

Scripture

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THE MAKING OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

It must be admitted that the Gospel of John does present a problem. Probably most Catholics accept the view that it is written by the apostle John, the mature fruit of a long life of meditation on his Master's life. And certainly a good case can be made out for Johannine authorship.¹ But this should not blind us to the fact that there is a large and fairly respectable body of opinion which finds it impossible to accept that view. They may not go as far as Bultmann, who sees it as a Gnostic treatise rather than a Christian gospel²; but they do see very clearly the differences that divide it from the synoptics—differences so great as to make it difficult to fit them into the same category. And we also should be aware of those differences.

It is instructive to run over quickly in our minds what we think the gospels are about, to form a general impressionist picture. Mainly, of course, it is the story of a man who died and rose again; almost a third of the gospel is concerned with this last week of our Lord's life, and this is common ground to all four of them. But apart from that, what have we? A few colourful stories about his birth and childhood; a pause; and then the opening of the gospel properly so-called with the dramatic appearance of John on the banks of the Jordan. Things move quickly then. The scene shifts to Galilee, and it is there, among unromantic working people, that the bulk of his life is spent. He rouses their excitement by magical deeds—a man with paralysis recovers power to walk, a blind man sees, a dumb man speaks, a dead girl is brought back to life, lepers and mad-men and epileptics beyond number are cured: almost casually, like crumbs scattered to the birds, the miracles flow from his hands. This attracts enthusiastic mobs, and he talks to them in their own language—crisp, pungent, humorous: about the woman who lost half a crown and turned the house upside down till she found it; about people who choke over a fly, but swallow a camel quite easily; about bloated plutocrats being able to squeeze through a needle's eye more easily than through the gates of heaven. He told them stories which held them listening intently and

¹ The traditional view and arguments are excellently developed by Westcott, *The Gospel according to St John*, ix–lxvii.

² *Theology of the New Testament*, II, pp. 10–14

set their wits to work : 'The Kingdom is like yeast . . . is like a man who gave a party, but nobody would come . . . like a young man who squandered his inheritance. Soon he has whole crowds of eager followers ; and out of these he selects a dozen, devotes special attention to them, trains them. But all the time in the background there is the faint murmur of disapproving authority : and suddenly, just as it looked as if his movement was on the verge of great things, there is a collapse, leading to the swift climax of the final tragedy.

Something like that is what many people would think of as 'the gospel.' But actually of course it is not ; it is only the first three gospels ; and if now we isolate John and set him against that global picture, it makes it very clear just how different he is. His story is centred in Judea rather than in Galilee. It is not a quick-moving story packed with incident ; there are only about a dozen incidents in the whole book ; and of these only half a dozen are miracles. Instead of incident we have talk ; and in language very different from the others—confused, complex, abstract.

We are not going to say that the differences are absolute ; it is stretching scepticism too far to say that there is nothing in common between John and the synoptics. But equally it is an oversimplification to say that he is just filling in what the others left out. There is much more to it than that. He has something different to tell us—if only we would listen. For the great disadvantage of our oversimplification and generalisation of 'the gospel' is that it obscures the specific message that each has to tell. We distort them in an effort to fit them all into an identical pattern. But the synoptics have their way of looking at our Lord and his purpose, and John has his : and both are inspired.

The prologue to the fourth gospel contains the root of all its theology ; it is not an introduction so much as a summary. And the tone is set by the very first words : 'In the beginning was the Word.' Who *is* Jesus? What is he? The apostles realised what he was at the Resurrection ; he was the Lord ; and this is the substance of their earliest preaching : 'This Jesus whom you crucified, God has raised up. . . . Let all the house of Israel know then most certainly that God has made him Christ and Lord' (Acts 2:32, 36). In the light of this they then reflected on his life amongst them, and realised that this too had some meaning : 'You know the word that came to pass in Judea, beginning with Galilee after the baptism that John preached—Jesus of Nazareth, who went round doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil' (Acts 10:37f.) ; and so we get the earliest form of the gospel, dealing with our Lord's public life from his baptism onwards. Then the mystery moves a step further back ; if this is what he is, then even his birth must have importance, for it

was then that he became what he was ; and so we have the infancy-gospels of Matthew and Luke. And now John carries us a stage further back still. Jesus is not merely the Risen Lord ; he is not merely the teacher and miracle-worker of the public life ; he is not merely the wonder of God-made-man. John thinks back through God's action before the Incarnation, back through the history of Israel ; back to the creation ; and then steps over the borders of creation to the time when there was no time. And there he finds, not a void and an unthinkable abyss of nothingness, but the fullness and immensity of the divine being which fills all space. Infinity is vibrant with the immanent activity of God who fills it. God is active, God is communicating with Himself, communicating Himself. He is speaking.

A word is not just a bubble of air shaped to conventional meaning. It is the expression of personality. It conveys all that is most essential of intelligible being. This is true of any word ; it is true above all of God's word. In it the power of His being is contained. 'The word of God is like a two-edged sword; living and effective . . .' (Heb. 4:12) ; 'Just as the rain and snow water the earth and make it rich and fruitful, so is the word that comes out of my mouth—it shall not come back to me fruitlessly but will do my will . . .' (Is. 55:10f.). This is the thunderous voice that John hears in the stillness and silence of eternity—God speaking His word in Himself and expressing all His divine being in this word : 'In the beginning was the Word ; and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

And when at a certain moment of time the immensity of divine being overflowed in creation, what He made was also the expression of Himself. He spoke it. He said : Let there be light—and behold there was light. But the Word that He spoke was still the Word He had spoken to Himself—an echo, as it were, of that first Word. 'All things were made by Him ; nothing that came into being did so without Him.'

And then God showed Himself again : He spoke to Israel ; to Adam, to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to Isaiah . . . and each time it was the same Word that spoke. All of this Old Testament revelation is summed up in John the Baptist ; he is the last of the prophets, in whom all the prophets are contained ; the end of the Old Testament, and representative of the whole. He sums up the Old Testament and in him we see most clearly what it was : There was a man sent from God to give witness of the light : as a light shines by virtue of the light within it, and by its very illumination bears witness of the light it bears.

And finally there comes the light itself into the world. The Word of God which was from the beginning with God, which spoke through

the prophets (cf. Heb. 1:1)—that Word is a Person : and that is the Person that John's gospel is about, just as the others are about the humble Jesus of Nazareth, the idol of the crowds, the friend of the apostles : 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.'

But what exactly is all this activity of God's? What was it that led Him to break out of His satisfying uniqueness into a creation? Was it sheer exuberance of vitality? a display of omnipotence? supreme sovereignty moulding objects of His power? Various answers might be given; John's is summed up in the word 'revelation.' The whole process—Incarnation, Old Testament, creation, even in a sense the Blessed Trinity Itself—is one of revealing, of God unveiling His glory. The glory of God has shone forth in the face of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6), as it shone forth first in the Second Person of the Trinity. The Word of God is as it were a mirror, receiving the glory of God and reflecting it outwards. That is almost a definition of Him; that is His function—He *is* the recipient of the fullness of God's glory, and through Him alone that glory shines out. It is exaggerating a little (but we are dealing with truths which strain language), but we might even say that not even the Father Himself could display His glory: for the very act of communicating it brings into being the Son, and through the Son alone the glory shines. And so John says: 'We saw His glory—the glory which belongs to the only-begotten of the Father': which belongs to Him, and could belong to no other than the only-begotten; not 'as it were,' but 'as it *had* to be.' For this is what he is, the Word made flesh—the revealer of the Father.

This glory of God is thought of in the Old Testament in almost physical terms. It is a light: the light of the first act of creation, the light of the burning bush, the pillar of fire in the desert . . . right up to the light that overshadowed the mount of Transfiguration. Outside of this light, as before the creation, there is only nothingness—the nothingness of non-being, the distortion and emptiness and fatuity of sin. That is the state of things without God; that is what the world was like before Christ shone into it. 'The light shone into the darkness, and the darkness could not overwhelm it.' In spite of the frightening, almost substantial power of evil without God, wherever the light shone, evil would be forced to give way.

The darkness cannot overwhelm light; but there is this strange feature of light also—it illuminates, but it also casts shadows. Where the light falls, all is bright; but the very brightness shows up the darkness as darker still. And that too is the effect of our Lord's coming. 'This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men have preferred darkness to light: for their works were evil; for everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light

lest his works should be shown up as evil' (John 3:19f.). Our Lord is set for the rise but also for the fall of many. He is a catalyst. Merely by coming into the world, by standing before men, he is an instrument of judgment. He forces himself on us, demands that we take sides, demands that we pass judgment, for or against him. But it is a fearful thing to have the light so close to us : like fire, it burns and tests our quality. For the judgment that we pass on Christ is really a judgment on ourselves. By our reaction to Christ we show ourselves up for what we are.

Men choose. They pass that judgment on Christ which is really a judgment on themselves. The whole life of Christ is this process of judgment, of forcing men into two camps ; but it culminates in a judgment scene where a climax is reached, where light and darkness clash irrevocably, where the Truth is condemned to die ; and in that judgment those who condemn him finally condemn themselves. 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not' : his own—a people so long prepared, whose whole reason for being was to be a preparation : a lantern whose only light was that which now stood before them. In denying him, they denied the light that had beckoned them on—they denied their own existence. We notice the way in which John speaks of 'the Jews'—the detached, dispassionate, impersonal way he speaks, which would never allow us to suspect that he himself was by birth a Jew. It is not he who has turned his back on his people, but they who have turned their backs on themselves. To them the promises had been made, and the Word of God to their fathers ; they had the Scriptures, in which they sought to have life. Those Scriptures spoke of Christ, but now they say : 'You can be this man's disciples—we are the disciples of Moses' (John 9:28). The nation of Israel existed to become Christians ; and now at this moment they deny their history, they cut themselves off from their stock. They are no longer Israel, the people of God ; but simply Jews—a nation like any other nation : they have condemned themselves to sterility, like a plant that refuses to flower and fruit. They condemn him.

But this in turn is only a means of fulfilling their role. Light never shows up brighter than when contrasted with blackest darkness. And here most clearly the light shines forth. He is hoisted up on the cross. But what was intended to be a gibbet for displaying his shame was in fact a pennant, a standard, a sign of victory ; it was a candlestick from which the light would shine to all the world. For in Christ the glory of God shines out ; and what is this God ? Being ? Truth ? Power ? Yes, but more essentially still, John tells us, 'God is Love' (I John 4:8). And on the cross love shows itself most plainly. 'Greater love than

this no man has, that he should lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13).

The crucifixion is not a shameful defeat; it is the moment when Christ does most effectively what he had come to do. He had come to let men see his glory; and here that glory is most clearly seen, so that all can see and all can come: 'I if I be lifted up from the earth shall draw all men to myself.'

For there is this final step. He has come not only to make the theoretical revelation of his Father—a statement of fact, which once made is self-sufficient. He has come not only to show that glory, but to spread it; that other men may be as he is, sons of God—sons of God born not of flesh but of the will of God. And this too is the ultimate fruit of the resurrection: 'Unless the seed falls into the earth and dies, it remains itself alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.' How is that fruit born? How are men to be born again as sons of God? 'To them that receive him' this power is given. We receive Christ, we assimilate him, we become one with him. This process is called faith ('to those who believe in his name'). But it is not just an intellectual assent to certain theoretical propositions. Faith is receiving Christ in the measure of his giving—the reaction must be proportionate to the stimulus. And Christ gave himself totally—surely on the cross we see how totally he gives himself. We have not really received him till we feel within ourselves the measure of this total return of giving of ourselves.

Nothing else will do. A man is a wonderful thing, the crown of creation, the image of God. But no matter how triumphantly the blood courses in our veins, let us not think that this is sufficient for us, before whose eyes hangs the ineffable revelation of God's love on the cross. Life and happiness is what we all desire; that is what lies at the root of all our natural instincts and longings, which sting a man to perpetual restlessness on the pitiful wheel of carnal appetite. Basically, it is not wrong; it is only the welling up in us of the thirst for life which God has implanted in us. But the will of the flesh cannot attain this end. Nor can even our highest aspirations, man's will to good and his pledged determination to serve his God. We must empty ourselves as Christ emptied himself; we must give ourselves, as he gave himself, in a total giving of Love. And then we are born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

So much for John's concept of 'salvation'—Christ revealing the Father's glory in His essential quality of love, and drawing all men to Him in the response of faith. He expresses this compendiously in the prologue. How does he carry it out in the gospel itself?

Many suggestions have been made about the plan of the gospel ; and there are many ways in which one might approach the problem. But one starting-point would seem to be to try to see the specific difference between John's gospel and the others. We begin with the proposition that his gospel is 'different': where is this difference most clearly seen? One obvious difference is the absence of parables which are such a striking characteristic of our Lord's teaching in the synoptics. John has no parables. But he does use the word parable. 'All of this has been spoken to you in parables,' he says (John 16:25) ; and although this might be referred to the statement about the woman bearing a child in sorrow which immediately precedes it, or even merely to the general context of the Last Supper discourse, it is possible to extend it further to all our Lord's words. This receives some support when we consider further the arrangement of John's gospel : he has no parables, like the synoptics, but he does have as a regular feature an incident to which a discourse is attached—the multiplication of the loaves and the long discourse on the bread of life ; the curing of the blind man and the discourse on the light of the world ; the raising of Lazarus and the words about the resurrection and the life. It is as if John wants us to see our Lord's actions as having an inner significance like that of a parable, which the appended discourse is intended to bring out.

And this is supported further by the term that John uses for those actions of our Lord. The English translations regularly use the word 'miracle,' but this is only a rough approximation. A miracle itself has many possible meanings. It can be looked at from the point of view of the recipient, and thus seen as a deed of mercy. Or it can be looked at from the point of view of the miracle-worker, and seen as an act of power. And the synoptics do in fact for miracle use some word which brings out one or other of these aspects ; but for John a miracle is neither a work of power, nor a source of wonder, nor an act of mercy. For John the word for a miracle is 'sign.' And from this point of view our Lord's miracles are of a piece with all his other actions—the changing of water to wine and the cleansing of the temple are both equally 'signs': they are actions which have some inner significance, a deeper meaning to which the external action points the way.

What is this significance? That is the purpose of the gospel, that is why John is writing—to bring out this inner significance in the actions of our Lord's earthly life. It is not often that we are told the purpose of a gospel in explicit terms ; but John does that at the end of his book : 'Many other signs Jesus did in the sight of his disciples ; but these things are written in order that you may believe that Jesus

is the Christ, and believing have life in his name' (John 21:30f.). The events that John is dealing with are certainly historical events, actual and verifiable: they were done in the sight of his disciples. But it is not merely a history or a biography that he wishes to write; he has selected a certain number of these historical actions which are particularly appropriate for his purpose, and has described them in such a way as to make their importance clear. They show us that Jesus is the Christ.

The title 'Christ' is practically a summary of the Old Testament. God made promises to the patriarchs, chose a nation to embody these promises, and in the course of time these promises came to centre on the person of the king and then of an ideal king yet to come—the Messiah, the Christ. In the word Christ then all the promises and the hope and destiny of Israel was summed up. And it was not merely a matter of national concern. The choice of Abraham and later of Israel was itself organically connected with the fall of man, and the promise then made: the seed of the woman was to crush the serpent's head. Through Israel this was to be achieved; in Abraham's seed all nations would be blessed. In other words, the term Christ sums up not merely the destiny of Israel but the destiny of mankind: it is a summary of all that God had done and would yet do for the salvation of the world.

Jesus, on the other hand, is a proper name. It denotes an individual—Joshua bar-Joseph. It recalls a specific, concrete individual. It is not Man, but a man. It reminds the apostles of a person they had known as a man knows his friends: someone of a particular height, a particular way of walking, a particular colour of hair, someone you recognised when you saw him coming down the street. He had his mother's nose perhaps; he spoke with the local accent of Galilee; on his body as on theirs were the marks of his life—the scar where the chisel slipped, the marks of the roads on his feet. All of those very personal undertones we should hear when the apostles use the name Jesus—a man well known, and how well loved.

Now we fit individuals into categories: John is a man, John is a teacher, John is an electrician, we say. And the more specific the category, the greater the aura is cast on the individual. . . . John is head-master, John is the manager. . . . And if the category is even more unique, the more incongruously we feel it fit the person we know so well. . . . John is Pope, John is a saint: 'What,' we say, 'that fellow; why, I went to school with him.' If then we begin where the apostles began, with the friend they knew and talked with and laughed with, we can feel the awe with which they make this astounding correlation—Jesus is the Christ: in this man the whole

purpose and explanation of their history reaches its climax : their history, and the history of the world, all creation past and future. God's relationship with men from eternity and to the end of time is concentrated in this moment of time and in this parcel of flesh which is Jesus : Jesus is the Christ.

It is that quality of this historical person that John is going to lay before us. And for that purpose he is going to take certain deeds and describe them in such a way as to bring out their timeless and eternal value. And it is eternal. Jesus is a real individual, but his meaning is not just for a fortunate few of his contemporaries. He is the word that spoke to Moses and David ; Abraham saw his day and rejoiced ; Isaiah saw his glory and spoke of him. And we too are not merely remembering him as we remember any other great historical figure of the past—Alexander the Great, or Caesar, or Napoleon or Nelson. Jesus Christ is yesterday, today and the same for ever. The incident immediately preceding the final summary that we are now discussing is Thomas putting his hand to our Lord and proclaiming his faith in his Lord and God ; and our Lord replies : ' Blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed.' It is for people like that—people like us—that John is writing. He assures us that we are not in any way to envy those who saw Christ according to the flesh ; for the flesh profiteth nothing, and the true meaning of Christ is as accessible for us as it was for any of his disciples. For Christ is still with us, he is here among us, in the Church. It is there that the real mystery of Christ continues. What he did, he does. His earthly actions were signs—and those signs are prolonged in our sacraments. So in a minor key, in counterpoint to John's description of our Lord's mystery, we have the sacramental life of the Church. All of this is John's purpose as he sets down our Lord's life in signs : actions significant of a wider reality, one which is true beyond the borders of time and place—the reality of the Old Testament, the deep mystery of the Church.

That, then, is what is specific to John's gospel : in the account of the Passion he shares a common tradition with the synoptics ; in the prologue he summarises the whole ; and in between we have what may be called the Book of Signs.

First we have the witness : for a sign of its very nature needs to be seen, we must have our attention drawn to it and the fact that it has meaning. So first John stands up like a sign-post with its finger pointing to Christ. The first disciples follow, and each bears witness to the other—Andrew to Simon ; Philip to Nathanael ; they go and see ; and this is what they saw.¹

¹ It will be clear that in what follows Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, is followed almost slavishly.

They begin with a group of signs which tell us of the transition to the new order. This is the key-note of each, though each has variations. At Cana water is changed to wine: the water of life which the Old Testament thirsted for, and which their rites (like the 'water of the purification of the Jews') symbolically tried to attain. This Old Testament blessing is changed to something richer and more joyful, the reality of the New Testament (and in the lower key, surely the riches and joy of the wine of the Eucharist). Then Nicodemus comes before us as the representative of official Judaism, expressing its hopes in the language of the day, the coming of the Kingdom. And our Lord tells him that the fulfilment is not to be found in the inevitable flowering of the old system, it is not a natural development growing out of their history; nor is it to be achieved by conquest or by any means that they could wield. It was to be a new thing—something spiritual, above human reach, demanding a new birth. John the Baptist then reappears to tell us the means of this rebirth and its relationship to the old system: the old system and its ceremonial (as summed up in washing with water) could not give life; but it was not for that reason an empty ceremonial; it was a container—an empty container indeed, but one which was fitted to receive something. So water-washing was fitted to receive and would receive the power of God, and from that water and the spirit the new birth would come.

The temple was now seen for what it was; this centre of Jewish religious life was only a preparation for the undreamed-of presence of God in their midst, in the person of the Word of God who had become the tabernacle of God among them. And in the discussion with the woman of Samaria this section is rounded off by a repetition of the two ideas of the temple and the water—two aspects of the Jewish faith, worship and blessing: both had the limitations of a symbol—they signified but did not give (just as the picture of a piece of bread cannot satisfy hunger): and now the symbol was fulfilled in Christ.

Fulfilled in Christ: but what is Christ? Not merely a prophet and a wonder-worker like the prophets of old; they announced the word of God and sometimes, like Elias, worked miracles to give the people a foretaste of 'salvation.' Christ was the Word of God in person, and in God's word is life. So we have two signs of which the main point is the power of Christ's word—the healing of the ruler's son at Capharnaum, the healing of the cripple at Bethesda.

How does a 'word' give life? Not simply by hearing it but by assimilating it. If we hear a word with our ears, that is nothing; and if we see Christ according to the flesh that is nothing; and if we accept him as a wonder-worker, even that is nothing as long as we do not take him into our hearts and our very beings. Only then does

he become the food of our souls. But how shall this thing be? When his body is broken for us, and his blood is shed on the cross; there the Word of God speaks most clearly to us, and it is that voice that we must hear. We must believe that God is love in receiving and making our own the crucified Christ. 'I am the bread of life; he who eats me shall not hunger—he who believes in me shall not thirst.' And this time the undertones sound even more clearly—the crucified Christ who shows God's love is present for us in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

With this we have reached the centre of the book; and chapters seven and eight which follow are among the most interesting in the whole gospel. For one thing, it is surprising to note as we reread this long section that nothing really happens. (The section on the woman taken in adultery is not an original part of John's gospel.) But there is brilliantly conveyed to us the sense of crowds and confusion and bustle such as would characterise Jerusalem at one of the great feasts. And the confusion of the crowds itself matches the confusion of their minds; the scene is full of the interplay and intercross of statement, argument, disagreement, differences of opinion. And it is the opinion that is uppermost. Our Lord is almost in the background: he intervenes only once or twice, with some abrupt statement—'I am the light of the world,' 'He who comes to me shall not thirst'—which sets off the discussion again: like a central, dominating but silent figure round which the press of conflicting opinion swirls.

He stands apart, but supremely above it. They cannot grasp him. And in this we have almost a summary of the whole earthly life of our Lord. In the opening scene, the discussion with his brethren, we have the strange contradiction that our Lord refuses to accompany them to the festival to display his qualities triumphantly and overwhelmingly. But he does go; only—'in secret.' It is an epitome of the revelation of the Word; that he did not come with pomp and power as they expected, to compel belief and acceptance. He came into this world hidden and secret, concealed by the habit of flesh. In this form he tests the faith of men: for it needs faith to penetrate that garb of humanity. He tests faith; he instigates discussion and disagreement. 'He is the Christ—he is a good man—he is a trouble-maker—the Messiah comes from heaven—from Judea—not from Galilee—the authorities are opposed to him—but how does he work miracles. . . .' Back and forth the arguments go, putting on trial the central figure who stands so silently. But it is they who are themselves on trial, and this figure splits men into two camps, those who accept him and those who refuse him.

But there is this wonderful dramatic irony about it all: that if they

refuse him, they merely make his case clearer and stronger still ; they are really furthering his success. It is by their rejection of him that his light shines out more clearly—so clearly as to be blinding to those who will not see. And so there follows the incident of the blind man, in whose cure the blindness of the Pharisees is confirmed. They reject him—they reject him in the name of Moses and the old law. The essential sin was never put more clearly. All human systems have a centripetal tendency—a drag towards their own centre, making a perfect and perfectly closed circle from which everything else is excluded. This is true even of human religious systems : they have no room for any god other than one of their own fashioning. Faith is precisely the breaking of the vicious circle, breaking out of the enclosing prison of human standards, to let in the disruptive force of God himself. This the Pharisees refused to do. They were satisfied with their religion as it was. There was no room in it for a God who would shatter the system they had so carefully worked out for themselves. They would have Moses—but no more. With this profession of faith they imprison themselves inside their own faith, their own human ideals, their own system, and shut God out. They turn their eyes inwards, where no trace of light from outside is allowed to enter. ‘They make darkness light and light darkness’ (Is. 5:20). It is the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which there is no forgiveness, because the perversion is complete. Their light is darkness, therefore every step towards the light they see is a step deeper into darkness. They do not recognise darkness when they see it ; because they say : We see, therefore they are blind.

The opposing forces are now arrayed : the Good Shepherd must meet with death (chapter ten). But this death is the source of life. This is portrayed for us in the raising of Lazarus—from death comes life, for our Lord first of all, and then for all who are one with him by faith.

And so all set for the final scene, the life-giving death of Christ. John rounds off his book of signs in a chapter in which the full significance of this death is made plain. When he is dead, then his message will be there for all the world to read, how precious was that death, how full of meaning and of life : so Mary anoints his body, anticipating his death, and the odour of the ointment fills the whole house as the value of his death shall fill the whole world. He is condemned by the Jews ‘that one man may die in order that the whole people should not perish’—and not only the nation of Israel, John comments, but in order that the scattered people of God should be gathered into one. And in the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, this is once more laid before us by John : it was a royal procession, as

our Lord's crucifixion a week later was to be a royal enthronement, a 'lifting up'; and, like the crucifixion, it drew all men to him: 'See,' the priests complain, 'the whole world goes after him.'

There, then, John lays before us the life of Christ in its innermost significance. It is limitlessly full of meaning. It is not the story—pathetic, exciting, edifying—of a great man. It is for all men, for us each day as for the Jews then, a challenge and an appeal, a call to pass judgment: can we see him for what he is? can we see that Jesus is the Christ—that in these historical events the full meaning of life is contained? It is very literally a crucial test; and on the issue depends life or death for each of us. These things are written in order that we may believe, and believing have life in his name.

L. JOHNSTON

Ushaw

THE UNITY OF SECOND PETER : A
RECONSIDERATION

THERE is no book in the New Testament that indicates its author so clearly as does the Second Epistle of Saint Peter. He is Simeon Peter a servant and Apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1); a beloved brother of St Paul (3:15). With others he was an eyewitness of the Transfiguration on 'the Holy Mount' (1:16-18). His death was foretold by the Lord (1:13ff.; cf. John 21:18ff.). Yet the authenticity of no New Testament writing is in such doubt, perhaps, as that of 2 Peter. There is no clear evidence of it in Patristic literature before Origen (d. 253) who says it was then a disputed writing.¹ The situation was no better in the time of St Jerome (d. 420).²

Grotius (d. 1645) and critics since his time have renewed the old doubts and added many other difficulties to the one that troubled the contemporaries of St Jerome. 2 Peter differs not merely in style but also in doctrine from 1 Peter. It is seemingly dependent on Jude which many critics think best dated after A.D. 70 at the earliest. Our epistle styles the first Christian generation 'Fathers' (3:4), which presupposes that they had died some time before. It is hard to see how such words could be written before the Apostle's death in 64 or 67. Together with this, certain objections arising from a delay in the second coming are answered (3:4-10), difficulties which may have

¹ *In Johann. Commen.*, v. 3. cf. Eusebius *H.E.*, vi, 25, 8

² *De viris illustribus* 1: 'Scripsit [Petrus] duas epistolas quae catholicae nominantur: quarum secunda a plerisque ejus esse negatur, propter stili cum priori dissonantiam.'