

## **INTRODUCTORY**

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

THE writer of these pages sets himself the task of showing on internal grounds that the Fourth Gospel is a historical and not merely, as some present-day critics affirm, a theological document. In speaking, however, of the Gospel as historical we do not mean that the aim of the writer of it was primarily a historical one. His interest may well have been theological, as indeed he expressly states it to have been (xx. 31). But our contention will here be that the writer did not invent his story to teach theological truth. We believe that the things which the Evangelist records as

having happened are real events, that they did take place. In saying this we are setting ourselves in opposition to much of the criticism of our day, which denies to this Gospel serious historical value, regarding it as irreconcilable with the Synoptic tradition of the life of Jesus Christ.

For the opposition to the Johannine authorship of the Fourth Gospel is based chiefly on internal grounds. Its external credentials might be accepted by adverse critics were it not for what they consider to be overwhelming objections against its apostolic authorship on the ground of internal evidence. But, as it is, the external evidence is explained away because it is thought that the story of the life of Jesus in this Gospel cannot be brought into agreement with what is acknowledged to be the earlier story in point of time, that, namely, which we have in the pages of the Synoptists. Critics opposed to the Johannine authorship of the Gospel contend that

both stories of the life of Jesus—that of the Synoptists and that of the Fourth Gospel—cannot be alike historical. A choice, then, has to be made between the two, and preference is shown for the Synoptic story. For it is argued that the Fourth Gospel is obviously a theological document, and its writer's interests are theologically determined, so that its genesis is explicable on theological grounds. While, then, the Fourth Gospel may be an interesting psychological study its contents are not history and are not to be so interpreted.

It is because the opposition to the historical character of the Fourth Gospel is based principally on its contents, and because the external credentials of the apostolic authorship of the book are explained away, not for the reason that they are trivial, but because they cannot outweigh the internal evidence, that we shall in these pages confine our attention to this internal evidence, and discuss the historical

probability of the events which this Gospel records.

Now it is clear that the mind, when it applies itself to considerations of historical probability, cannot possibly start as if it were a *tabula rasa*. For in judging whether or not a document is historically probable, that is to say whether or not the events recorded in it are likely to have happened, we are either comparing the document itself with other documents which may agree with or conflict with it, or we are judging of the agreement of its recorded events with individual or general human experience. Thus it may be argued that the story in the Fourth Gospel is historically improbable because it contains so much of the miraculous. This is an objection which might equally well be urged against the other Gospels, and it is no part of our present purpose to consider it. The case before us is that of a document purporting to be historical

and yet not in agreement with other documents. We have to do with critics who accept the Synoptic account of the life of Jesus as, in the main at any rate, historical but who contend that the story of the same life in the Fourth Gospel is so much at variance with it that it cannot be seriously regarded as history. The interests of the writer are so obviously theological that there can be no doubt that his record of the life of Jesus is to be interpreted not historically but theologically.

It cannot be too strongly insisted upon at the outset of our inquiry that the Fourth Gospel does certainly put forth its own claim to be historical, to be an account of things which really happened. Indeed it purports to be the work of an eyewitness of some, at any rate, of the things which it records. Thus at the beginning of the Gospel (i. 14) we read: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt

among us; and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." And this assertion of personal witness is clearly put forward in the opening words of the first Johannine Epistle, a work which is generally recognised to proceed from the same hand as the Gospel, whether or no that hand be the hand of John the son of Zebedee: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us."

No asseveration of personal witness of the life of Jesus could well be stronger

than this. And it is reaffirmed in the narrative of the Gospel. Thus when the writer records the incident of the piercing of the side of the Crucified, out of which there came blood and water, he adds (xix. 35): "And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true that ye also may believe." Whether the statement at the close of the Gospel (xxi. 24) is one made by the author himself or is a later addition, it too is an assertion of personal witness: "This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true."

This last-quoted verse shows that it is intended that the author of the Gospel should be identified with the person who is described in its pages as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." This is clear from the connection of the verse with those immediately preceding it. We thus have

to recognise the presence, purported at any rate, of the writer at several of the scenes described by him. He was present at the Last Supper (xiii. 23), to him was intrusted by Jesus the care of His mother (xix. 26, 27), he was a witness of the empty tomb (xx. 1-10), and he saw personally the risen Jesus (xxi. 7).

Now it may, of course, be said that this is but a device on the part of the writer to give authority to his work. We are told that pseudonymous writing was common in old times and that the practice of it must not be judged by modern standards of authorship. This is indeed an important point that has to be borne in mind in estimating the genuineness of ancient writings. But it may be questioned whether it has much to do with the case before us. For what the writer does *not* do in his Gospel is to lay claim to a great name. It is the modesty of his reference to himself that specially strikes

us. He never names himself at all, but he employs always a circumlocution when he has to make mention of himself. Thus we have seen above how he describes himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," the identity of this disciple with the author, real or purported, being assured to us by the statement of xxi. 24.

And there can be little doubt that the writer intends the reader of the Gospel to see his presence at other scenes which he records, when he does not name himself. When in the first chapter (35 ff.) he tells of two disciples of John who both followed Jesus at the instigation of the Baptist he gives the name of one of them but not that of the other. "One of the two that heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." It has been generally understood that the other was the author himself.

So again in xviii. 15 he writes that two disciples followed Jesus from the garden,

where the betrayal had taken place, to the palace of the high priest. The one disciple he names—Simon Peter—the other is spoken of simply as “another disciple.” It can hardly be supposed that the author was ignorant of the name of this other disciple, for he tells us so much about him. He “was known unto the high priest, and entered in with Jesus into the court of the high priest.” And when Peter was standing outside “the other disciple which was known unto the high priest went out and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.” And it was in connexion with this admission of Peter by the portress into the court of the high priest that the first denial made by Peter of his Master occurred. The whole account of this scene is indeed most graphic and circumstantial, and the character of the description is at once explained if it be the work of an eyewitness, as it will be if the author be that other disciple. In a later chapter we shall return to this matter.

The point which it is sought to emphasise now is that while the author of the Gospel does undoubtedly seem to wish to give his readers the impression that he himself played a part in some, at any rate, of the scenes which he describes, and that he writes as one who knows because he has seen and heard, he yet does this with such modesty and self-suppression that it becomes absurd to treat the Gospel as a pseudonymous writing which claims authority by the use of some great and honoured name.

It must not, however, be denied that it is possible that the writer of the Gospel may have wished to make it appear that he was an eyewitness of the events that he records in order to give authority to his writing. But there is a serious objection to this theory of the make-belief of discipleship, which may be stated here. It is this. The claim to be a personal disciple and eyewitness is not sufficiently prominent to support the theory. It is altogether too casual and by-

the-way. For it must be remembered that the theory presupposes that the writer's interest is mainly theological and that he forges events and puts into the mouth of Jesus words which He did not really speak in order to give support to the doctrine contained in them. But in those parts of the Gospel which are most doctrinal the presence of the writer is not hinted at, with the exception of the chapters which give the discourse in the upper chamber at the Last Supper. He does not anywhere in those sections of the Gospel which give our Lord's public discourses refer to his own presence at the time they were delivered. He does not say: I was there, and I heard these words, and I know, therefore, that they are the doctrine of the Lord. Even in the upper chamber, where the writer represents himself as present, he does not emphasise his presence. The only two occasions in the Gospel where the personal witness of the writer is specially emphasised are those

which have been already mentioned, namely, the piercing of the Lord's side, whereat there came out blood and water, and the manifestation of the risen Jesus. As by the mention of the one the writer gives his personal testimony to the actual death of Jesus, so by his record of the other he bears witness to the Lord's triumph over death.

Personal witness is all-important on such points as these; and if the witness which the writer so emphatically gives were not true, he would be an impostor; and no appreciation of the sublime grandeur of his conception of the Person of Jesus Christ should blind our eyes to the fact. There would be no excuse for what would be a deliberate falsehood. Even if these things did take place and the writer had not personal experience of them and yet said that he had, he would stand guilty of a deception which no good intention could justify. If the words of xix 35 be not true, they are gross deceit. For even though xxi. 24 may be no claim of the

author of the Gospel, but an addition made by some other writer who may have genuinely believed what he said, the same cannot be said of xix. 35. The words, "He knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe," could only come from the writer of the Gospel himself; for he alone could testify that he knew that he was speaking the truth. For while one, other than the author of the Gospel, might testify that the author was saying what was true—a testimony which he could only give if he had independent evidence of the truth of what was related—he would not be likely to say that the author knew that he was speaking the truth; whereas the statement comes quite naturally from the Evangelist himself.

We must not, however, omit to mention, in passing, the opinion that has been entertained that the pronoun ἐκεῖνος in this verse has reference, not to the Evangelist, but to the Lord Jesus. This opinion originates with Zahn (*Einleitung*, ii. p. 476), and it has found

favour with Dr. Sanday. It is not necessary to discuss the matter here, for the argument is not seriously affected by it, but I confess that I prefer Westcott's view that the person intended by ἐκεῖνος is the same as the subject of μεμαρτύρηκεν. But even if we suppose that Zahn is right and that what is here written amounts to "Christ knoweth that what the writer is saying is true," it would still remain true that we have here an asseveration of the Evangelist himself and not the testimony of another. For a man is not wont to call Heaven to witness that something that has been said is true unless it be what he himself has said.

The claim, then, of the author of the Fourth Gospel to have been a personal disciple of Jesus, and to have seen and heard something of that which he records, seems unmistakable. It is a claim put forward by the Evangelist himself, and it is supported by the testimony of xxi. 24. But this claim has been and still is disputed. It becomes

necessary, then, to examine it and to decide whether it can be justified. If it be the case, as adverse critics contend, that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is not the Jesus of the Synoptists, but the poetic creation of a later time, then the Gospel is not historical in the true sense of the word.

But how shall we institute our inquiry, and on what principles shall we carry it forward? Our document does not stand alone, but it has to be considered in relation to the other three Gospels. We are assuming that the Synoptic Gospels are, speaking generally, historical, that they give a true picture of Jesus Christ, who really did do and say the things which He is in them represented to have done and said, that they are a faithful account of His deeds and words and of His manner of living and speaking. Of course it has to be borne in mind that there are differences and divergences even among the Synoptists, but for our purpose these are for the most part unimportant,

though they have their importance in what is known as the Synoptic Problem. With that we have not here to do. Assuming the general historical correctness of the Synoptists, we have to bring the Fourth Gospel into connexion with them.

On comparing the Fourth Gospel with the other three we observe that it covers ground which they also cover, while it also contains much matter peculiar to itself, namely, the Judæan ministry of Jesus. It seems desirable, then, first of all to compare with the Synoptists those parts of the Fourth Gospel which treat of subjects common to it and them. For the time the Judæan ministry peculiar to St. John may be left out of account. We will first inquire whether the character of the Fourth Gospel in those parts of it which touch closely the Synoptic narratives is such that its claim to be the work of a personal disciple and eyewitness can be sustained. For if it be indeed the writing of one who drew from

his personal experience, this ought to show itself in the narrative. The author need not agree with the Synoptists in every detail, but in the main he should, and we ought to find incidental touches which give evidence of personal witness. Agreement with the other Gospels would of course prove nothing in itself, for our author, if he be only a fictitious disciple and eye-witness, will have drawn his information from them. We must look for independence even in those parts of the Gospel which touch the Synoptists most closely. We must test our Evangelist in regard to those points in which his account of things, which the Synoptists record, differs from theirs, either in the way of correction or of addition.

I may say, then, at once that a careful examination of those parts of the Fourth Gospel which can be compared with the other three as treating of a common subject, has led me to the conclusion that the

Evangelist is indeed writing from personal experience, and I desire to state at length my reasons for this conclusion.

The sections of our Gospel which we shall first examine, being those which touch closely the Synoptic narratives, will be the ones which deal with the ministry of the Baptist, with the betrayal, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, and with the post-resurrection appearances. After dealing with these we will pass to consider a group of five other events common to the Synoptists and the Fourth Gospel, namely, the cleansing of the temple, the feeding of the five thousand, the walking on the sea, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the Last Supper.

After we have examined in some detail these parts of the Fourth Gospel which treat of events which the other Evangelists also treat of, and substantiated the claim of the fourth Evangelist to be a personal disciple and eyewitness, we can proceed to

the consideration of those sections of his Gospel which treat of the Judæan ministry, and we shall start without prejudice against their historical probability.

It will have been noticed that we have been proceeding on the assumption that the Fourth Gospel is the work of one author, and it may be objected that we have not allowed for the possibility that in some parts of the Gospel we may have the work and testimony of a personal disciple while in other portions this may not be the case. Well, for my own part, I believe that this Gospel is one and indivisible, and that it is impossible without violence to dissect it or sever one part from another. The narrative flows on without creating any suspicion that at any point of it a new hand has become engaged on it. I except, of course, the section at the beginning of chapter viii. and possibly also the two concluding verses of the Gospel. The rest is all alike written in

the style peculiarly "Johannine," a style so distinctive that it seems well-nigh impossible that it could proceed from more than one person. It is the style of the Fourth Gospel, and the style too of the so-called First Epistle of St. John. And if we can make good our contention that the Fourth Gospel is the work of a personal disciple as it claims to be, then there is very good reason to believe that its author is John the son of Zebedee.

I do not propose to discuss the theory put forward by Delff and subjected to criticism by Dr. Sanday (*The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*), that the author of certain parts of the Fourth Gospel, though a personal disciple, is yet some other person than John the son of Zebedee. The choice seems to me to lie between the traditional authorship and a mere make-believe of personal testimony. My object in these chapters is primarily to vindicate the historical character of the Fourth

Gospel, so that the person of the writer of it is not of chief concern. But I am persuaded that if the Gospel is recognised, as I believe it will have to be, but is not in Delff's theory, as an indivisible whole, and the writing of a personal disciple, it will be acknowledged to be the work of John the Apostle.