paul rebuked Peter because of his inconsistent behaviour with regard to the Jews. Marcion tried to make out, without any evidence at all, that John was also a bigoted and inconsistent Judaizer and therefore also incurred the rebuke of Paul.*

ARCHÆOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

We find that the noblest families in Rome, such as the imperial family of the Flavii, that of the senator Pudens (who is probably the person mentioned in 2 Tim. iv. 21), and the consular family of the Acilii Glabrones, used paintings to decorate their private cemeteries in Rome at the end of the first century or at the very beginning of the second, which could only have been suggested by matter contained in the fourth Gospel. This is excellent external evidence that the Gospel, immediately after it was written, was known and valued in Rome by the people who had most to lose by accepting its teaching and who were also highly educated.

It is true that this is no evidence that it was written by the apostle John, but it is evidence that it was written by a person

*Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, iv. 3.

whose authority was so great that even people who almost certainly also possessed and valued the Synoptic Gospels accepted it without question, in spite of the differences between its account of the life and teaching of Jesus and that given in the other three Gospels. We know that the better educated members of the church felt this difficulty, especially with regard to the chronology of the Gospel, but that they were not prevented by it from receiving the fourth Gospel as being the work of a personal disciple of Jesus.

Evidence like this cannot be fairly dismissed as "wholly elusive," and to pass it over in complete silence is not honest, especially when this is done in books written for those who have neither the time nor the inclination for a minute study of the subject.

THE APPENDIX TO THE GOSPEL

It is generally agreed that the Gospel, as first written, ended with the formal statement of its purpose at the end of chapter xx, and that the last chapter was added as an appendix, either by the author of the rest of the book, or by some disciple who was "saturated with his master's spirit." It was plainly added to correct a misunderstanding about a saying of Jesus which was interpreted to mean that the disciple who was commonly known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" should not die until the Lord returned in glory.

To this chapter two verses were added by some unknown persons, one of which is as follows: "This is the disciple who beareth witness of these things, and who wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true." As this contains the testimony of some persons other than the writer, and was added, as far as we have any evidence, when the Gospel was first written, or immediately afterwards, for it is found in all manuscripts of the Gospel, it may fairly be regarded as the earliest piece of external evidence for the authorship of the Gospel. The "disciple" referred to must be one of the seven persons mentioned in the second verse of this chapter as meeting the risen Christ by the sea of Tiberias. He is further described in verse 20 as the disciple

whom Jesus loved, who lay back on His breast at the Last Supper, and asked who it was that should betray Him.

It is plain from the whole of the chapter that this disciple was not Peter. There is no reason to suppose that Thomas and Nathanael were singled out by our Lord for any special favour. We are told in the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus chose three disciples to take with Him on three special occasions—the raising of the daughter of Jairus, the Transfiguration, and the Agony in the Garden. These were Peter, James and John, the last two being the sons of Zebedee, mentioned in this chapter. It is not possible to ascribe the fourth Gospel to James, as he was put to death not later than A.D. 44 (see Acts xii). Therefore, even in the opinion of such a critic as Dr. B. H. Streeter, “only John is left” as the possible author or inspirer of the fourth Gospel.

Some critics have suggested that the persons who wrote this testimonial to the author of the Gospel, without expressly naming him, wished their readers to infer that it had been written by the son of Zebedee. But, being prudent people, they mentioned two unnamed disciples in the party of fishermen who are romantically described by one of these imaginative critics as “two dark figures who make all identification impossible.” If the writers of the testimonial were pressed by some better informed person as to the identity of the Evangelist, they could always say, “We never expressly stated that the son of Zebedee was the author. We mentioned two other disciples, either of whom might have been a disciple, not mentioned elsewhere, for whom Jesus had a special affection, and who, on account of his position and education, was better able to understand His teaching than a Galilean fisherman.”

Some of these critics have allowed so much play to their imaginative faculties as to make it necessary to identify one of these “dark figures” with a young disciple of Jesus who belonged to a priestly family and whom they call “John of Jerusalem,” for the very good reason that absolutely nothing is known about him. Others identify him with a personage whose history we shall have to investigate later and who is called “John the Elder.” Why either of these persons should have taken into their heads

to go fishing in the sea of Galilee with a body of "unlearned and ignorant men," the critics never condescend to explain. But certainly it was very considerate of one or both of these "Johns" to accompany the disciples on this occasion, for they thus enabled witnesses who added verse 24 to chapter xxi to explain away the obvious meaning of their solemn asseveration about the authorship of the Gospel to those persons (if any) who, being better informed as to the facts, called their statement in question.

The simplest way of getting rid of this piece of external evidence is to say, as Dr. Johnson did of a certain person, that the witnesses were telling a lie and knew that they were doing so. This method has been adopted by several German authorities, including, we regret to say, Dr. Harnack.

Many more subtle methods of destroying the force of this evidence have recently been adopted to which we have no space to refer here. They are dealt with in the larger books which the present author has written on this subject.* It is enough to say that, generally speaking, they are so improbable that they have commended themselves to no one but their authors.

WHY QUOTATIONS FROM JOHN ARE RARE IN EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

Very little Christian literature, except the New Testament, has come down to us from the first 150 years after the crucifixion, and of that little there is none that can fairly be described as a formal treatise about Christian doctrine written by Christians for Christians. As soon as a book of this type did appear—the long treatise of Irenaeus dealing with heresies prevalent in his time and before it (*c.* A.D. 180)—abundant quotations from the Gospel of St. John are found, and also a definite ascription of this Gospel to "John the disciple of the Lord," who in several passages is put on a level with the other apostles. It is, therefore, not so remarkable as it is often represented to be that no verbal quotation from the Gospel is found before this time and no

* *The Son of Zebedee* (1927), p. 154; *What is Modernism?* (1932), pp. 203 ff. See also articles by the writer in *The Evangelical Quarterly* for July, 1943, and July and October, 1944. He has also in preparation a larger work dealing with the problems in more exhaustive and technical detail.

ascription of the book to the Apostle, except, as we have already noted, in the writings of the heretic Ptolemy.

The Epistle of Clement to the church of Corinth (*c.* A.D. 95) was probably written before the Gospel was published. The letters of Ignatius (*c.* 110) deal mainly with church discipline, in so far as they do not deal with the private feelings and wishes of Ignatius, who wrote them when he was on his way to be put to death in Rome. His younger contemporary Polycarp wrote a letter, intended to accompany several of these letters, which he sent to the church in Philippi, in which he quotes the first Epistle of St. John as Scripture, but not the Gospel. It may be noted in passing that all ancient writers and most modern attribute this Epistle to the author of the fourth Gospel, and there is every reason to suppose, as we shall see later, that Polycarp was not only acquainted with this Gospel, but also with its author.

The *Shepherd* of Hermas (*c.* 100) is a strange book which hardly quotes the New Testament at all. The so-called Epistle of Barnabas does not treat of matters with regard to which quotations from the fourth Gospel would be relevant.

The writings of Justin Martyr which have come down to us are defences of Christianity addressed to the Roman Government, and a treatise in the form of a dialogue intended to win over the Jews to Christianity. In the former treatises much is made of the moral teaching of Jesus, and in the latter much is made of the fulfilment of prophecy. The most suitable materials for the writer's purpose were found in the Synoptic Gospels, and these are freely quoted. The fourth Gospel is not quoted exactly, but the ideas which lie behind it are referred to as matters of common knowledge, and certain passages in these books come near to being verbal quotations.

The fact that Justin (who wrote about A.D. 150) does not quote the Gospel often and, when he refers to ideas contained in it, does not quote its words exactly, has been given enormous importance during the last hundred years by those persons who desired, because of their philosophical or theological presuppositions, to show that the Gospel was the work of some late writer who was certainly not a disciple of Jesus. It was stated to be self-evident that Justin did not value the Gospel, and did not assign it to an

apostolic author. This opinion ought to have been abandoned, when in 1888, a translation was published of an Arabic version of a Harmony of the Four Gospels (the *Diatessaron*) compiled by Justin's pupil Tatian, which places the Fourth Gospel on exactly the same level as the Synoptic Gospels and contains no matter not found in these four books. But "new truth" of the kind indicated above about Justin's supposed opinion of the Gospel dies hard. It was resuscitated quite recently in a Cambridge Prize Essay called *The Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* by Mr. J. N. Sanders, who got over the insuperable obstacle to his theory to be found in the discovery of the Harmony of Tatian by the simple method of ignoring it altogether.

It is interesting to note that Tatian, who *must* have known of the existence of all our four Gospels, makes little use of quotations from them in a treatise that he wrote to confute Greek ideas about Christianity. So long as we had only this treatise it was possible to argue that he gave little support in his writings to traditional beliefs about the authorship or value of the Gospels, but the discovery of the text of his Harmony of the Gospels should have shown how dangerous it is to use the argument from silence against a well-established tradition. Moreover, as we have said, it is certain that the fourth Gospel was accepted at this time by most heretical writers. Celsus, the well-informed opponent of Christianity, who was answered at a later date by Origen, used arguments against the evidences for Christianity which could only be suggested by this Gospel.* He does not seem to have had the slightest idea that he was using a book which educated Christians were inclined to reject as spurious.

The testimony from the paintings on the tombs of the most noble Roman families mentioned above is very important with regard to the testimony of Justin. He was put to death in Rome after teaching there for some time, and there is reasonably good evidence that he lived near the house of Pudens and may well have known some members of his family. Their tombs and the decoration on them would also be open to his inspection. These facts are not, and cannot be, disputed, but they can be, and often are, misrepresented.

*Origen, *Against Celsus*, ii. 60, 61.

The church historian Eusebius, who lived in the early part of the fourth century and had access to an excellent library of Christian books at Caesarea, many of which have since disappeared, dealt expressly with the question as to which books of the New Testament had been received without dispute in the early Church and which had only been received with some hesitation. He puts the fourth Gospel among the books which had been received from the first and treats it as being, in all respects, on the same footing as the Synoptic Gospels.

POLYCARP AND IRENAEUS

We have already mentioned Polycarp as the author of an Epistle in which the First Epistle of St. John is quoted as Scripture. He was bishop of Smyrna in Asia and was burnt at the stake about A.D. 155. In the course of his trial he stated that he had served Christ for 86 years. If this means that he was born of Christian parents, he would be a full grown man at the time when, according to the universal tradition of the church, the apostle John was living at Ephesus and writing his Gospel there.

In his later days Polycarp was accustomed to speak to his people about his recollections of "John and the others who had seen the Lord." Among his hearers were two young men: one Florinus, who was the older and who came into close personal contact with Polycarp; and the other Irenaeus, who was apparently somewhat younger and may have been not more than fifteen years old. Irenaeus subsequently went to Lyons in Gaul, where he became the bishop of the churches in that thoroughly civilised and Romanised district, and had frequent contacts with the church in Rome.

The contact between the churches in Asia and the churches in the Rhone valley was very close, as is shown by the fact that it was to the churches in Asia that the letter of the churches of Lyons and Vienne was addressed when they suffered a terrible persecution in the reign of Marcus Aurelius some years after the martyrdom of Polycarp. It is possible that Irenaeus wrote this letter; it is certain that he succeeded the aged bishop Pothinus who was put to death in this persecution. He was,

therefore, in contact with two venerable and important Christian teachers who could well remember the days when some of the apostles were still alive, and also with the churches in Rome and Asia which, if we are to believe the testimony of such writers as Tertullian and of Irenaeus himself, were founded by apostles and had preserved the apostolic tradition in its greatest purity. Men who have seen their friends put to horrible deaths because they believed the history and teaching recorded in the Gospels—and Irenaeus and Tertullian were such—do not lightly accept books as genuine for which the evidence is scanty or suspect ; still less do they try to support such evidence by making deliberately false statements.

Irenaeus ascribes the fourth Gospel to a writer whom he sometimes calls “John the disciple of the Lord,” and sometimes simply “John,” as if he was so well known that to call him by this name alone was sufficient to establish his identity. He says that this Evangelist lived at Ephesus until the time of Trajan and was the teacher of Polycarp. Of Polycarp he says :* “And Polycarp was not only instructed in the faith by the apostles and personally acquainted with many who had seen Christ, but he was also appointed by the apostles in Asia as bishop of the church at Smyrna. Him even I saw in my early youth, for he remained a long time with us and was exceedingly old.”

We have said that a certain Florinus was a hearer of Polycarp in company with Irenaeus. He subsequently became a presbyter in the Roman church and adopted heretical opinions. The historian Eusebius has preserved a letter which Irenaeus wrote to him to try to win him back from his heresy by reminding him of the teaching which they had both received from Polycarp in their youth. In this he says† : “When I was a boy, I saw thee in lower Asia with Polycarp moving in splendour in the royal court and endeavouring to gain his approbation. I remember the events of that time more clearly than those of recent years. For what boys learn, growing with their mind, becomes joined to it ; so that I am able to describe the very place in which the blessed Polycarp sat as he discoursed, and his goings out and his comings

* *Against Heresies*, iii. 3.

† Eusebius, *Church History*, v. 20.

in, and his manner of life, and his physical appearance and his discourses to the people and the accounts which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the others who had seen the Lord. And he remembered their words, and what he had heard from them concerning the Lord and concerning His miracles and teaching, having received them from eye-witnesses of the life of the Word. Polycarp related all things in harmony with the Scriptures. These things being told me by the mercy of God, I listened to them attentively, noting them down, not on paper, but in my heart. And continually by God's grace I recall them faithfully."

This letter was most probably written when Irenaeus was a bishop some time between A.D. 170 and 190. It was obviously of the nature of an "open letter," and was considered of sufficient importance to be preserved for more than a hundred years, since it came into the hands of Eusebius when he was writing his history. A bishop who was one of the most influential men of his time, so influential that he took upon himself to rebuke the bishop of Rome for lack of charity in his dealings with the eastern churches, would not be likely to write such a letter to an older man who had every opportunity and every inducement to correct it publicly, if its contents were not strictly true. Still less would he have made it so much public property that it was preserved, in spite of the destruction of Christian documents, especially in Rome in the persecution of Diocletian, in a copy which reached a place so far distant as Caesarea in Palestine. This evidence for the authorship and importance of the Gospel, though somewhat late in being recorded in any book which has come down to us, is, nevertheless, on the face of it, about as good as it can be.

Polycarp was a man who left a deep mark on church history. One of his hearers recorded in the most solemn manner that he heard him say that he had been a disciple of "John and the others who had seen the Lord," and reminds an older friend of this experience and of the way in which the teaching of Polycarp harmonised with the teaching of the Scriptures, which, in this passage, can only mean primarily the contents of the Gospels. No one disputes that Irenaeus used the four Gospels which we use, and no others.

But this evidence sorts so ill with a theory as to the nature and method of composition of the Gospels which is now prevalent that every possible attempt is made to discredit it.

We are told that Irenaeus was too young to remember what he heard from Polycarp, or to understand that, when that venerable person spoke of "John," he never intended to refer to the apostle at all, but to the quasi-mythical figure called "John the Elder." The fact that Florinus was obviously an older man who would have refuted the testimony of Irenaeus, if he could, is never mentioned. Harnack was largely responsible for the prevalence of this theory, which was essential to his conception of the true nature of Christianity, but he did not go a step further, as he did in dealing with the evidence of the witnesses in Jn. xxi. 24, and roundly charge Irenaeus with telling a deliberate lie. This method of discrediting his testimony has not been despised by many German and some English commentators, but they have often disguised it in language which, even if it is more decent, is equally unwarranted either by known facts or by probability.

We are told that the theory that the apostle wrote the Gospel fitted so well with the arguments which Irenaeus desired to use against the heretics that he never took the trouble to enquire into its truth, as if there were no older men who would have been only too glad to refute this argument, if they could. We are also told that all other church writers in places so far from Lyons as Carthage, Alexandria and Ephesus followed him in his mistake or misrepresentation, without making any independent enquiry into the facts.

If it were not for the existence of the mysterious personage to whom we have referred several times as "John the Elder," such hesitation to accept the testimony of Irenaeus would be inexcusable. As it is, it is inexcusable to support the theory that Irenaeus was mistaken by a misrepresentation of his testimony such as we are about to describe.

In the last edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a work which is supposed to be written for ordinary readers by specialists, there is an article on the authorship of the fourth Gospel by the celebrated Roman Catholic philosopher Von Hügel. From such a man one would expect an impartial statement of the facts. But

what one finds with regard to the connection between Irenaeus and Polycarp is this: "But Irenaeus was at most fifteen years old when he frequented Polycarp: writes thirty-five or fifty years later at Lyons, *admitting that he noted down nothing at the time*" (italics ours). This is, of course, formally true; but we leave our readers to judge how far it misrepresents the real meaning of Irenaeus, as expressed in the passage given above.

This is only one example out of many of the shifts to which critics are reduced who refuse, in the face of the plainest evidence, to believe that the apostle had anything to do with the writing of the Gospel.

"JOHN THE ELDER"

We must deal with the famous "Elder" who figures so prominently in all modern books dealing with "the Johannine writings."

The book of the Revelation was not favourably received by many members of the early church. Justin attributed it to the apostle John and the learned Origen seems to have had no doubt that he wrote it (although he doubted if the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by St. Paul). But his pupil Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, objected to the attribution of the book to the author of the Gospel (whom he believed to be the apostle), on the ground that it was written in very bad Greek. He brought forward a traveller's tale that there were two tombs in Ephesus both said to be tombs of persons bearing the name "John," and from this he inferred that there might have been another man of that name at Ephesus who might have written the Revelation. It is not improbable that there were two Jews in Ephesus both named John, but there is not the slightest evidence that one wrote the Gospel and the other the Revelation, either in any document that has come down to us or that was known to Origen or Dionysius. Yet Alexandria was the intellectual centre of the Christian world, and both Origen and Dionysius were the heads of the Christian university there. Origen subsequently went to the other main centre of Christian learning at Caesarea.

About fifty years later Eusebius, who did not believe that the

same man wrote the Revelation and the Gospel, although he was quite convinced that the apostle wrote the Gospel, found in the writings of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, who was a contemporary of Polycarp and, according to Irenaeus and Jerome, "a hearer of John the Evangelist," the following passage, which pleased him very much. The writings of Papias, except the passages which Eusebius quotes, have perished, but Eusebius notes that he was a man of very small intelligence.

Papias wrote a commentary on the "oracles" of the Lord and in the course of it he says:* "But I will not scruple to give a place for you, along with my interpretations, to everything else that I learnt carefully and remembered carefully in time past from the Elders, guaranteeing its truth. . . And again on any occasions when a man came my way who had been a follower of the Elders, I would enquire about the discourses of the Elders—what Andrew, or Peter, or Philip, or James, or John, or Matthew, or any of the Lord's disciples said, and what Aristion and the Elder John say."

From this Eusebius infers that Papias did not claim to be a hearer of the apostles, but received the doctrines of the Faith from their immediate friends, and that he refers to two persons called John—"one of whom he mentions with Peter and James and Matthew, evidently meaning the Evangelist, and another whom he names separately, and does not include in the number of the apostles, because he places Aristion before him. This man he *distinguishes* (italics ours) by the name of 'Elder'."

Unfortunately for this argument, Papias made a strange blunder, if he meant to *distinguish* the "John" mentioned last from the "John" mentioned in the list of familiar names of apostles by calling him "the Elder," for in the earlier part of this passage he also gives the title "Elders" to the persons who were undoubtedly members of the Twelve.

We have no space in which to discuss the thorny question as to whether Papias meant to refer to one or two men both called "John." This has been dealt with at great length in all books in which the authorship of the Gospel is discussed. What we must notice is that Eusebius is not very happy in his interpretation,

* Eusebius, *Church History*, iii. 39.

which contradicts not only the statement of Irenaeus, who was in a position to know the facts, but also a statement that he had made himself in an earlier work. In confirmation of his interpretation he states that "Papias often mentions Aristion and John the Elder by name, and gives their statements in his works," which is, on the face of it, excellent evidence for the existence of two Johns; but he rather spoils this argument by adding, "It is here proved that the statement of those is true who assert that there were two of the same name in Asia and that there were two tombs at Ephesus, both called John's until this day, *which it is particularly necessary to observe*" (italics ours).

In this last remark Eusebius seems to be reproducing the statement of Dionysius, which was mere hearsay, and he throws a weight on it which it should not be necessary to do, if the works of Papias afforded quite unequivocal evidence for the existence of two "Johns" in Ephesus. This is the only documentary evidence that we have for the *existence* of "John the Elder." There is no evidence that he wrote the Revelation, unless the conjecture of Eusebius is to be regarded as evidence. No ancient writer ever suggests that he wrote the Gospel.

But a certain M. Nicholas, in 1862, suggested that the Elder *may* have written it, for no better reason than that this theory fitted in well with certain contemporary German speculations about the origin and date of some of the books of the New Testament.

This theory has had an extraordinary vogue. But its glory is now fading to some extent. Certain critics who have some slight respect for tradition now suggest that the Elder may have acted as an amanuensis for the apostle. Others suggest that he was a friend and disciple of the apostle who "put his ideas into shape". The first of these two suggestions is harmless, but unproved. The second is equally unproved and may not be altogether harmless if it implies, as it generally does, the further assumption that in putting the apostle's ideas into shape the Elder so transformed them that they ceased to have much value as history.

Some have thought that the Elder wrote the Epistles, but not the Gospel. They do not like the idea that the Gospel may have been written by a person who can be described, as the Elder

was by Papias, as " a disciple of the Lord ". They prefer to regard the author of the Gospel as an unknown theologian or as a great dramatic genius who may, or may not, have been called John.

The confusion that reigns in critical circles with regard to the Elder may be judged from the following facts. Von Hügel called him " the very real and substantial Elder ". Dr. Streeter has written a long, if confessedly imaginary, account of his doings in the fourteenth chapter of his *Four Gospels*. Von Soden* says that there is absolutely no reliable evidence that John the apostle ever lived and worked at Ephesus ; but that the evidence in favour of the Elder is as reliable as it possibly can be. He omits to state that this " reliable " evidence rests entirely on a report that reached Dionysius that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each bearing the name of John. Papias never connects the Elder with Ephesus in any way. Yet Dr. Inge,† who is surely an authority in this field of " scholarship ", can find it in his heart to describe the Elder as " nebulous ", and Dr. B. W. Bacon,‡ the most independent of all critics, describes the story of the Elder John of Ephesus as " a higher critical mare's nest of the purest breed ". This is the kind of thing which is dignified by the name of New Knowledge.

THE ALOGOI

Another argument principally relied upon by those who deny that the apostle had anything more than a very slight connection with the writing of the Gospel is the existence of a sect which refused to accept the Gospel as the work of an apostle, or as containing any reliable evidence for the life and teaching of Jesus. These people are represented as having been orthodox old-fashioned Christians who had been brought up on the Gospel of St. Mark and who disliked the novelties which the fourth evangelist is supposed to have invented with regard to the Gospel history.

Dr. Streeter has written a long account of them in his *Four Gospels*. He admits that it is nothing more than a gleaning in

* *Urchristliche Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 214, 215.

† *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, p. 253.

‡ *Hibbert Journal*, Jan., 1931, p. 321.

“the pastureland of speculation”. He describes the evangelist as a man who had known the apostle in his youth and “conceived a mystic admiration for him”, who, when he was about twelve years old, may have seen Christ on the cross, and who might “without undue exaggeration or sacrifice of strict veracity” be described as one “who had seen the Lord”. This purely imaginary person is also credited with “a pilgrim’s knowledge of Jerusalem” and a remarkable capacity for “slipping into trances” in which it was revealed to him what the Lord would have said if only He had had any prevision of the needs of the church in Ephesus at the end of the first century.*

But unfortunately there is no documentary evidence at all for the existence of this sect at Ephesus at so early a date. When Irenaeus wrote his treatise on heresy about A.D. 180, he briefly refers to a body of people who existed in his own time in some unspecified place who rejected the Gospel according to John and the prophetic spirit, because they thought that this Gospel favoured the doctrines of the Montanists. The Montanists were a sect who held opinions not unlike those of the Quakers and the Salvation Army. Irenaeus was no friend of the Montanists, but he speaks in severe terms of the people who tried to refute them by refusing to accept the Gospel according to John, describing them as men who come near to committing the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Spirit.†

They were apparently so unimportant that he spends no time in refuting their opinions, although if they could have brought forward any sound arguments to prove that the Gospel was not a reliable account of the life and teaching of Jesus written by a man who was in a position to know the truth, they would have invalidated many of the arguments that he uses against other heretics. Eusebius, as far as we know, had never heard of them.

About two hundred years after the reference which Irenaeus made to these persons, Epiphanius, a credulous heresy-hunter who was a bishop in Cyprus, wrote a book on heresies. He collected information concerning about eighty of them. But he admits that he only knew by hearsay of the existence and tenets

* *Op. cit.*, pp. 418 f., 433, 437 ff., 456, 468.

† *Against Heresies*, iii. 11. 9.

of some of them. Some of his information was derived from the works of Hippolytus who lived in Rome in the middle of the third century. It was probably from his voluminous writings that Epiphanius got to know of a sect which rejected the fourth Gospel and the Revelation and ascribed them to Cerinthus.* The founder of this sect seems to have been unknown, and it consequently had no name. Epiphanius called its members "the Alogoi". This name had the advantage of being both a description of the opinions of the sect and a punning term of abuse, for it could mean both "those who deny the doctrine of the Logos (*or* the Word)" and also "the unreasonable people".

This name has had a history which its author never foresaw, and which would have disgusted him if he had foreseen it. It now appears in all "critical" accounts of the authorship and character of the fourth Gospel as an infallible proof that the Gospel was rejected as soon as it appeared by a large body of well-informed and orthodox Christians who were silenced by a judicious mixture of force and fraud.

We have never seen it mentioned in any "critical" treatise on the Gospel that Irenaeus thought that the members of this sect were in danger of committing the unpardonable sin, but that he considered it so unimportant that he never troubled to deal with its objections. Still less do such works mention that Epiphanius calls them "weak serpents", the noun being used to denote the dangerous character of the sect and the adjective its insignificance.

Whatever value we may attach to the opinion of a writer who was speaking about these people on hearsay evidence about a hundred years after they had ceased to exist as an organised body, we can be certain that if they really ascribed the Gospel to Cerinthus, they were more feeble-minded than Papias, even if we accept to the full the unfavourable verdict which Eusebius pronounced against him. Moreover, they must have been as ignorant of the facts of early church history as some writer in a future age might be if he ascribed Loisy's Commentary on St. John's Gospel to Pope Pius X.

* Cerinthus was a first century heretic who taught that Jesus was an ordinary man, born of Joseph and Mary, and who, according to ancient tradition, was resolutely opposed by the apostle John, who called him "the enemy of the truth."

Such are the bases on which the modern objection to the external evidence for the apostolic authorship of the fourth Gospel rests. The critics have shown that there is some probability that a man called John who was a disciple of the Lord existed and *may* have died at Ephesus. They have shown that a small, ignorant and perverse body of people existed, probably in Rome, possibly also in Asia, at some time between the middle of the second century and the middle of the third, who rejected the fourth Gospel in the face of the opinion of the best educated and most noble families in Rome and the unanimous opinion of the most learned and respected members of the church, not to mention most of the prominent heretics of the second century.

But this is no proof at all that the "Elder" wrote the Gospel, or even "put it into shape". The opinion of the "Alogoi" about it has no more historical value than the opinion of Luther that the Epistle of James was "a right strawy Epistle".

Even if it could be definitely proved that the Elder wrote the Gospel, this would leave the difficulty, so plainly stated by Von Hügel in his article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, still unsolved—namely that it is impossible to believe that a personal follower of Jesus could have written the fourth Gospel. Papias regarded the Elder as at least "a disciple of the Lord", and as one from whom a reliable account of the Lord's teaching might be derived, a record as reliable as that which might be derived from any of the Twelve.

Some of the more moderate critics would now have us believe that he stood nearer to Jesus than even the son of Zebedee and was fitted by his birth and education to understand His teaching better than any of the "unlearned and ignorant" fishermen of Galilee. But really "independent" critics, like Bacon and Loisy, threw the Elder overboard long ago and were acting quite logically in doing this, on the supposition that their theories about the origin and nature of the Gospels are true.

No careful student of the Gospels will deny that there is a difficulty in reconciling the portrait of Jesus presented by the Synoptists with that presented by St. John. But this is no excuse for rejecting perfectly straightforward and reliable external

evidence for the apostolic, or quasi-apostolic, authorship of the Gospel and still less for misrepresenting it or ignoring it.

The difficulty may well be due to our ignorance of the period during which the books of the New Testament were written. Those who knew more about it than we can ever hope to do saw the difficulty, but did not allow it to influence their conviction that the Apostle John was the author of the Gospel.

III

INTERNAL EVIDENCE AND THEOLOGICAL OBJECTIONS

In his Commentary on St. John's Gospel Bishop Westcott endeavoured to prove from the contents of the Gospel: (1) that the author was a Jew; (2) that he was a Jew of Palestine; (3) that he was an eye-witness of the life of Jesus; (4) that he was one of the Twelve; (5) that he was the Apostle John.

This argument was at one time rejected, without any attempt at detailed refutation, by many persons "who consider themselves entitled to speak in the name of criticism", with the pontifical pronouncement that Westcott "had not grappled with the question as to whether it was probable that one of the Twelve would have so presented his testimony". But it is now generally allowed that he proved his point with regard to its first two heads and that something is to be said for the third. But the evidence for the fourth and fifth heads is still generally regarded as "wholly elusive".

The objection to it is really based on a conjectural reconstruction of the theory of the development of Christian doctrine in strict accordance with what is supposed to be the law of the development of all religions—namely spontaneous evolution from a lower form to a higher.

It used to be believed that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God in unmistakable terms, when challenged by the Jews to do so, and that He taught His disciples still more clearly to regard Him as such. Consequently when St. Paul, St. Peter, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Fourth Evangelist plainly made this doctrine the backbone and the motive both of their lives and of their teaching, they were only expressing in their own words what might have been learned from the Master while He was on earth. But of recent years many have come to believe that Synoptic criticism has established that a part of the second Gospel and part of the tradition common to the first and third Gospels are almost the only accounts of the life of Jesus which may reasonably be regarded as "historical".

Some fragments of the original matter in the first Gospel are also accepted as reliable, and it is allowed that there might be some historical justification for part of the outline of the fourth Gospel, or for some isolated events and sayings recorded in it.

Whatever in these traditions seemed to imply that He was anything more than a good man who had an exceptional sense of His dependence on God through that "sonship" which He shared with other men, but realised in a higher sense than they did, was ascribed to the "experience" which His followers had of the influence of His "spirit" after the "resurrection". It was never explained how these followers came to believe that He had survived death and was able not only to communicate with them, but also to inspire them to live at a higher moral level than they, or (it is generally admitted) any other men, had been able to live before.

In the face of such an "explanation" as this of the origin of Christianity, it is obviously natural that the fourth Gospel, if it is to be regarded as the work of *any* personal follower of Jesus, should appear to be "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence".

But the force of truth is so great that, after long hesitation, many critics who cannot go all the way with the theory of the origin of Christianity outlined above are now beginning to admit that the Gospel contains traces of "a good Jerusalem tradition", unknown to, or not used by the writers of the Synoptic Gospels. Some are even willing to regard the son of Zebedee as the source of this tradition.

The fact seems to be that the second Gospel consists of its writer's recollections of the teaching which St. Peter gave to Gentile converts who had no knowledge of Christianity and not much of Judaism. This is the account of its origin given by Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, whose testimony to the existence of "the Elder" we have already mentioned. Peter, we are told, adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, and it is not, therefore, surprising that it did not contain all that was known about Jesus. Moreover, he seems to have described His life as it appeared to the disciples before the resurrection. He may have thought that his Gentile hearers would best understand the meaning of the life of Jesus if they approached it from the same

position as that from which he and his fellow disciples had first learnt to regard it. However this may be, it is certain that in the second Gospel we are continually reminded that what is recorded there is presented from the point of view of men who did not and could not understand what they saw fully, because the Son of Man had not then risen from the dead.

That St. Peter was capable of giving further instruction as to the moral teaching of Jesus and as to the Person of Christ is obvious from the Epistle which is attributed to him. Extreme critics are driven to deny, on purely subjective evidence, that he had anything to do with this Epistle. But few of them go so far as to deny that the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Corinthians and Romans are the work of a man who was converted from Judaism to Christianity soon after the crucifixion, who submitted his teaching to the leading members of the Twelve and who gained their approbation for it. Many critics who are by no means prepared to accept the traditional view of the origin of Christianity also accept the Epistles to the Colossians and Philippians and, to some extent, the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles as the work of St. Paul, and acknowledge the Epistle to the Hebrews to be an early and authoritative presentation of the faith of the church.

It is as certain as anything can be about the dating of ancient literature that, at any rate, the universally acknowledged Epistles of St. Paul were written before the second Gospel was published in its present shape. This admission does not in any way prove that the teaching contained in the Gospel was not well known to the people to whom St. Paul wrote before they received his letters. The summary of a sermon to the first Gentile converts ascribed to St. Peter in Acts x. 34-43 resembles the general content of the second Gospel very closely.

It is obvious that St. Paul and many other Christian missionaries must have based their message on this type of teaching, often with considerable additions corresponding to matter found in the other Gospels. Otherwise it is impossible to account for the teaching given in the undisputed Epistles, and the background of Christian belief that this teaching presupposes. St. Paul had never taught in Rome when he wrote and dispatched his Epistle

to that Church, so it is obvious that it was not he who imparted the teaching which it presupposes and without which it would be unintelligible. It is hardly too much to say that the Epistle to the Romans presupposes nearly all the teaching which is found in *all* the Gospels, and not in the Synoptic Gospels only. Its teaching about the Person and work of Christ and of the importance of this doctrine as a motive for living the Christian life must have come from Jesus Himself, while He was on earth, or from the opinion that His followers formed of Him within the first twenty years or so after the crucifixion.

If this teaching had its source in the teaching of Jesus, the origin of the teaching of St. Paul is accounted for, and the content of the fourth Gospel need not necessarily be referred to "a theologian" or to "the first of the great Christian mystics", or even to "the first of the modernists". Some may think that the wording in which it is expressed is the work of the Evangelist, and that the account which is given of the teaching is much compressed. These points are of secondary importance; what is vital is that it should not misrepresent or exaggerate the teaching of Jesus as to His person and office.

There are only two alternatives to this traditional method of accounting for the doctrinal teaching of St. Paul and of the fourth Evangelist. One is that the whole thing was founded on an illusion: the other is that the Spirit of the risen Christ so worked on the minds of these men that they were able to write their books in perfectly good faith, and to put forward as the teaching of Jesus something which He had never taught, or even thought of.

Attention is drawn to the way in which St. Paul speaks of his experience of the indwelling Christ, and to the revelations upon which he founded his claim to be regarded as an apostle in the fullest sense of the term. It is supposed that this experience and these revelations not only transformed his character and enlightened his understanding of the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament, but also enabled him to proclaim as the teaching of Jesus something which could not have been found in the meagre traditions of the life and death of a Galilean carpenter which he received from the Twelve.

But such a theory omits to notice that, even if St. Paul claims that he did not receive his gospel from men, but by revelation of Jesus Christ, he also says that he was not the only one who preached this gospel. "So whether it were I or they, so we preached and so you believed" (I Cor. xv. 11; see also Gal. ii. 1-10). Of course it can be assumed that the other apostles and teachers of the early church were also subject to visions and revelations, but this is pure supposition and has no evidence to support it. But from the point of view of those who do not believe in the existence of a God who can be regarded as a Person in any intelligible sense, and of those who think that God is only manifested in the processes of "nature" culminating in man and that consequently "Jesus was most divine when He was most human", this is comfortable doctrine.

We do not know how far the record of the moral teaching of Jesus is ascribed by such critics to the visions and revelations which the disciples of Jesus are supposed to have received, or how far they are content to ascribe it to syncretism or to His religious genius. But it should be observed that, although St. Paul seldom quotes the actual words of Jesus with regard to this teaching, its inspiration is manifestly present in his Epistles, especially in the latter part of the Epistle to the Romans.

It is not too much to say that, some time before the Synoptic Gospels were published in their present form, the essential ideas contained in them were current in the teaching of St. Paul and other Christian missionaries who can have had little or no contact with him and little opportunity of knowing of and accepting the additions which he is supposed to have made to the primitive teaching of Jesus and the Twelve as the result of his visions or of his theological speculations. It is not even too much to say that many of the ideas which lie behind the teaching of the fourth Gospel were in the air, if not actually formulated in the language in which we now find them expressed in that book. This is so obviously the case that many critics allow that the Evangelist was a disciple of St. Paul, and that he obligingly supplied a "historical" justification for his master's speculations in the form of an edifying romance.

No one who is prepared to admit that the undisputed Epistles

of St. Paul depend on the teaching of Jesus need trouble himself very much about the theological content of the fourth Gospel when he is considering the question of its authorship. Critics like Loisy, who regarded it as nothing more than a book of devotion, were compelled by the logic of their theory to ascribe much of these Epistles to a "Christian Gnosis" which only developed after the death of their alleged author.

IV

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Dr. V. H. Stanton wrote: "Trustworthy as the tradition of apostolic authorship may be held to be, this authorship could not thereby be proved, if the character of the Gospel should appear to be incompatible with it." This is perfectly reasonable as a general statement, but it practically assumes as proved something which is far from being proved with regard to this particular book. Attempts to show that the Gospel contains gross anachronisms and shows a lack of knowledge of conditions in Palestine before the fall of Jerusalem have broken down completely.

We have shown that the external evidence for the apostolic authorship is neither negligible nor untrustworthy. The only argument that can be used against it is that it is unlikely to the verge of impossibility that one of the Twelve, or any personal disciple of Jesus would have presented his testimony in this form.

But the problem as to what would happen if the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels had such a disciple as the Fourth Evangelist is not easily solved. The disciple is universally admitted to have been a religious and even a dramatic genius of the first water, whatever his teacher may have been.

Dr. Streeter, who regarded the apostolic authorship of the Gospel as so improbable as not even to deserve discussion, and who unhesitatingly assigned it to the Elder whose contact with Jesus was confined to a possible sight of Him on the cross when he was a child, was constrained to assume that this personage was one to whom "the category of development in the slow biological sense of the term does not apply".* On the other hand Dr. C. E. Raven, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, described the Evangelist imagined by Dr. Streeter as "a psychological and moral monstrosity" and as "a traitor to the true interests of Christendom".† Dr. Raven is no ignorant and hide-bound traditionalist. He had at one time so much reverence

* *Four Gospels*, p. 457.

† *Jesus and the Gospel of Love*, pp. 163, 164.

for "independent" criticism that he refrained for many years from publishing the opinions which he felt compelled, in the end, to express in his book mentioned above (see p. 156).

Dr. Streeter was obliged by his theories to assume that the Elder was such a serious exception to "the beautiful order of nature" that he also wrote down his visions in the form of a history, tricked out with minute details of place and time which he deliberately collected while on a pilgrim visit to Jerusalem. The value of these details for the purpose of persuading readers of the book that it was a genuine history of Jesus is obvious, but the morality of such literary devices leaves something to be desired.

Other writers tried to satisfy the curiosity of the early church about the events of the earthly life of Jesus by writing those books which we call "the Apocryphal Gospels", but they completely failed to impose their fictions on any but the most ignorant people in what is called, without any conclusive evidence, an uncritical age.

How was it that the Elder, or whatever other "John" wrote the fourth Gospel, succeeded not only in misleading all the most learned men of the second and third Christian centuries, but also in supplying exactly the kind of account of the life and teaching of Jesus which makes the rest of the New Testament and the rapid spread of Christianity intelligible?

Not only the "Alogoi," but also the doctors of the church, saw as clearly as we do that the order of events described in the fourth Gospel does not correspond exactly with the order of events described in the Synoptic Gospels, but this did not prevent them from ascribing it to an apostle. At this distance of time we are not likely to be able to explain these chronological difficulties any better than Tertullian and Origen did; but we can say with confidence that no visionary or mystic would have wantonly inserted them, if he had many lucid intervals. That he had at least one lucid interval is assumed in that part of the theory that assigns his accuracy in topographical detail to a visit to Jerusalem in search of "local colour".

None of the theologians of the second or third century ever observed any contradiction between the presentation of the

teaching about the Person of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and in the fourth Gospel. This is really remarkable, for they were keen-scented hunters of heresy, and perfectly well aware that when the Gospel was first preached a small body of persons, regarding themselves as Christians, believed that Jesus was no more than a man. They decisively rejected this opinion, and the sect that held it vanished early in the second century without leaving a trace, not because of persecution or extermination, but as a result of a better understanding of the Gospel message.

If the modern mind now rejects the portrait of Jesus presented in the fourth Gospel as "hardly human" and "quite unnatural", it is presuming to weigh in the scales of human ignorance the form which a revelation of God in the flesh should have taken. We may believe, if we please, that it is impossible that an Incarnation should have taken place in a definite man at a definite time in a definite place, although we may allow that the story is a mythical representation of the "truth" that God is and always has been incarnate in mankind. If this attitude is adopted, it is advisable to consider what its implications are. One is that it is improbable to the verge of impossibility that one of the personal followers of Jesus should have written, or had more than a very slight share in, the fourth Gospel. From this it follows that the external evidence that the apostle John was the author or even the inspirer of the Gospel must be discredited at all costs, no matter how improbable the arguments used to discredit this evidence may be.

The members of the early church, who knew perfectly well that the Epistles of St. Paul and the Synoptic Gospels were the earliest documents of the faith, did not treat the evidence for the authorship of the fourth Gospel in this way. They were in a far better position than we are to judge how far it corresponded to a tradition inspired by the Old Testament and resting on recollections of the kind of teaching which Jesus would have been likely to give in Jerusalem in the face of Rabbinic opposition, or how far it represented a transformation of this teaching into the idiom of Greek philosophy—in a word, how far it was Judæan or Alexandrian in origin.

For a long time it was "one of the best established results of

criticism ” that the Gospel was Alexandrian, both in language and thought. Now there is a growing consensus of opinion that its diction is Aramaic, and that its theology is not radically different from that of the Old Testament, as interpreted by certain enlightened Rabbis, and illuminated by the certainty that “ Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God ” (John xx. 31).

The members of the early church accepted the teaching upon which this Gospel put the coping stone at the peril of their lives. Many who accepted it from the very first, if we are to believe the evidence of the manner in which they decorated their burial places in Rome, were men of education and of noble family, and some of them lost the right of succession to the Imperial Throne because they accepted it. It is unlikely that we, with our partial knowledge of the era when it was published, understand it better than they did, or know more about its author. It is certain that we risk nothing but the derision of a band of self-satisfied savants who drew their original inspiration from German philosophy, if we decline to give a fair hearing to the existing evidence for its authorship. No doubts were cast upon its apostolic origin until the presuppositions upon which it relies—that there is a God who can and does influence the course of history, and that man, when left to himself, is incapable of rising out of the sin and misery with which he is encompassed—were challenged in the eighteenth century by what passed, in its day, for Illumination.