

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

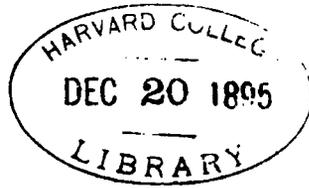
<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php



THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AFTER A CENTURY OF
CRITICISM.

BY THE REV. W. L. FERGUSON.

WHEN, where, and by whom was the Fourth Gospel written? These questions have been often asked and variously answered during the past one hundred years.

It shall be the aim of the present discussion to consider: *first*, the history of the controversy; *second*, the date of composition; *third*, the place of composition; *fourth*, the author; *fifth*, the occasion and the author's object in writing; *sixth*, the present aspects of the controversy.

I. THE HISTORY OF THE CONTROVERSY.

That the Apostle John wrote the Fourth Gospel, was the generally received opinion of the Christian church down to the end of the seventeenth century. The only exception to this was on the part of a small sect, which flourished in Asia Minor at the close of the second century, known as the "Alogi." This sect "denied the doctrines of the Logos, the Paraclete, and of the continuance of the prophetic gifts in the church, and also attributed the writings of John, which taught these doctrines, to Cerinthus, in order not thereby to impeach the authority of that apostle."¹

¹ Jackson, Dictionary of Religious Knowledge, p. 23.

At the close of the seventeenth century a few English Deists made an attack upon this Gospel, but the contest was of little importance. It was not until 1792 that the storm, which has raged so violently at times, really broke forth. The occasion was the publication of a small book, by Edward Evanson, entitled "The Dissonance of the Four generally received Evangelists." Evanson had been a clergyman in the Church of England, but, some fifteen years before he wrote his book, he had left the ministry, owing to certain difficulties in which he had become involved. "In 1773 he was tried in the Consistorial Court of Gloucester for publicly altering or omitting such phrases in the church-service as seemed to him to be untrue; correcting the authorized version of the Scriptures, and conversing against the creeds and the divinity of Christ."¹ The case was carried to the Court of Arches, and in 1777 it was quashed, upon technical grounds.

Evanson urged the differences between the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel. He regarded as spurious the seven letters to the seven churches in the former, and he assigned the latter to some second-century author, e. g. some Platonic philosopher. He also regarded as spurious Matthew and Mark, assigning them also to the second century. Likewise he rejected the Epistles to the Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Hebrews; of James, Peter, John, and Jude. He expressed himself as abundantly satisfied with the Gospel according to Luke and with the Acts of the Apostles.² The book of Evanson called out numerous replies, and in 1810 was the subject of the Bampton Lectures.

Prior to the death of Evanson, which occurred in 1805, his views gained currency in Germany. In 1798, Eckermann wrote rejecting the authorship of John, but admitting that Johannine traditions formed the basis of our Fourth Gospel. Several other Germans entered the contest, but the battle lan-

¹ Schaff-Herzog, art. "Evanson," ii. 777.

² Bampton Lectures (1890), pp. 174-175; Reynolds, *Pulpit Commentary*, p. xii.

guished until 1820, when Bretschneider published his "Probabilia." The work was originally written in the German, but later was translated into Latin, not being intended for general circulation but for the use of the students. The book does not assert as positive the conclusions of the author, but as probable. The object of the work was to call forth opinions from experts.

Bretschneider put forth all the old views of Evanson, Eckermann, Vogel, and others, and he also added new ones. He emphasized the points that both in discourses and in Christological teaching the Fourth Gospel contradicts the other three; that it is the work of a Christian, who was either of pagan, or, as would seem more probable, of Alexandrian origin; that it belongs to the first half of the second century. The substance of all the later destructive criticism is to be found in his work. Bretschneider's views brought out a perfect cyclone of books, pamphlets, and articles in reply. In 1824, after carefully weighing all the evidence presented in these replies, Bretschneider withdrew his objections as urged in the "Probabilia," and expressed himself as thoroughly satisfied that his arguments had been fully answered. Two years later, in a review article, he repeated this withdrawal; and four years later he reasserted the same retraction in his "Handbook of Dogmatics."¹

For a short period the theological world found rest. But the season of quiet was broken, in 1835, when Strauss published his "Life of Jesus." The appearance of this work opened the Johannine question anew, and precipitated a conflict, which, under one form or another, and with varying degrees of intensity, has been waging ever since. Replies to Strauss in the shape of sermons, books, editorials, and theses came thick and fast. But amidst them all, he was unterrified; and by means of them, his books received much free advertising and ran through four editions.

¹ Bampton Lectures (1890), p. 188.

In the "Life of Jesus," Strauss assumed as proved the conclusions of Bretschneider concerning the Fourth Gospel. He also adopted the views of Gieseler and Griesbach, that the synoptic Gospels are a redaction of an oral tradition, "which, after having circulated for a long time in a purely oral form, was at last slowly fixed" in the present shape. The critical tests which Wolf had applied to the writings of Homer, were applied by Strauss to the Gospels. The result was that Strauss regarded all four of the Gospels as spurious; denied the incarnation; denied the possibility of miracles, and asserted that the Christ of the Gospels was a myth.¹

In the first edition of his work, Strauss rested upon his assumptions concerning the Gospels without any misgivings. But in the second and third editions he expressed some doubts as to whether, after all, the Fourth Gospel is not by the Apostle John. In his fourth edition, however, he returned to his former position, holding it the more tenaciously, inasmuch as he saw that it was necessary for the maintenance of his entire work.

In 1864 Strauss wrote a new *Life of Jesus*, which was said to be a *Life of Jesus for the German People*. On this occasion he did that which he had hitherto neglected, i. e. took into consideration the authenticity of his sources—the Gospels—of the *Life of Jesus*. His position in reference to the synoptics remained unchanged, practically, but he was compelled to modify his opinions concerning the Fourth Gospel. He rejected the evidence of Papias, Eusebius, Justin Martyr, and the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel itself; openly alleging that if the evidence concerning the synoptics is defective, that concerning the Fourth Gospel is doubly so. He says: "As regards the external evidence, it would be well for the cause of the Fourth Gospel if it were similarly circumstanced with that of the three first."²

¹ Godet, *Commentary on John*, i. 10.

² Strauss, *New Life of Jesus*, p. 77.

But Strauss admitted that the Homilies of Clement, as well as the fragments of Apollinaris, were entitled to some consideration.¹ He could not deny their existence, nor their seeming reference to the Fourth Gospel. He also admits that "the contemporary apologists, Tatian and Athenagoras, also refer, though without naming it, unmistakably to the Fourth Gospel; and at last Theophilus of Antioch quotes it with due form: "Therefore the Holy Scriptures and all inspired writers teach us, among whom John says, In the beginning was the Word," etc. Strauss admits also that "Irenæus, indeed, does say that John wrote the Gospel when he was staying at Ephesus, in Asia." But he complains because Theophilus does not say why he attributed the Fourth Gospel to John, and because Irenæus does not say in so many words that Polycarp told him (Irenæus) that John was its author. Furthermore, Strauss declares that historical accuracy is not always predicable of Irenæus, and so rules him out of court altogether.²

Strauss in his writings continually charges the orthodox theologians and critics with a lack of fairness and candor in dealing with evidence, while he prides himself that he is wholly unbiased. If he ever were entitled to claim this for himself, here is at least one instance where the claim must be forfeited. The case is simply this: When confronted by evidence which was derogatory to his theory, Strauss dismissed the witnesses summarily, on the ground that every man must prove, beyond a peradventure, that he is telling the truth. Such a thing is impossible, and if it were a common requirement, it would destroy all evidence, whether historical or legal. But with all his labor, Strauss failed to save his theory. It fell, never to rise again, under the strokes of Baur, the former instructor of Strauss. Strauss had constantly maintained that the Gospels were myths: that the miracles and discourses attributed to Jesus were the accretions of fancy, as

¹ *Ut supra*, p. 83. ² *Ut supra*, pp. 86-90.

the myth passed from one generation to another; that these stories being put into writing were believed; and that the Gospels do not represent any conscious intent to deceive.¹

But Baur, on the other hand, showed that there was plan in the writings, and especially was this true in regard to the Fourth Gospel. Baur did not hesitate, however, to call them "conscious" fabrications. According to his theory, discord and enmity prevailed in the early church; there was strife between the Petrine and the Pauline Christians, and between Jewish and Gentile converts. The resultant of these conflicting forces, he claimed, was the Catholic Church, in which peace was effected. "The monuments of this unifying process are the books of the New Testament, which, for the most part, were written in the second century, in order either to advance the views of one of the parties, or to make a compromise between them." As partners in this same line of investigation, we may count Zeller, Köstlin, Schwegler, Ritschl, and Hilgenfeld.²

But the theory of the Tübingen, or Baur, school is now quite fully abandoned. It served, however, a double purpose. (1) It showed that Strauss' theory of unconscious myth was wholly without foundation; and (2) it ultimately destroyed itself—a result, to be sure, exactly opposite to what its advocates expected, but a result, nevertheless, which was inevitable, owing to the failure of its supporters to reach any common conclusion respecting the date, authorship, and authority of the various New Testament books.

While the views of Evanson, Bretschneider, Strauss, and Baur were attracting so much attention, there grew up an intermediate school of critics, which was loath to separate the Fourth Gospel wholly from the Apostle John. The views of this school may be grouped under two heads: (1) The partition theory, and (2) the derivation theory. The parti-

¹ *Ut supra*, pp. 33-35.

² Dictionary of Religious Knowledge, art. "Baur," p. 90.

tion theory holds that the basis of our present Gospel is the work of the Apostle John, but the body of it belongs to a later author or authors. In short, the Gospel is largely made up of interpolations. On the other hand, the derivation theory holds that the Gospel is Johannine only in the sense that it embodies the teachings of John, as remembered by his disciples or as taught in the Ephesian school founded by him. Renan may be taken as a fair example of those who hold this view. He says: "The Fourth Gospel is not the work of the Apostle John. It was attributed to him by one of his disciples about the year 100. The discourses are almost wholly fictitious, but the narrative portions contain valuable traditions which go back in part to the Apostle John."¹ The more radical advocates of this theory would place the date farther on toward the middle of the second century, or even past it. The most prominent among those who belonged to this intermediate school were Eckermann, Paulus, Schenkel, Schweizer, Ewald, Tobler, Reuss, Sabatier, Haze, Renan, Wendt, Weizsäcker, and Weisse.

There is still another coterie of critics in Germany, Holland, and England, to whom a brief reference must be made. The representatives of this group are Keim, Oscar and Heinrich Holtzmann, Thoma, Scholten, Tayler, "Supernatural Religion," Edwin A. Abbott, and Davidson. This school denies to the Fourth Gospel any connection with the Apostle John, whatever. It holds that the "Gospel was written between Barcochba and Justin (135-158 A. D., according to Pfeleiderer's dating; a recent writer, Krüger, places the First Apology, on which the question turns, in 138 A. D., Dr. Hort c. 146). The Gospel was written at Ephesus, by a single author, who, from the miracles to which he gives admission, cannot have been either the Apostle or a disciple of the Apostle, but was a nameless person who sought to invest his work with apostolic

¹ Renan, *Vie de Jesus* (13th ed., Michel Levy Frères, Paris, 1873), p. xi.

authority; the ideas are largely derived from Philo, and a great part of the narrative is pure allegory."¹

It would be interesting to note the many phases of this view as held by different individuals, and especially the view of Davidson, who formerly advocated the Johannine authorship; and of Martineau and Delff, in whom are found the most recent opinions of this modern negative school. But the limits of this article forbid such an expansion.

It is difficult to make a satisfactory classification of critics. Sometimes the designations "hostile" and "orthodox" are applied to those who on the one hand have attacked the Gospel, and, upon the other hand, to those who have defended it. But the classification does not hold, for many of those who have questioned the Johannine authorship have done so in their research for truth; while many who have defended the Johannine authorship have been far from what the term "orthodox" usually means. Schleiermacher, Neander, De Wette, Lücke, Bleek, Bunsen, Ebrard, Tholuck, Hengstenberg, Meyer, Lechler, Weiss, Luthardt, Godet, Beyschlag, Zahn, Lightfoot, Westcott, Salmon, Sanday, and Ezra Abbot have written in favor of the Johannine authorship. With such an array of scholars in favor of the Johannine authorship, it can scarcely be claimed as true that "our age has cancelled the judgment of centuries."²

Having dealt thus briefly with the history of the controversy, we now pass to consider:—

II. THE DATE OF COMPOSITION.

When was the Fourth Gospel written? Various results have been reached by those who deny the Johannine authorship. Baur, the leader of the Tübingen school, said, 170 A. D.; Volkmar, 155; Zeller (since 1853) and Scholten (since 1867), 150; Hilgenfeld (1875), 130-140; Keim (1867), 110-

¹ Sanday, *Expositor* (4th Series), v. 373.

² Keim, *Jésus of Nazareth* (Eng. tr., 1873), i. 142.

115, but since 1875, 130; Holtzmann, as contemporaneous with the Epistle of Barnabas (*ca.* 100); Bretschneider, the beginning or the middle of the second century. Since no one of these dates is later than the third quarter of the second century, and since Irenæus testifies that the Apostle John lived until the reign of the Emperor Trajan (98–117 A. D.), the field of inquiry is restricted at the most to the period extending from 98 A. D. to 170 A. D. What witnesses can be brought forward between these dates, and what is the value of their testimony?

There is at least one connecting link between Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons, 178–202 A. D., and the Apostle John. That link, or person, is Polycarp of Smyrna. That Polycarp was a hearer of the Apostle John, is evident from the following quotation, which Eusebius gives from the Epistle of Irenæus to Florinus, who was a heretic. He says: "These doctrines, O Florinus, to say the least, are not of a sound understanding. These doctrines are inconsistent with the church and are calculated to thrust those who follow them into the greatest impiety. These doctrines, not even the heretics out of the church ever attempted to assert. These doctrines were never delivered to thee by the presbyters before us, those who also were the immediate disciples of the apostles. For I saw thee when I was yet a boy in the Lower Asia with Polycarp, moving in great splendor at court, and endeavoring by all means to gain his esteem. I remember the events of those times much better than those of more recent occurrence. As the studies of our youth, growing with our minds, unite with them so firmly, that I can tell also the very place where the blessed Polycarp was accustomed to sit and discourse; and also his entrances, his walks, the complexion of his life, and the form of his body, and his conversations with the people, and his familiar intercourse with John, as he was accustomed to tell, as also his familiarity with those that had seen the Lord. How also he used to relate their discourses, and what things he had

heard from them concerning the Lord. Also concerning his miracles, his doctrine, all these were told by Polycarp, in consistency with the Holy Scriptures, as he had received them from eye-witnesses of the doctrine of salvation. These things, by the mercy of God, and the opportunity then afforded me, I attentively heard, noting them down, not on paper, but in my heart; and these same facts I am always in the habit, by the grace of God, to recall faithfully to mind."¹

What, now, is the value of this testimony of Irenæus, as given by Eusebius? There is no reason to question the correctness of Eusebius in giving the quotation. Whatever may be said concerning the interpretation which he put upon certain facts, the accuracy of Eusebius in recording the facts is quite generally acknowledged. The question in this case, then, is not concerning Eusebius, but wholly as to the reliability of Irenæus as a witness. Is Irenæus correct in making Polycarp a hearer of the Apostle John? Eusebius thinks Irenæus confused the Apostle John with some other John, but Irenæus bears no such testimony, neither do the facts concerning Polycarp's life render such confusion possible.

Recent investigation has forced back by ten years the martyrdom of Polycarp. The date now generally accepted is 155 A. D.² According to a document preserved in Eusebius,³ Polycarp was eighty-six years of age when put to death. He was, therefore, born in 69 A. D. If John lived in Asia Minor until 98 A. D., or even later, there is nothing to prevent Polycarp from being his disciple, so far as age or opportunity is concerned, for a number of years.

But these are not the only reasons for supposing Irenæus to be correct in his statement. He was bound in other ways to the immediate locality of the Apostle John's teaching and influence. Pothinus, his immediate predecessor, as Bishop

¹ Eusebius, H. E. v. 20.

² Bampton Lectures (1890), pp. 387-392, esp. 390.

³ H. E. iv. 15; see also Irenæus, Adv. Haer. iii. 3. 4.

of Lyons, was from Asia Minor, and is supposed by some to have heard the Apostle John, or at least to have been familiar with Christians contemporary with the Apostle. Moreover, there is a letter, addressed by the churches of Vienna and Lyons to the churches in Asia Minor,¹ which is often assigned to Irenæus, and which indicates a close fellowship between the churches of Gaul and those of Asia Minor. When the fact that Irenæus himself was from Asia Minor is considered, and when account is taken of those ties which afterwards bound him to that region, it seems almost incredible that he should be mistaken.

It is beyond question that Irenæus made use of the Fourth Gospel, and that he attributed it to the Apostle John. To be sure, he does not say that Polycarp informed him that John wrote the Gospel, but he does say—and one must suppose he had some reason for saying—that John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on his breast, put forth his Gospel while he abode in Ephesus in Asia.²

It is certain, also, that Polycarp made use of the First Epistle of John, a document which cannot well be separated from the Fourth Gospel, whether considered as respects its style or its doctrine.³

Thus the conclusion is reached that Polycarp and Irenæus both taught Johannine doctrine, and that the one did not differ from the other, either in the sources of his teaching or in the content of the same, since the First Epistle of John presupposes the Fourth Gospel.⁴ The testimony of Clement of Alexandria and of Tertullian, who flourished at the close of the second century, is not here considered, because it falls without the limits of the dates set—98–170 A. D. Neither is any account taken of the testimony of Theophilus of An-

¹ H. E. v. 1–4. ² Adv. Haer. iii. 1. 1.

³ Strauss, Renan, and others admit this fact. See Strauss, *New Life of Jesus*, i. 78.

⁴ See Epistle of Polycarp, vii. and viii., in Vol. i., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

tioch, or of Apollinaris, Bishop of Hierapolis, since it is now quite generally admitted that the Fourth Gospel was in use during the third quarter of the second century. Professor Charteris says: "Indeed, I believe it may now be said that the debate does not extend beyond the middle of the century."¹

But lest the link between Irenæus and the middle of the second century be deemed a necessary one, Tatian, who died about the year 170 A. D., is put forward as a witness. Tatian was an Assyrian; born about 110–120 A. D.; reared and educated as a pagan; able to speak and write Greek, as well as his own vernacular of Syriac; converted to Christianity during his maturer years; lived in Rome; was a pupil of Justin Martyr; wrote an apology known as "An Address to the Greeks"; after the death of Justin became an ascetic; imbibed Gnostic doctrines; became the leader of a sect which was considered heretical, and, having moved to the East, probably to Antioch, he composed his "Diatessaron," or harmony of the four Gospels. Until recent years, it was generally supposed that this work was lost, and but for the testimony of Eusebius and Epiphanius, in the fourth century, Theodoret of Cyrillus, in the middle of the fifth century, and Barsalibi, a Bishop of Syria, in the twelfth century, scholars would have been ignorant of its existence and contents.

We now have the Diatessaron of Tatian. In 1876, a Latin translation of the work of Ephraem Syrus, who flourished about 360 A. D., and who wrote an exposition of Tatian's Diatessaron, was published. Two MSS. of the Diatessaron with Ephraem Syrus' comments were in the Armenian convent at Venice. From these Zahn endeavored to reconstruct the original Diatessaron of Tatian. In 1881, he published a monograph in which he considered the historical and critical questions pertaining to the Diatessaron,

¹ Croall Lectures (James Nisbit & Co., London, 1882), p. 96.

and also the text, so far as he had succeeded in restoring it. Since the attempt of Zahn to restore the Diatessaron, there have been brought together in Rome two Arabic MSS. of the same. From these MSS. an Arabic version was published by Ciasca, in 1888. This corresponds so nearly with the original on which Ephraem Syrus commented, that there is now little doubt that we possess the Diatessaron of Tatian.¹

The importance of these discoveries of later years is given by Harnack as follows: "We learn from the Diatessaron that about 160 A. D. our four Gospels had already taken a place of prominence in the church, and that no others had done so; that in particular the Fourth Gospel had taken a fixed place alongside of the three synoptics."² The importance of these discoveries is further enhanced when it is remembered that Tatian was a pupil of Justin Martyr, and that in all probability he used only such sacred writings as were approved by his master. Justin was martyred at Rome during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, about the year 166 A. D. Of the many writings mentioned by Eusebius as belonging to him, three only have come down to us—two Apologies and the Dialogue with Trypho. The date of these writings is placed by most critics at not later than 147 A. D.

From these writings of Justin, it is learned that he was familiar with certain documents which he styles "Memoirs," "Memoirs by the Apostles," and "Memoirs composed by the apostles of Christ and those who followed with them." What better description could be desired, in a single sentence, of the Gospels than the last one given? "Memoirs composed by the apostles of Christ and those who followed with them"! Indeed, Justin himself testifies to the general use of these written "memoirs" in Christian worship. He says: "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the

¹ Bampton Lectures (1890), pp. 375-387.

² Encyc. Brit., art. "Tatian," xxiii. 81.

apostles or the writings of the prophets are read."¹ Here, then, these memoirs are placed side by side with the Old Testament Scriptures, and are evidently regarded by the churches as of equal authority with them.

But were these "memoirs" Gospels? Justin declares that they were. He makes the identification in the following words: "The apostles in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them."² And were they the Gospels which form the Diatessaron? In short, were they the Gospels known to us?

Dr. Ezra Abbot says: "A careful sifting of the evidence will show, I believe, that there is really no *proof* that in the time of Justin Martyr . . . there was a single work, bearing the title of a Gospel, which as a *history of Christ's ministry* came into competition with our present four Gospels, or which took the place among Christians which our Gospels certainly held in the last quarter of the second century."³

That Justin Martyr made use of the Fourth Gospel in particular can scarcely be doubted by any one who reads the First Apology. The doctrine of the Logos, so different from that of Philo or Plato, but so similar to that of the Fourth Gospel, would seem clearly to indicate such use. It has been said of Justin: "He cites the synoptists, he thinks and argues according to John." Hilgenfeld and Keim both admit that Justin actually used all four Gospels as known to us, and Dr. Ezra Abbot, after a most careful discussion of the case, concludes that "We are authorized to regard it as in the highest degree probable, if not morally certain, that in the time of Justin Martyr the Fourth Gospel was generally received as the work of the Apostle John."⁴ In view of what Justin says about the general practice of reading the Gospels in the churches at public services, it cannot be unfair to assume that

¹ First Apology, lxvii. ² *Ibid.*, lxvi. ³ Critical Essays, p. 18.

⁴ Critical Essays, p. 82.

the Gospels—our four—were known and accepted for some considerable time prior to the date when Justin wrote.

In this investigation, the second quarter of the second century has now been reached, a date removed by less than fifty years from the time of the Apostle John's death. Back to this point the use of the Fourth Gospel cannot be gainsaid. But there is testimony to the existence of the Fourth Gospel during this second quarter of the second century.

Papias, who was Bishop of Hierapolis, was, according to Irenæus, "a hearer of John, a companion of Polycarp, and a man of the olden time."¹ Papias certainly knew the first two Gospels, and in common with Polycarp made use of the First Epistle of John. If what has been said in an earlier part of this paper is true, concerning the relation of the First Epistle to the Fourth Gospel, that the one presupposes the other, then the conclusion is obvious that the Fourth Gospel was known to Papias.

In a lengthy, and in the main a very fair, discussion, Godet, after considering all the evidence relating to the famous passage preserved in Eusebius,² leads up to the conclusion that the Fourth Gospel must have been in the possession of Papias when he wrote the passage under discussion. Godet dates the work of Papias at 100–110 A. D., and claims Scholten, Hilgenfeld, and Keim, of the critics, as his supporters for this date. Godet's exact words are: "The view which Papias held of the evangelical history was formed under the influence of the Johannine narrative, much rather than under that of the synoptics."³ Continuing, Godet says: "If our Gospel, then, has exercised over him the influence which we have demonstrated, it must necessarily have existed before the beginning of the second century."

The date assigned by Godet is probably too early. Godet wrote in 1876, but since then Lightfoot has shown that the

¹ Adv. Haer. v. 33. 4; Fragments of Papias, iv. ² H. E. iii. 39.

³ Godet, Commentary on John, i. 236–237.

decade 130–140 A. D. is the better date. This avoids any seeming desire to push the time of Papias' writing back (for the sake of partisan purposes) beyond a period which is entirely reasonable. And if, as now seems quite probable, Papias was born about the year 70 A. D., then both the statements of Irenæus, that "Papias was a hearer of the Apostle John and a companion of Polycarp," must in the future remain unchallenged.

Thus we have not only Polycarp as a connecting link with the apostolic age, but we have Papias as well. "Two are better than one."

Among the Gnostics, there is the testimony of Marcion (fl. 138–142 A. D.), of Valentinus (fl. at Rome 140 A. D.), and of Basilides (fl. at Alexandria 125 A. D.). Without entering into the details concerning Marcion and Valentinus, we pass at once to the evidence of Basilides. This brings us into the first quarter of the second century.

Basilides flourished during the reign of Hadrian (117–138 A. D.). His home was at Alexandria in Egypt. He was the leader of a Gnostic sect and a very voluminous writer. None of his writings remain except what are preserved in Hippolytus' "Refutation of All Heresies," in the works of Clement, and perhaps in Origen. The portion of his works with which we are now concerned is that which is found in the "Philosophumena," a writing formerly assigned to Origen, but now quite generally believed to belong to Hippolytus, and to be a part of his "Refutation of All Heresies."

Hippolytus was Bishop of Portus, near Rome, and flourished about 225 A. D. His work is occupied chiefly with a description and refutation of the principal heresies which had afflicted the church up to his time. He reviews the Ophites, the Simonists, the Basilidians, the Docetæ, and the Noetians.

In dealing with the Basilidians, he uses the works of their founder, Basilides, and it is to this author's sayings as preserved in Hippolytus that we now appeal. Hippolytus, in

quoting from Basilides, writes: "And this he says, is what is said in the Gospels: The true light, which enlighteneth every man, was coming into the world" (John i. 9). "And that each thing, he says, has its own particular times, the Saviour is a sufficient (witness) when he observes, Mine hour is not yet come" (John ii. 4).¹

Here we have two distinct quotations from the Fourth Gospel. Are they really copied from the works of Basilides? This is a question upon which much has been written. The conclusion seems to be quite well established that the words are from Basilides. To such a conclusion, Matthew Arnold, Bunsen, Keim, and Renan agree. Matthew Arnold declares that no "one who had not a theory to serve would ever dream of doubting it. Basilides, therefore, about the year 125 of our era, had before him the Fourth Gospel."²

In pushing this line of investigation back to the first century, use might be made of the Epistles of Ignatius, who was martyred 107-115 A. D., since it is now admitted by many that the genuineness of the Vossian recension is established, and that there are undoubted references to the Fourth Gospel in them. Considerable, also, might be said concerning the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," "The Didache," "Hermas," and "Barnabas," all of which bear witness to the Fourth Gospel. But the dates of these are so uncertain, and in some cases the integrity of the text is so doubtful, that no account of them is here taken. It is scarcely needed, since we are at a period in our investigation removed from the death of the Apostle John only fifteen, or, at most, twenty-five years.

During this period the Fourth Gospel was in circulation among both Christians and Gnostics, evidently received and quoted as an apostolic authority. When we consider that it required time for such works to circulate and to gain acceptance,—even if we allow but a decade of years,—we are forced

¹ Refutation of All Heresies, vii. 10, 15.

² God and the Bible (Macmillan & Co., 1893), p. 233.

to acknowledge its existence at the very beginning of the second century. At that time there were living multitudes of people who had seen and heard the Apostle John—for he died not earlier than 98 A. D. These people, one would suppose, might be expected to protest against any other Gospel being used than those which had been approved by the Apostle.

Then, too, we must remember that Polycarp and Papias, who both were hearers of John, and who both made use of the First Epistle of John, were living in this period; Polycarp at Smyrna, and Papias, probably, at Hierapolis in Phrygia. But from no quarter, neither from Polycarp, nor Papias, nor the Christian bodies, nor the Gnostics, does the faintest protest against the Fourth Gospel appear in any age, except by the Alogi, as already noticed, at the close of the second century. We have no hesitancy, therefore, in concluding this part of our investigation by saying that the Fourth Gospel is a late first-century writing. Having in this manner determined the date of the Fourth Gospel, we now turn to consider:—

III. THE PLACE OF COMPOSITION.

Where was the Fourth Gospel written? For an answer we are shut up to the single phrase which we find in Irenæus. "Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia."¹ "At Ephesus in Asia." This was the constant belief of the church, apparently, to the time of Irenæus. It has been the accepted belief ever since his time.

But was Irenæus correct in saying that John was in Asia? Lutzelberger, in 1840, sought to show that he was not. But he was met by the most determined opposition, especially by the Tübingen school. Keim, in 1867, sought to establish the same claim, by asserting that Irenæus confused John the Apostle with John the Presbyter; that it was John the Pres-

¹ Adv. Haer. iii. 1.1; Eusebius, H. E. v. 8.

byter who was in Ephesus, and that Polycarp was his disciple, and not the disciple of the Apostle, who never had been in Ephesus. Who this John Presbyter was, does not at present concern us. Our one question is: Was John the Apostle at Ephesus? Irenæus more than once testifies that he was. Clement of Alexandria writes to the same effect. According to the anti-Montanist, Apollonius, John the Apostle is said to have raised a dead man at Ephesus. Eusebius also accepts the fact of John's residence there, but claims that there were in Ephesus two Johns—John the Apostle and John the Presbyter. Moreover, they both were buried there, and Eusebius mentions seeing their tombs.

This statement concerning the two Johns, as made by Eusebius, must stand on its own merits. It may be correct. Lightfoot, Zahn, and others think it is; but there are many who are yet unconvinced by the evidence which is now attainable. Those who argue that the Apostle John was not in Ephesus, disregard the testimony just cited, because it comes from men at the close of the second century, and later. They base their claim upon the silence of Ignatius, Polycarp, and others who wrote early in the century, claiming that inasmuch as these writers do not mention John's residence in Ephesus, he was, therefore, never in that city. All that need be said in reply to this plea is, that the argument from silence, while always a dangerous one, is at the same time next to no argument at all. It seems more reasonable to form a judgment upon what is said, than upon what is unsaid. There has been no sufficient reason assigned why we should discredit the testimony of Irenæus, that "John put forth his Gospel while he abode in Ephesus in Asia." We now direct our inquiry toward:—

IV. THE AUTHOR OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

By whom was it written? Many hypotheses have been put forth in answer to the question. Tobler ascribed it, as well

as the Epistle to the Hebrews, to Apollos. M. Nicolas said it was the work of John the Presbyter, a contemporary of the Apostle John at Ephesus. Weizsäcker and others declared in favor, not of any particular name, but of some unknown, and hence unnamable, member of the Johannine school at Ephesus. Lutzberger favors the idea that some Samaritan of Mesopotamia composed it. Baur, Hilgenfeld, Keim, and Scholten assign the authorship to some great unknown Alexandrian philosopher, a semi-Gnostic. Renan suggests Cerinthus, the heretic, as a possible author. Herr Ludwig Noack puts forth as his candidate, Judas Iscariot.¹ These attempts at naming an author are mere guesses, made without a single scrap of evidence which can unquestionably be brought in support of them. The guesses, however, are quite in keeping with the dates of the negative critics, fully as numerous and equally as conflicting.

If, now, we turn from these conjectures, we shall find that there has been a constant acceptance of the Fourth Gospel as the work of the Apostle John, throughout all the centuries, from the second to the nineteenth. Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Irenæus, the Muratorian Fragment, Heracleon, and Ptolemæus, all bear witness that in the third and fourth quarters of the second century the Fourth Gospel was ascribed to the Apostle John.

But the objection is often made that the second century was an "uncritical age." This statement, in great part, is an assumption. We know that the churches had constantly to contend with heretics and Judaizers, and we also know that multitudes of spurious documents were early put in circulation. The churches, however, before the middle of the second century, appear quite generally to have settled the canon or apostolic writings; so that it could be said, as already noted, that by the middle of the second century there were no documents in competition as gospels with our four

¹ Bampton Lectures (1890), p. 249 *et. seq.*, also p. 412.

received evangelists. The one question which the early churches asked in regard to every writing was: "Is this transmitted?" If a satisfactory answer could not be obtained to this query, no acceptance was accorded the document in question. Instances in proof of this might be brought by citing the history in connection with the Epistles of Jude, Second Peter, Second and Third John, James, Hebrews, and the Apocalypse. Eusebius classes all these writings under the one head, "Antilegomena," a fact, which, while not denying the value of these writings, still attests that the early churches used great care in accepting MSS. and in forming the canon.

In view of these things, how could some great unknown Alexandrian, or John Presbyter, or Samaritan of Mesopotamia, or any other person, gain for his writing a general acceptance among both Gnostic sects and Christians? The hypothesis of forgery is the only possible explanation. The Fourth Gospel was put forth in the name of John, and was unanimously received as genuine; and that too when Polycarp and Papias, hearers and disciples of John, were yet alive; and when hundreds of men and women who had both seen and heard the Apostle John could have given testimony as to whether he ever wrote a gospel! On the face of it, such a conclusion is impossible.

But we have not to rely upon this external testimony for our belief that the Apostle John wrote the Fourth Gospel. There are certain internal features which lead to the same conclusion. Almost all of the later commentators divide this evidence into (1) indirect and (2) direct, following in their discussions the ensuing order: (*a*) The author was a Jew; (*b*) a Jew of Palestine; (*c*) an eye-witness; (*d*) an apostle; (*e*) the Apostle John.¹ The direct testimony is gathered from the four passages: John i. 14; xix. 35; xxi. 24; 1 John i. 1-5. Any discussion of these points would

¹Westcott, Bible Commentary on John, pp. v-xcvii.

carry us too far afield. Suffice it to say that they are maintained upon characteristics of style; acquaintance with Jewish thought, customs, circumstances, and locations; accuracy in describing certain scenes which are depicted in the Gospel; the autobiographical nature of portions of the work; and the manner in which the inner thought and personal relations of the Twelve to Christ are described.

These inductions are supported by the statements of the Gospel itself: i. 14, "We beheld his glory"; xix. 35, "And he that hath seen hath borne witness"; xxi. 24, "This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things"; 1 John i. 1-5, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and which our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life, declare we unto you." To be sure, the author does not say that he is the Apostle John. He simply leaves himself nameless, using the descriptive phrases: "that other disciple," "the disciple whom Jesus loved." In xxi. 24, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is identified with the author of the book. Was that author the apostle? Bishop Lightfoot answers the question thus: "Comparing the accounts of the other Gospels, it seems safe to assume that he was one of the inner circle of disciples. This inner circle comprised the two pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John, if, indeed, Andrew deserves a place here.

"Now he cannot have been Andrew, because Andrew appears in company with him in the opening chapter. Nor can he have been Peter, because we find him repeatedly associated with Peter in the closing scenes. Again, James seems to be excluded, for James fell an early martyr, and external and internal evidence alike point to a later date for this Gospel. Thus by a process of exhaustion we are brought to identify him with John, the son of Zebedee."¹

¹The Fourth Gospel, Essays by Abbot, Peabody, and Lightfoot (Chas. Scribner's Sons, New York), p. 169.

Over against the theories of critics, then, we place the constant and unquestioned acceptance of the Fourth Gospel, as from John, for more than sixteen centuries. We also posit the testimony of church writers and historians at the close of the second century, and later. We call attention to the fact that the early churches exercised great care in the acceptance of MSS. purporting to be apostolic. We urge the indirect and the direct proof which the Gospel itself affords in support of the conclusion that John the Apostle wrote it. Finally, we say that since the burden of proof rests upon those who deny the authorship of John, and since those who make this denial have failed to select an author upon whom they could agree, and since no fragment of trustworthy testimony in favor of any other author than the Apostle John has yet been produced, we must still hold to the commonly expressed belief that John the Apostle is the author of the Fourth Gospel, and we are constrained to deny to opposing critics the glory which they claim for themselves of having reversed the judgment of centuries. We shall now consider briefly:—

V. THE OCCASION AND THE AUTHOR'S OBJECT IN WRITING.

The Gospel itself does not state the occasion, but it does declare the object of the author in writing his Gospel. The earliest references to the occasion are found in the Muratorian Fragment, in Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. Jerome and Eusebius also make reference to it. The Muratorian Fragment represents John as writing at the earnest solicitation of his fellow-disciples and bishops. Irenæus says it was written to confute the heresies of Cerinthus and others.¹ Clement of Alexandria states that "St. John, last (of the Evangelists) when he saw that the outward facts had been set forth in the (existing) Gospels, impelled by his friends, and divinely moved by the Spirit, made a spiritual Gospel."² Je-

¹ Adv. Haer. iii. 11. ² Eusebius, H. E. vi. 14.

rome, in substance, testifies to the same set of facts as does the fragment of Muratori.

But the Gospel itself must state the purpose of the writer. He declares it to be threefold. "These things are written [1] that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, [2] the Son of God; [3] and that believing ye may have life in his name" (John xx. 31). While the occasion, then, may have been the solicitations of disciples and bishops, the object was not so much to supplement the writings of other evangelists, or to confute the errors of Cerinthus, as to give positive evidence concerning the Christ, in order to establish faith in the hearts of believers. "Every thing in the book from Prologue to Epilogue is selected in view of this aim. Narratives, miracles, discourses, and doctrine all converge about this one point, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." Finally, let us consider:—

VI. THE PRESENT ASPECTS OF THE CONTROVERSY.

The last word concerning the Fourth Gospel has by no means been spoken. Recent years with their discoveries and investigations have brought to light much additional evidence in favor of this Gospel and nothing against it. Belief in the Johannine authorship is constantly being strengthened, owing to the fact that the date is now pushed back so perilously near the close of the first century. Those who are still disposed to deny the authorship to the Apostle, feel more kindly toward the opinion which connects the Gospel with some companion or disciple of John; in short, that there is at least a good Johannine tradition as its basis. It is also admitted that the differences which were urged as existing between the Fourth Gospel and the synoptics, have, in many cases, been overstated. Schürer and Weizsäcker alike admit the residence of the Apostle John in Asia Minor. Weizsäcker regards the proof of this as unshaken. Schürer believes there is no

good ground for confusing the Apostle John with any other John.

On the part of those who have held, and who still hold, that the author was the Apostle John, there are not a few who concede a certain subjective element in the discourses, claiming that the Apostle did not reproduce them as spoken by the Lord, but as they appeared to the disciple after the lapse of many years.

Others there are who do not think it improbable that our Gospel is a translation into Greek from an original Aramaic MS. by the Apostle. Still others favor an original MS. by the Apostle, but afterwards rewritten or edited by some member of his school. Archdeacon Watkins expresses this as his opinion: "The key to the Fourth Gospel lies in translation, or, if this term has acquired too narrow a meaning, transmutation, re-formation, growth; nor need we shrink from the true sense of the terms, development and evolution. I mean translation of language from Aramaic to Greek; translation in time extending over more than half a century, the writer passing from young manhood to mature old age; translation in place from Palestine to Ephesus; translation in outward moulds of thought from the simplicity of Jewish fishermen and peasants, or the ritual of Pharisees and priests, to the technicalities of a people who had formed for a century the meeting-ground, and in part the union, of the philosophies of the East and West."¹ But this translation, or transformation, Dr. Watkins believes was wrought in the Apostle himself, not through editors or redactors of the Gospel.

Perhaps the most significant of recent utterances is that of Dr. Paul Rohrbach, in a discussion concerning the Gospel according to Mark and the Canon of the Four Gospels. After reviewing the questions under discussion, he concludes as follows: "If the main premises are correct, then our synoptic Gospels belong to the time even before the year 90, and were

¹ Bampton Lectures (1890), p. 426.

together in Asia Minor. The Johannine Gospel cannot have come into existence considerably later. I am glad to agree in this acknowledgment with Professor Harnack and with Professor Zahn; and also in the other acknowledgment that the canon of our four Gospels followed close upon the edition of the Fourth Gospel in Asia Minor. It was more than two generations until it made its way throughout the entire Church."¹ That the two schools, or groups of critics—the so-called destructives, and the orthodox—are coming together on many points cannot be denied. Whether they shall approach each other sufficiently to see eye to eye, depends very much upon the discoveries of the future. If some of the investigations now under way, prove to yield the results which they promise, that happy day may not be so very far removed.

In closing this discussion, which of necessity has been a very long one—yet numerous points of interest and importance have been wholly omitted—it may be well to give in brief the conclusions at which we have arrived.

1. The history of the controversy shows a constant change of base on the part of the hostile critics. (1) Disagreement of the New Testament writings; (2) Myth; (3) Tendency writings; (4) Partition; (5) Derivation. Each theory in turn advocated by a considerable school, but each demolished by its successor.

2. By a chain of evidence the Fourth Gospel can be traced back to the opening years of the second century in its actual use and circulation. Allowing time sufficient for multiplying copies and placing them in general currency, we are constrained to place the date of this Gospel late in the first century.

3. In absence of proof to the contrary, the statement of Irenæus, that "John put forth his Gospel while he abode in Ephesus in Asia," is accepted.

4. The constant and unquestioned acceptance by the church,

¹Der Schluss des Markusevangeliums, etc. (Georg Nauck, Berlin, 1894), p. 66.

for over sixteen centuries, of the Fourth Gospel; the manifest evidences of care which the early churches exercised in forming the canon of New Testament writings; the indirect and the direct proof of the Gospel itself; and the failure of the opposition to agree upon any one man who could have written the Gospel, or to produce any proof for any hypothesis advanced, all induce us to accept the Apostle John as the author; this until credible proof to the contrary is produced.

5. The author's own declaration: "These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name," is taken as sufficient proof concerning the author's object in writing the Gospel.

6. There is at present a tendency among hostile critics to admit much that has been claimed for the Fourth Gospel in regard to date and place of composition, and also to assign its origin to Johannine tradition. Likewise, the orthodox critics, in some instances, admit that a subjective element exists in the author's version of the discourses attributed to Christ, in the Gospel, while some believe it was originally written in Aramaic.