

partaker of the Divine nature will it be able to comprehend the mystery of his being who is at once Divine and human. And yet in that likeness of all the saved to their common Lord there shall be no mere uniformity. There, also, as the manna in the Jewish legends was said to taste to each man like the food in which he most delighted, each soul shall recognize in the work which Christ has done for it that of which none can know the wonder or the sweetness but himself.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

---

"*THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED.*"

FEW things are more remarkable or more striking in Biblical criticism than the confidence with which writers of directly opposite opinions express themselves on the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. M. Bouzique, in his *History of Christianity*, which is now being published in English, says (vol. i. p. 136): "Its dogmatic portion is the work of a Platonizing Christian, not to say a Gnostic, and cannot therefore be set down to the account of any of the Twelve Apostles." The author of "*Supernatural Religion*" has demonstrated to his own satisfaction that it was not written by St. John; nay, he goes even further, for, in his "*Conclusions*," he says: "The author of the Fourth Gospel is unknown, and no impartial critic can assert the historical character of his narrative. Apart from continual minor contradictions throughout all these narratives, it is impossible to reconcile the markedly different representations of the Fourth and of the Synoptic

Gospels" (vol. ii. p. 481).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, we turn to Alford's "Prolegomena," and read thus (p. 70, fourth edition): "Our conclusion, then, from internal as well as external evidence, must be that the Gospel is what it has generally been believed to be—*the genuine work of the Apostle John.*" And so with other authorities. It would seem from the point of view assumed by either side that it was absolutely and wholly impossible to take any other—that there was actually no evidence but that which either has thought fit to adduce for his own purposes.

That it is possible to make out a very strong case against the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel we do not for a moment deny—the strongest reason being so obvious as to suggest itself to every intelligent child, "Why is it that St. John's Gospel is so different from the rest?"—just as it is easy to make out a very strong case against the integrity of Isaiah, or the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. But the force of the argument in all these cases is mainly derived from an obstinate refusal to sum up and estimate the mass of positive evidence on the other side. There may be negative reasons of great weight against many things that are known to be true; but they can never be sufficient to outweigh the two or three facts of positive evidence on the other side. And though it may not be possible to disprove these facts, it is always possible to ignore them; and, if we would support and advance the opposite opinion, it is indispensable to do so. Now there appears to be

<sup>1</sup> The references are to the first edition of the work.

one fact which, though patent on the face of the Fourth Gospel, has not been commonly estimated at its real importance. And yet it is a fact of which every reader can judge for himself: and this is the indication which the writer appears to intend to give of his own identity. We may surely take it for a truth so certain as to need no proof that the writer of this Gospel, whoever he was, wrote it for the express purpose of being believed, and to that end desired to authenticate his statements.

The conclusion of the twentieth Chapter, which some critics believe to be the true conclusion of the book, and which all critics accept as an integral portion of it, establishes the former, at least, of these positions: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name." Is it unfair or uncritical to draw attention to the words, "*in the presence of his disciples,*" as justly indicating the character of those now recorded and of their recorder? Is it possible to refer these verses to any one but the author of the book? Is he not here speaking of himself and his work? Does he not clearly intimate that he was himself a disciple of Jesus and an eye-witness of that which he related? And does he not explicitly declare his motive in writing, viz., that men might believe? Does it not therefore make it probable that we may find him in other places drawing particular

attention to the authority of the statements which he made? It seems at least possible that in Chap. i. 14 there may be such a passage: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory," &c. Writers differ as to the way in which they understand this *we*, and therefore we will not press it, but only remark that to ourselves it seems more natural to understand it as spoken, not of Christians or of men generally, but of the special experience which as a *disciple* of Jesus the writer would have.

Again, in Chap. xviii. 15, 16, we are told that "Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple," &c. Here we are introduced to two persons called disciples, that is to say, apparently, apostles, Simon Peter and *another*, who are associated with Jesus at his arraignment before the High Priest. In Chap. xix. 26 the second of these persons appears again, for we can hardly doubt that it is the same, associated with the mother of Jesus — to whose care she is consigned. In the following verse he is called "the disciple," and "that disciple." But here he is further designated as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*," a title which was applied to him before in Chap. xiii. 23, when he lay on his Master's bosom at the Last Supper. No reasonable critic can for one moment doubt that the person who lay on his Master's bosom, to whose care He consigned his mother, was also the disciple who was known to the High

Priest, and who was associated with Peter when he followed his Master into the palace of the High Priest. All these are certainly incidents such as those which are described by the writer, in the general terms of Chap. xx. 31, as occurring "*in the presence of the disciples.*" Once again, in the twentieth Chapter, we find him associated with Peter in the visit to the sepulchre, when he is called "*the other disciple,*" "*that other disciple,*" and "*the other disciple whom Jesus loved.*" It may therefore be regarded as certain that it is one and the same person all through who is meant. It is also at least probable that there may be some relation between this *disciple* and the *book* of which mention is made in Chap. xx. 30. But up to this point it does not otherwise appear who "the other disciple" was, nor who "that disciple" was "whom Jesus loved." Had the Gospel stopped at Chap. xx. 31 there would be nothing to shew us this.

There remains one other passage before we pass on to the twenty-first Chapter, and this is Chap. xix. 35, where, of the piercing of Jesus' side, it is said: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." Some understand this to be spoken, not of the writer himself, but of another person, from whom he had received his information. In that case it of course adds nothing to our means of discovering who the writer was. Probably, however, most persons who read the narrative will identify this eye-witness with the writer himself, and will understand him to mean that he was present when the incident referred to occurred, and

saw it with his own eyes. Indeed, it seems impossible to interpret the latter words, "and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe," otherwise than of the writer himself; for why should he so authenticate another person's testimony? They correspond moreover with singular accuracy to the other statement in Chap. xx. 31: "But these are written that ye might believe." In both cases the writer is manifestly anxious to assure his readers of the truth of what he wants them to believe. This, also, viz., the piercing of Jesus' side, was one of the things that were done "in the presence of the disciples," or at least of one of them.

But as yet we have not been able to identify with greater precision the particular disciple referred to in the several passages already mentioned. For that we must turn to Chap. xxi. Here, again, the beloved disciple comes before us, and in the 24th verse he is distinctly identified with the writer. It matters not whether the last two verses are or whether the whole of the Chapter is by the same hand as the rest of the book: the attestation at the end, whatever its worth, cannot be intended to apply to that Chapter only, but must be meant to indicate who the beloved disciple already spoken of is. And if that attestation is not by the author, it must certainly be acknowledged as an independent indication of his identity, and, in fact, the only clue we have, and doubtless a very ancient one, to the mystery of the "beloved disciple." And this is the point that we are desirous of urging, namely, the impossibility there is of identifying the disciple whom Jesus loved apart from the Gospel itself.

The author of “Supernatural Religion” says (ii. p. 430): “In none of the Pauline or other Epistles is there any allusion, however distant, to any disciple whom Jesus specially loved. The Apocalypse, which, if any book of the New Testament can be traced to him, must be ascribed to the Apostle John, makes no claim whatever to such a distinction. In none of the apocryphal Gospels is there the slightest indication of knowledge of the fact; and if we turn to the Fathers even, it is a striking circumstance that there is not a trace of it in any early work, and not the most remote indication of any independent tradition that Jesus distinguished John or any other individual disciple with peculiar friendship.” Now, not to mention in passing that He certainly did more than once distinguish *Peter*, *James*, and *John* with marks of peculiar favour, we observe that, if this is true, as it no doubt is, then it is impossible that our knowledge of the beloved disciple can be derived from any other source than from the Gospel itself; and, consequently, we cannot legitimately use the identification of the beloved disciple with St. John as a reason for refusing to believe that the Gospel which bears his name was written by him. It is unfair to say that St. John’s Gospel was not written by the beloved disciple, because we do not know who the beloved disciple was except from the Gospel itself. We do not know that the beloved disciple was St. John, or that St. John professed to be the beloved disciple except from this Gospel; and therefore we must not argue about the authorship of it as if the two men were certainly identical. The writer may have been the beloved disciple, and yet that

disciple not St. John; or he may have been St. John, and yet St. John not the beloved disciple. And it is likewise unfair to say that the Fourth Gospel was not written by St. John, because there is nothing outside the Gospel to shew that the beloved disciple was St. John, except that universal ecclesiastical tradition, which is affirmed to be insufficient authority to rest on in a case of this kind. It is surely inconsistent to repudiate altogether such a tradition and yet, at the same time, to accept it so far as to make it the basis of our attack upon the Gospel itself.

If the internal evidence is against the Johannine authorship of the Gospel, by all means let it be given up; but if the only ground for our knowledge of such authorship is supplied by the Gospel itself, let us not reject it as a mere ecclesiastical tradition. To affirm that the evidence is merely external, and on that ground to reject it because it is insufficient, is all very well; but not if the strongest evidence of all, and indeed the only source of our knowledge that the Gospel was written by St. John, is to be found in the framework of the Gospel itself. But that this is the case is no less certain than that the fact of its being so has been commonly overlooked by writers of entirely opposite opinions. Those who believe St. John wrote the Gospel rely chiefly upon the external tradition which has associated it with St. John, supported, as they believe it to be, by subsidiary internal indications; and those who do not believe it appear to be ignorant of the fact that there is more authority supplied by the Gospel itself than even the consensus of tradition can afford. But if

the Gospel, as it is said, is not attested by external tradition as being St. John's, then we can only know it to be so from itself; but those who deny its authorship do not acknowledge *this* testimony, and affirm that internal evidence is against it. Now, of course, a book may be allowed to bear witness against itself; and we may justly say that the Fourth Gospel bears internal evidence of not having been written by the beloved disciple, or of not having been written by St. John, if the evidence tend that way: but if the *only* source of our knowledge that St. John was the beloved disciple is the Gospel itself, we cannot fairly make that knowledge the basis of our attack upon the authorship of the Gospel; because it is investing with too much importance a statement which depends solely upon the authority of the Gospel which we reject. The Gospel may be unauthentic because it is not genuine; but we may not assume its authenticity in a crucial point, in order to disprove its genuineness, and from its genuineness, *so* disproved, deny its authenticity. We certainly may not assume St. John to have been the beloved disciple if there is not external evidence to that effect, and if the evidence of the Gospel itself is not trustworthy. Our knowledge of this identity must either rest upon tradition, or the tradition must have been derived from the Gospel. It is alleged that the Gospel owes all its authority to tradition. We are in a position to prove that the tradition is directly traceable to the Gospel itself. It is quite certain that if the Gospel had ended at Chap. xxi. 23, all would have been desirous to know who the beloved disciple was but no one could have discovered. The next verse, by

whomsoever added, makes it clear that the beloved disciple was the writer. If, therefore, this verse was not added by St. John, or by the writer himself, whoever he was, no complaint can attach to him for having revealed his identity. If it was added by the writer or by St. John, the only conceivable supposition is, that it was added to reveal the identity. But how does it reveal the identity? Only in this way: we learn from it that the writer was the beloved disciple, and that the beloved disciple was *one of the seven* enumerated (xxi. 2). But which of them? It is clear that he cannot have been Peter (verse 20). Neither can he have been Thomas, unless he who is twice designated as Didymus in this Gospel (xi. 16, xxi. 2), is also called "the disciple whom Jesus loved," which is improbable. He must therefore have been one of the remaining five. He may have been Nathanael, "the Israelite without guile" (i. 47); but not unless a twofold appellation is given in the same Gospel to the same man, which is also improbable. He cannot have been James the son of Zebedee, because his early death (Acts xii. 2) is incompatible with any theory of authorship for this Gospel; neither can he have been one of the two who are not named (xxi. 2), because in that case nothing as to identity would be revealed by this apparent revelation. We are, therefore, led to conclude that the writer intended to identify himself with the younger son of Zebedee, as the only one of the seven enumerated (xxi. 2) for whom he can have desired to pass. Thus much, at all events, is certain, that if anything was intended to be disclosed by Chap. xxi. 24, this is all that we can gather from it, while we can only gather it in

this way—the Gospel leaves it for certain that it was written by St. John, or by Nathanael, or by one of two others utterly unknown. It surely does not require any great strain upon probability to eliminate three of these; but if so, the Gospel itself distinctly implies, and shuts us up to its Johannine authorship. When, therefore, we find universal Christian tradition corroborating this conclusion and endorsing it, we are surely not at liberty to dismiss it lightly, nor to argue as if the Gospel itself were silent as to its authorship.

The writer of “Supernatural Religion” says (ii. p. 440): “The peculiarities we are discussing seem to us explicable only upon the supposition that the writer of the Gospel desired that it should be understood to be written by a certain disciple whom Jesus loved, but did not choose distinctly to name him or directly to make such an affirmation.” Now, if this really is the case, we may surely ask, Why, then, did he leave upon his work such evidence as this, which is only consistent with the desire to pass for St. John? Granting that we cannot ascertain who the beloved disciple was from tradition or the consensus of external authority, it is obvious, from the Gospel itself that he can only have been St. John—a conclusion which tradition confirms. Before, therefore, we can altogether reject this uniform tradition we must deal with and alter the existing form and substantial framework of the Gospel. Here is a document which comes to us not wholly anonymous, as the other Gospels are (a fact which is frequently alleged to their disparagement), but indirectly, and yet manifestly, professing to be written by one of the imme-

diate disciples and companions of Jesus: are we to reject it *on this ground?* Surely, we must rather make this ground the basis of our examination of the Gospel,—at least, it will be unfair to treat the supposed Johannine authorship of it as a mere ecclesiastical tradition, when the claim to such authorship is one of the permanent and inherent features of it.

We need not here enter into the further evidence of St. John's being the beloved disciple, but content ourselves with observing that, according to the Synoptical Gospels, he was, on three separate occasions, one of those that were chosen to exceptional nearness, and that, in Luke xxii. 8, he is found, as in John xx. 3. xxi. 20, associated alone with Peter. As the result of what has been said, the question really is, whether it is more likely that one of the disciples should write, as he appears to have done in this Gospel, with the design of keeping himself in the background, and yet with the intention of not leaving it uncertain who he was; or whether, in the second century, and late on in it,—for this is the only alternative position that is suggested,—a writer wholly unknown, and so obscure as to have been entirely forgotten, should have written a Gospel such as this, with the only conceivable intention of getting his work to pass for one of apostolic origin; and, in order to accomplish his purpose, should have resorted to such means as these of suggesting his identity, when it is clear that the only fact he had to build upon was the universal tradition, that St. John was the beloved disciple,—a tradition, which it is confessed was derived solely from the (till then non-) existing Gospel of St. John.