

## I.

# THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL: EXTERNAL EVIDENCES.

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THE problem of the Fourth Gospel—that is, the question of its authorship and historical value—requires for its complete solution a consideration of many collateral questions which are still in debate. Until these are gradually disposed of by thorough investigation and discussion, we can hardly hope for a general agreement on the main question at issue. Such an agreement among scholars certainly does not at present exist. Since the “epoch-making” essay (to borrow a favorite phrase of the Germans) of Ferdinand Christian Baur, in the *Theologische Jahrbücher* for 1844, there has indeed been much shifting of ground on the part of the opponents of the genuineness of the Gospel; but among scholars of equal learning and ability, as Hilgenfeld, Keim, Scholten, Hausrath, Renan, on the one hand, and Godet, Beyschlag, Luthardt, Weiss, Lightfoot, on the other, opinions are yet divided, with a tendency, at least in Germany, toward the denial of its genuineness. Still, some of these collateral questions of which I have spoken seem to be approaching a settlement. I may notice first one of the most important, the question whether the relation of the Apostle John to Jewish Christianity was not such that it is impossible to suppose the Fourth Gospel to have proceeded from him, even at a late period of his life. This is a fundamental postulate of the theory of the Tübingen School, in regard to

the opposition of Paul to the three great Apostles, Peter, James, and John. The Apostle John, they say, wrote the Apocalypse, the most Jewish of all the books of the New Testament; but he could not have written the anti-Judaic Gospel. Recognizing most fully the great service which Baur and his followers have rendered to the history of primitive Christianity by their bold and searching investigations, I think it may be said that there is a wide-spread and deepening conviction among fair-minded scholars that the theory of the Tübingen School, in the form in which it has been presented by the coryphæi of the party, as Baur, Schwegler, Zeller, is an extreme view, resting largely on a false interpretation of many passages of the New Testament, and a false view of many early Christian writings. Matthew Arnold's protest against the excessive "vigour and rigour" of the Tübingen theories brings a good deal of plain English common-sense to bear on the subject, and exposes well some of the extravagances of Baur and others.\* Still more weight is to be attached to the emphatic dissent of such an able and thoroughly independent scholar as Dr. James Donaldson, the author of the *Critical History of Christian Literature and Doctrine*, a work unhappily unfinished. But very significant is the remarkable article of Keim on the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem, in his latest work, *Aus dem Urchristenthum* ("Studies in the History of Early Christianity"), published in 1878, a short time before his lamented death. In this able essay, he demolishes the foundation of the Tübingen theory, vindicating in the main the historical character of the account in the Acts, and exposing the misinterpretation of the passage in the Epistle to the Galatians, on which Baur and his followers found their view of the absolute contradiction between the Acts and the Epistle. Holtzmann, Lipsius, Pfleiderer, and especially Weizsäcker had already gone far in modifying the extreme view of Baur; but this essay of Keim's is a re-examination of the whole question with reference to all the recent discussions. The still later work of Schenkel,

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\* See his *God and the Bible*, Preface, and chaps. v.. vi.

published during the present year (1879), *Das Christusbild der Apostel und der nachapostolischen Zeit* ("The Picture of Christ presented by the Apostles and by the Post-Apostolic Time"), is another conspicuous example of the same reaction. Schenkel remarks in the Preface to this volume:—

Having never been able to convince myself of the sheer opposition between Petrinism and Paulinism, it has also never been possible for me to get a credible conception of a reconciliation effected by means of a literature sailing between the contending parties under false colors. In respect to the Acts of the Apostles, in particular, I have been led in part to different results from those represented by the modern critical school. I have been forced to the conviction that it is a far more trustworthy source of information than is commonly allowed on the part of the modern criticism; that older documents worthy of credit, besides the well-known *We*-source, are contained in it; and that the Paulinist who composed it has not intentionally distorted (*entstellt*) the facts, but only placed them in the light in which they appeared to him and must have appeared to him from the time and circumstances under which he wrote. He has not, in my opinion, artificially brought upon the stage either a Paulinized Peter, or a Petrinized Paul, in order to mislead his readers, but has portrayed the two apostles just as he actually conceived of them on the basis of his incomplete information. (Preface, pp. x., xi.)

It would be hard to find two writers more thoroughly independent, whatever else may be said of them, than Keim and Schenkel. Considering their well-known position, they will hardly be stigmatized as "apologists" in the contemptuous sense in which that term is used by some recent writers, who seem to imagine that they display their freedom from partisan bias by giving their opponents bad names. On this subject of the one-sidedness of the Tübingen School, I might also refer to the very valuable remarks of Professor Fisher in his recent work on *The Beginnings of Christianity*, and in his earlier volume on *The Supernatural Origin of Christianity*. One of the ablest discussions of the question will also be found in the Essay on "St. Paul and the Three," appended to the commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, by Professor Lightfoot, now Bishop of Durham, a scholar who has no superior among the Germans in breadth of learning and thoroughness of research. The dissertation of Professor

Jowett on "St. Paul and the Twelve," though not very definite in its conclusions, likewise deserves perusal.\*

In regard to this collateral question, then, I conceive that decided progress has been made in a direction favorable to the possibility (to put it mildly) of the Johannean authorship of the Fourth Gospel. We do not know anything concerning the theological position of the Apostle John, which justifies us in assuming that twenty years after the destruction of Jerusalem he could not have written such a work.

Another of these collateral questions, on which a vast amount has been written, and on which very confident and very untenable assertions have been made, may now, I believe, be regarded as set at rest, so far as concerns our present subject, the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. I refer to the history of the Paschal controversies of the second century. The thorough discussion of this subject by Schürer, formerly Professor Extraordinarius at Leipzig, and now Professor at Giessen, the editor of the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, and author of the excellent *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*, has clearly shown, I believe, that no argument against the Johannean authorship of the Fourth Gospel can be drawn from the entangled history of these controversies. His essay, in which the whole previous literature of the subject is carefully reviewed, and all the original sources critically examined, was published in Latin at Leipzig in 1869 under the title *De Controversiis Paschalibus secundo post Christum natum Saeculo exortis*, and afterwards in a German translation in Kahn's *Zeitschrift für die historische Theologie* for 1870, pp. 182–284. There is, according to him, absolutely *no* evidence that the Apostle John celebrated Easter with the Quartodecimans on the 14th of Nisan in commemoration, as is so often assumed, of the day of the *Lord's Supper*. The choice of the day had no reference

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\* In his work on *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans*, 2d ed. (London, 1859), i. 417–477; reprinted in a less complete form from the first edition in Noyes's *Theol. Essays* (1856), p. 357 ff. The very judicious remarks of Mr. Norton in the *Christian Examiner* for May, 1829, vol. vi. p. 200ff., are still worth reading. See the valuable article of Dr. Wilibald Grimm, "Der Apostelconvent," in the *Stud. u. Krit.*, 1880, pp. 405–432; also, Dr. H. H. Wendt's *Neubearbeitung* of Meyer's *Kommentar* on the Acts, 5<sup>e</sup> Aufl., Göttingen, 1880. See also Reuss, *Hist. apostolique* (1876), and *Les Epîtres pauliniennes* (1878), in his *La Bible, trad. nouvelle*, etc. Contra, Hiiigenfeld, *Zeitschr.*, 1879, p. 100 ff; 1880, p. 1 ff.

to that event, nor on the other hand, as Weitzel and Steitz maintain, to the supposed day of Christ's death, but was determined by the fact that the 14th was the day of the Jewish Passover, for which the Christian festival was substituted. The celebration was Christian, but the *day* adopted by John and the Christians of Asia Minor generally was the *day* of the Jewish Passover, the 14th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it might fall, while the Western Christians generally, without regard to the day of the month, celebrated Easter on Sunday, in commemoration of the day of the resurrection. This is the view essentially of Lücke, Gieseler, Bleek, De Wette, Hase, and Riggenbach, with differences on subordinate points; but Schürer has made the case clearer than any other writer. Schürer is remarkable among German scholars for a calm, judicial spirit, and for thoroughness of investigation; and his judgment in this matter is the more worthy of regard, as he does not receive the Gospel of John as genuine. A good exposition of the subject, founded on Schürer's discussion, may be found in Luthardt's work on the *Authorship of the Fourth Gospel*, of which an English translation has been published, with an Appendix by Dr. Gregory of Leipzig, giving the literature of the whole controversy on the authorship of the Gospel far more completely than it has ever before been presented.

Another point may be mentioned, as to which there has come to be a general agreement; namely, that the very late date assigned to the Gospel by Baur and Schwegler, namely, somewhere between the years 160 and 170 A.D., cannot be maintained. Zeller and Scholten retreat to 150; Hilgenfeld, who is at last constrained to admit its use by Justin Martyr, goes back to between 130 and 140; Renan now says 125 or 130; Keim in the first volume of his *History of Jesus of Nazara* placed it with great confidence between the years 110 and 115, or more loosely, A.D. 100-117.\* The fatal consequences of such an admission as that were, however, soon perceived; and in the last volume of his *History*

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\* *Geschichte Jesu von Nazara*, i. 155, comp. 146 (Eng. trans. i. 211, comp. 199).

of *Fesus*, and in the last edition of his abridgment of that work, he goes back to the year 130.\* Schenkel assigns it to A.D. 115-120. †

This enforced shifting of the date of the Gospel to the earlier part of the second century (which I may remark incidentally is fatal to the theory that its author borrowed from Justin Martyr instead of Justin from John) at once presents very serious difficulties on the supposition of the spuriousness of the Gospel. It is the uniform tradition, supported by great weight of testimony, that the Evangelist John lived to a very advanced age, spending the latter portion of his life in Asia Minor, and dying there in the reign of Trajan, not far from A.D. 100. How could a spurious Gospel of a character so peculiar, so different from the earlier Synoptic Gospels, so utterly unhistorical as it is affirmed to be, gain currency as the work of the Apostle both among Christians and the Gnostic heretics, if it originated only twenty-five or thirty years after his death, when so many who must have known whether he wrote such a work or not were still living?

The feeling of this difficulty seems to have revived the theory, put forward, to be sure, as long ago as 1840 by a very wild German writer, Lützelberger, but which Baur and Strauss deemed unworthy of notice, that the Apostle John was never in Asia Minor at all. This view has recently found strenuous advocates in Keim, Scholten, and others, though it is rejected and, I believe, fully refuted by critics of the same school, as Hilgenfeld. The historical evidence against it seems to me decisive; and to attempt to support it, as Scholten does, by purely arbitrary conjectures, such as the denial of the genuineness of the letter of Irenæus to Florinus, can only give one the impression that the writer has a desperate cause.‡

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\* *Geschichte Jesu . . . für weitere Kreise*, 3<sup>e</sup> Bearbeitung, 2<sup>e</sup> Aufl. (1875), p. 40.

† *Das Charakterbild Jesu*, 4<sup>e</sup> Aufl. (1873), p. 370.

‡ See Hilgenfeld, *Hist. Krit. Einleitung in d. N. T.* (1875), p. 394 ff.; Bleek, *Einkl. in d. N. T.*, 3<sup>e</sup> Aufl. (1875), p. 167 ff., with Mangold's note; Fisher, *The Beginnings of Christianity* (1877), p. 327 ff. Compare Renan, *L'Antechrist*, p. 557 ff.

Thus far we have noticed a few points connected with the controversy about the authorship of the Fourth Gospel in respect to which some progress may seem to have been made since the time of Baur. Others will be remarked upon incidentally, as we proceed. But to survey the whole field of discussion in an hour's discourse is impossible. To treat the question of the historical evidence with any thoroughness would require a volume; to discuss the internal character of the Gospel in its bearings on the question of its genuineness and historical value would require a much larger one. All therefore which I shall now attempt will be to consider some points of the historical evidence for the genuineness of the Fourth Gospel, as follows:—

1. The general reception of the Four Gospels as genuine among Christians in the last quarter of the second century.
2. The inclusion of the Fourth Gospel in the Apostolical Memoirs of Christ appealed to by Justin Martyr.
3. Its use by the various Gnostic sects.
4. The attestation appended to the book itself.

I. I BEGIN with the statement, which cannot be questioned, that our present four Gospels, and no others, were received by the great body of Christians as genuine and sacred books during the last quarter of the second century. This appears most clearly from the writings of Irenæus, born not far from A.D. 125–130,\* whose youth was spent in Asia Minor, and who became Bishop of Lyons in Gaul, A.D. 178; of Clement, the head of the Catechetical School at Alexandria about the year 190, who had travelled in Greece, Italy, Syria, and Palestine, seeking religious instruction; and of Tertullian, in North Africa, who flourished toward the close of the century. The four Gospels are found in the ancient Syriac version of the New Testament, the Peshito, made in the second century, the authority of which has the more weight as it omits the Second and Third Epistles of John, Second Peter, Jude, and the Apocalypse, books whose authorship was disputed in the early Church. Their existence in the Old Latin version also

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\* About A. D. 115, according to Zahn in Herzog, 2d ed., vii. 135 sq.; see Smith and Wace's *Dict. of Christ. Biogr.* iii. 253.