

PART III
THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND ITS SOURCES

I see His blood upon the rose,
And in the stars the glory of His eyes ;
His body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.

I see His face in every flower ;
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but His voice—and carven by His power
Rocks are His written words.

All pathways by His feet are worn,
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea ;
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,
His cross is every tree.

From

“The Complete Poetical Works of J. M. Plunkett.”

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XIII

JOHN, MYSTIC AND PROPHET

SYNOPSIS

MYSTICISM, GREEK AND HEBREW

The Fourth Gospel should not be classed among works definitely historical in intention ; it belongs rather to the Library of Devotion. The author is a Christocentric mystic conscious of prophetic inspiration. In him are combined the religious experience of the Hebrew prophet and the philosophic mysticism of the school of Plato.

THE DISCOURSES OF JOHN

The contrast between the Jewish practice of preserving the *ipsissima verba* of Wise Men and Rabbis and the Greek literary tradition by which an author put into the mouths of historical characters speeches of his own composition.

The Synoptics reflect the Jewish practice ; John's method is akin to the Greek, but with the significant difference that the author regarded himself as a prophet inspired by the Spirit of Jesus, and therefore considered the discourses as the utterances of that Spirit and not as his own individual composition.

THE LOGOS

Probably both the Philonic conception of the Logos and also the paraphrastic expression "the Memra," found in the later Aramaic Targums, were known to the author ; but, since his purpose was to interpret Christianity to the Greek world, his conception is more nearly related to that of Philo.

THE QUEST FOR SOURCES

The ordinary methods of source-criticism cannot be applied to

this Gospel; so much so that most of the "Partition Theories" recently propounded may be ruled out at once.

(1) Analogies drawn from Old Testament criticism are not applicable, nor even those supported by the critical study of the Synoptics. Illustration of this.

(2) A further caution suggested by the psychology of authorship.

(3) Certain cases of lack of connection between paragraphs, which might seem evidence of a fusion of written sources, are better explained by the theory of accidental disarrangements in an early MS.

CREATIVE MEMORY

The creative activity of the subconscious mind has always a dramatic quality; this especially true of the mystic or the artistic temperament. In such cases memory tends to enhance detail along the line of the special interest of the individual.

In antiquity this tendency was not checked by the training in accuracy emphasised in modern education, with its stress on the scientific value of correctness of observation. Illustrations of this.

FACT AND SYMBOL

The effort to discover an eternal meaning behind the veil of historic fact might well lead to modifications of detail in John's description of events; but the free invention of incidents would be quite another matter.

The Church in Asia was fighting a battle on two fronts—against the Gnostics, who tended to dissolve the historical into symbol and myth, and against the Judaisers, who could not rise beyond an Adoptionist Christology conceived of in terms of apocalyptic picture-thinking. The *via media* which John champions centres round the conception of the Word made flesh. From this conception it seems to follow (1) that fact as fact is of value, but (2) that it is as an "acted parable" bodying forth some lesson of eternal moment.

Hence it is probable that stories like the raising of Lazarus came to the author in some document or oral tradition which, rightly or wrongly, he believed to be historical.

THE MYSTIC VISION

The possibility that certain of the scenes described had been *seen* by the author in the mystic trance. If so, the allegorical element in them is perhaps to be accounted for by the psychology of dream symbolism. A suggestion of Evelyn Underhill, based on analogies from Mediaeval Mystics.

CHAPTER XIII

JOHN, MYSTIC AND PROPHET

MYSTICISM, GREEK AND HEBREW

THE Gospels were written in the great age of Classical Biography ; Luke, the most cultivated of the Synoptics, differs hardly at all, either in his conception of the purpose of biography as predominantly didactic or in his literary methods, from his famous contemporaries,¹ Plutarch and Tacitus. The difference lies in the subject treated, not in the historical ideal of the several writers. The other two Synoptists—Mark in his unstudied style, Matthew in his more overt expression of an apologetic and practical intention—depart a little, but not strikingly, from the literary model of the day. But the Fourth Gospel stands apart. It does not purport to be a Life of Christ. Avowedly it is a selection, for a special purpose. “Many other signs therefore did Jesus . . . which are not written in this book : but these are written, that ye may believe . . . and that believing ye may have life in his name ” (Jn. xx. 30 f.).

If, then, we are asked to what class of literature the Fourth Gospel should be referred, we reply that it belongs neither to History nor Biography, but to the Library of Devotion. It will be misunderstood unless it is approached in a spirit comparable to that in which we approach the *Confessions* of Augustine or the *Imitation* of à Kempis. We must read it, as we read the book of Job, with our attention fixed less on the events recorded or

¹ These actually wrote slightly later than Luke ; but biography became popular with Hermippus at Alexandria 200 B.C.

on the characters of the dialogue than on the profundities of thought which through them are dramatically bodied forth. This Gospel is a meditation, an inspired meditation, on the Life of Christ. It is the work of one whom one cannot call philosopher, because he is a mystic who feels that he has got beyond philosophy—like Plotinus when he had seen the beatific vision, or like Aquinas, who, when nearing the end of his *Summa*, hung up his inkhorn and pen, saying, "What I have seen so transcends what I have written I will write no more."

The starting-point for any profitable study of the Fourth Gospel is the recognition of the author as a mystic—perhaps the greatest of all mystics. To him the temporal is the veil of the eternal, and he is ever, to use von Hügel's phrase, "striving to contemplate history *sub specie aeternitatis* and to englobe the successiveness of man in the simultaneity of God."¹ But, if this is so, it follows that any inquiry into the sources of the Fourth Gospel will be futile which does not approach the subject from the standpoint of the psychology of the mystic temper.

The title "mystic" has dubious associations; it has been used to cover a very large variety of experiences. It is often employed to give an imposing sound to childish speculations, or to practices which in the last resort are merely tricks of narcotic self-bemusement. In a nobler sense the word is used of the religious side of the philosophic tradition dominant in Hellenic thought, seen at its highest in Plato and Plotinus. The mysticism of John is nearer akin to this, but it is not the same. His mysticism, like that of Paul, is a mysticism centred, not on Absolute Being, but on the Divine Christ. The character of the mystic aspiration is necessarily affected by the conception entertained of the nature of the object towards which it is directed. The passion for union with the One becomes qualitatively different if that One is conceived of in the likeness of the historic Jesus. And just

¹ Cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, art. "John, Gospel of"—one of the most important discussions of the problem of the Fourth Gospel to be found in English.

in so far as the object is visualised by John as concretely personal, the religious experience which is its correlate is continuous with the Old Testament, rather than with the Platonic, apprehension of the reaction of the soul to the Divine.

The author of the Fourth Gospel stands between two worlds, the Hebrew and the Greek, at the confluence of the two greatest spiritual and intellectual traditions of our race. In him Plato and Isaiah meet. To call John a mystic is only correct so long as one remembers that in the Hebrew tradition the prophet is the counterpart of him whom elsewhere we style the mystic. The religious experience of the prophet is not quite the same as that of the mystic, though closely allied. We shall misapprehend both the psychology and the message of John if we forget that he is a Jew first, and never quite a Greek, and unless we relate the experience of which his Gospel is the record with that revival of prophecy which is the conspicuous feature of the Early Church.

The higher religion of the Old Testament was, humanly speaking, due to a long line of outstanding prophets. After the Captivity, the Law—which, as modern studies of the Old Testament have shown, was in its present form the work of priests and scribes building on the basis of the ethical monotheism of the great prophets—came more and more into prominence. The idea grew up that the succession of prophets had come to an end and that no new revelation of God was to be expected. The claim of John the Baptist to prophetic inspiration broke a silence which had lasted for more than three hundred years. But once the tradition that direct revelation had ceased was broken, prophecy as a living contemporary institution resumed its ancient importance and prestige, within—not outside—the Christian community. Prophets are ranked by Paul with Apostles as the foremost spiritual leaders of the Church,¹ and we have frequent allusion to them elsewhere in the New Testament. The essence of prophecy was the claim to direct inspiration. The prophet regarded himself, and was regarded by others, as the mouth-

¹ Cf. 1 Cor. xii. 28.

piece of a Divine communication sent through him to the community. Sometimes this took the form of a premonition of some future event; more frequently it consisted in some message of moral or religious exhortation. Modern historical and psychological investigation would suggest that both the language and thought of the prophet were modified, not only by his individual personal idiosyncrasy, but by the system of ideas prevalent in the community of his time and by the extent to which he had meditated on the problems with which he deals. But the prophet himself was unaware of these conditions. All he felt was that, whereas on ordinary occasions he was on the same level as common men, there were special times when he became the vehicle of a direct communication from God. But there was this difference between prophecy in Old and New Testament times. The Old Testament prophet said, "Thus saith the Lord"; he believed that his message was from the ancient God of Israel. The New Testament prophet felt that he was in contact with the "Spirit," which he seems to have thought of more often as the "Spirit of Jesus" than as the "Spirit of God."

Paul lays claim to such direct inspiration, though not, be it noted, for all his utterances (cf. 1 Cor. vii. 10); so, even more emphatically, does the author of the Apocalypse,¹ c. A.D. 95. The warnings against false prophets in the First Epistle of John and in the Didache are additional evidence of the immense prestige enjoyed by a true prophet; while the way in which Ignatius of Antioch, c. A.D. 115, appeals to utterances made by himself when inspired by the Spirit,² shows that the belief that the age of direct revelation was not yet over was still powerful in the most orthodox circles. To ignore the phenomenon of prophecy is to study the Fourth Gospel apart from its environment. And, for myself, I must say that the more often I read the discourses of the Fourth Gospel the more it is borne in upon me that its author was regarded, by himself, and by the Church for which he wrote, as an inspired prophet.

¹ Cf. Rev. i. 1; xxii. 18-19.

² *Trall.* 5; *Philad.* 7.

THE DISCOURSES OF JOHN

With this provisional assumption in mind, I proceed to raise the question, In what sense are the discourses ascribed to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel intended to be taken as historical? I venture to think that the answers given to this question both by the old-fashioned traditionalist and by most modern critical scholars are alike on certain points unsatisfactory.

In the ancient world there were two entirely different traditions in regard to the reporting of the discourses of historical personages or accepted teachers—the Jewish and the Greek.

The Jewish tradition had developed as a result of the existence of a class of "wise men" in the ancient Hebrew community. Epigrammatic sayings of these worthies were carefully preserved, as nearly as possible in their original form. In books like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Wisdom we trace a new type of literature gradually developing out of the practice of making collections of such proverbial sayings. Originally most of the sayings seem to have been preserved without the name of the author. The Book of Ecclesiasticus breaks this tradition of anonymity; although, even in this case, the innovation was not made by the author of the sayings himself, Jesus the son of Sirach, but by his grandson, who published the collection somewhere about 130 B.C. From this period onwards, more and more of the epigrammatic sayings of Jewish Rabbis came to be preserved with the author's name attached. It is to the continuance, in the preponderantly Jewish communities in the Early Church, of this Jewish practice of preserving as far as possible the exact words of the teacher that we owe the different collections of sayings of Christ which are preserved to us in the Synoptic Gospels.

The Greek tradition was quite different, not only in regard to the public speeches attributed to historical personages, but also as to the private teaching of the philosophers, who occupied in the Greek social and educational system a position not at all unlike

that of the "wise men" or later Rabbis in the Jewish. Thucydides, the most conscientious of all Greek historians, explains in a famous passage that he has been at the greatest pains carefully to ascertain and accurately to record all matters of fact, but that where he professes to give a speech delivered on any historical occasion, he has as a rule put into the mouths of the characters the sentiments which seemed to him to be proper to the occasion.¹ Similarly Plato, who felt that he owed everything to the teaching of Socrates, never, so far as we are aware, made any attempt to hand down to posterity the *ipsissima verba* of his master. But throughout his life, and it was a long one, he wrote a series of philosophical dialogues in which Socrates is represented as carrying on philosophical discussions either with ordinary citizens inquiring after knowledge or with the defenders of philosophical systems of which Plato disapproved. In most of the series the views which Socrates is represented as expounding are those which Plato himself, at the date of writing a particular dialogue, had come to entertain. Plato attributed his whole philosophical system to the original inspiration of Socrates; and it is probable that in the earlier dialogues the speeches of Socrates, though written in the style and language of Plato, do not inadequately represent opinions entertained by Socrates. But in the later dialogues Plato had developed his system far beyond anything which is at all likely to have been in the mind of the historic Socrates; and he seems then to have modified his practice.

John was writing in the Greek city of Ephesus, and for a Church of which the more cultivated, if not the majority, of the members had been educated in Greek schools and on Greek literature. Even Jewish Christians there would be familiar with the Greek tradition in these matters. Realising this, we perceive that the original readers of the Fourth Gospel would never have supposed that the author intended the speeches put into the mouth of Christ to be taken as a verbatim report, or even as a précis, of the actual words spoken by Him on the particular occasions on

¹ Cf. Thucydides i. 22.

which they are represented as having been delivered. They would not have supposed that the author meant that the doctrine propounded in these discourses was verbally identical with what was actually taught by Christ in Palestine, but rather that it was organically related to what Christ taught in such a way as to be the doctrine which Christ would have taught had he been explicitly dealing with the problems confronting the Church at the time the Gospel was written.

In a sense the Discourses of John are an attempt to supply a systematic summary of Christian teaching. We must never forget that the Ephesian Church about A.D. 90 was not in possession of our New Testament. Mark had been in existence perhaps five-and-twenty years, and by the time John wrote would have been firmly established in the Church of Ephesus. Luke was a more recent arrival, and it is possible that Matthew had not yet reached Ephesus (p. 416). The portion of the New Testament upon which the older members of that Church had been brought up was Mark and the Epistles of Paul, their founder. But Mark is conspicuously lacking on the side of teaching. Thus, while to us the Four Gospels, to them the ten Epistles of the Apostle, must have been the main authority for the "essence of Christianity." The discourses of the Fourth Gospel are intended, in combination with the selected narrative, to present the "essence of Christianity." Naturally they present the thinking of Jesus as organically related to the thought of Paul. Paul is the first that we know of the mystics whose mysticism is centred on Christ.¹ John, too, is a Christocentric mystic. But he had lived longer and meditated more than Paul, and is thus able to give a simpler, clearer, and in a sense a calmer, expression to his creed.

Are we, then, to say that the Discourses in the Fourth Gospel are to be conceived of as on exactly the same level as the Melian Dialogue of Thucydides, or the speeches in the *Republic* of Plato? Far from it. In this, as in other ways, John stands at the

¹Cf. A. Deissmann, *St. Paul*, E.T. p. 132 f. (Hodder and Stoughton, 1912).

meeting-point of Greek and Hebrew tradition. The analogies with Greek literary methods are valuable mainly in enabling us to understand how an author who valued historical accuracy, even though his purpose was not mainly historical, could, in all good faith and without any risk of being misunderstood by his readers, set down as spoken on definite particular occasions speeches which he knew quite well were not so delivered. But beyond that the analogy breaks down. First of all, a man of the temperament of the author of the Gospel must have meditated year after year, not only on the Epistles of Paul, but on certain Logia of Christ which had come home to him as being of special and profound significance. He appears to have a tradition of events independent of the Synoptics; it would be strange if this did not include some sayings as well. But what he gives us is not the saying as it came to him, but the saying along with an attempt to bring out all the fullness of meaning which years of meditation had found in it. It is not difficult, for example, to detect in the Johannine allegories of the Door, the Good Shepherd, and the Vine, interpretative transformations of what were originally parables of the Synoptic type. Epigrammatic Logia will have been modified in a similar way. But behind and beyond this, we must, I feel, look to that experience of possession by the Spirit which is the New Testament counterpart of Old Testament prophecy.

There is no incompatibility between a conscious choice of the medium of literary expression and the conviction that the thing expressed has come through some superhuman channel. The poet Blake in one passage speaks of a poem as given him by an angel, and then proceeds to give the reason for his choice of a particular metre. And, viewed as the utterances of a prophet edited by him in accord with Greek tradition, the discourses ascribed by John to Jesus take on a significance completely different from that of the speeches put into the mouths of his characters by the ordinary Greek historian. John knows that they are interpretations of the essentials of Christianity rather

than *ipsissima verba* of the historic Jesus ; but they have come to him through direct inspiration from the risen Christ Himself. That is why he insists "The Spirit shall lead you into all truth." John knows quite well that his theology is a development of the original Apostolic teaching, but it is a development directly inspired by the Spirit. It is Christ Himself, speaking "in the Spirit," who says "I have many things to tell you but ye cannot bear them now." It is thus He fulfils the promise, "The Paraclete, when he cometh, he shall take of mine, he shall glorify me." "Glorify me" can only mean "lead you to perceive the truth that I am the Incarnation of the Word." John had reached this conclusion ; but he believed that he had reached it, not by his own intellectual efforts, but by direct revelation of the Spirit of Jesus.

The author of the Gospel claims that his interpretation of the Person and Work of Christ is a revelation of the Spirit. That claim must be set side by side with that of the Old Testament prophets that their message was in the same way derived direct from God. At once we are brought up against philosophical and psychological problems of the greatest moment. What is the validity of religious experience ? Does the Divine Personality "communicate" facts and ideas to the human recipient, or does it rather act, like the contact of one inspiring human personality upon others, by stimulating in them insight and capacity beyond their normal selves, yet along the line of their own individuality and within the range of the culture of their age ? What is the relation of conscious thought and purposive endeavour to those subconscious processes of the mind from which an author's "happy thought," or the flash of discovery of the scientist, seems to arise ? What is the connection between phenomena like these and voices or visions of the prophet ?¹ The subject is one to which I hope to return at some future time. To discuss it here would take us beyond the field of the purely historical and critical investigation which is all this book professes to attempt.

¹ Cf. the Essays by C. W. Emmet on "The Psychology of Grace" and "Inspiration" in *The Spirit*, ed. B. H. Streeter (Macmillan, 1921).

In this place, all I desire to emphasise is that the discourses of the Fourth Gospel and the prophetic writings of the Old Testament cannot be considered apart from one another. There is food for reflection in the fact that the original starting-point of the movement towards ethical monotheism in the Old Testament, and also the most complete expression reached in the New of the idea that in Christ God is in man made manifest, both ultimately derive from a conviction of direct inspiration, which to prophet or evangelist himself did not appear to be an open question.

THE LOGOS

The interpretative fusion of Greek philosophic mysticism with the conception of a Personal God reached by the Hebrew Prophets, modified by the religious experience of the Early Church, obtained its classical expression in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.

There has been much discussion as to the conception of the Word with which the Gospel opens. Was it derived by the author from the "Logos" of Philo, the philosophic Jew of Alexandria, or from the use of the expression, the "Memra" or "Word" of the Lord, in the popular Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament known as Targums? The controversy has always seemed to me to be a curiously futile one, since it is extremely unlikely that John could have been ignorant of either.

In Philo's system the term God stood, roughly speaking, for the idea of Divine Transcendence, while by the Logos or Word of God he meant something rather like what nowadays would be spoken of as Divine Immanence. His choice of Logos (expressed thought, or word) instead of Nous (reason) or Sophia (wisdom) was no doubt mainly determined by the use of the phrase "God said" in the description of the act of creation in Genesis, and by the way in which in poetical passages in the Old Testament the "word of the Lord" is at times all but personified. The use of the term Memra in the Targums was developed out of these same texts in the Old Testament, and it is quite likely that Philo was

familiar with it in the oral paraphrases which later on came to be written down in the Targums. If so, that would be an additional reason for his preferring the word Logos, which was a possible equivalent in Greek.¹

All the same, the underlying intention of the usage in Philo and the Targums is absolutely different. Philo is working out a philosophical system designed to effect a synthesis between two great monotheisms—the prophetic religion of the Hebrew and the Platonism of the Greek. The Targums are popular renderings of the Old Testament lessons intended for congregations the majority of whom knew neither Hebrew nor Greek, but were sufficiently advanced to find difficulty in the more startlingly anthropomorphic expressions of the Old Testament like “the Lord God walked in the garden.” Wherever anything of this kind occurs in the original, the Targum replaces it by some inoffensive substitute; the “Dwelling of the Lord” (Shekinta = Heb. Shekinah) or the “Word of the Lord” (Memra) are the most common. But as Professor Moore of Harvard² has recently shown, these are merely reverential paraphrases; the expression the “Word,” or the “Dwelling,” is not meant to be in any sense a metaphysical or theological conception, it is a purely philological subterfuge—a kind of verbal smoke-screen to conceal the difficulty presented by the anthropomorphic language of the original. To Philo, on the other hand, the Logos is the name of a Divine Principle conceived of, along the lines of Greek philosophical thinking, as a connecting link between Transcendent Deity and the material universe.

It is often pointed out that John's conception of the Word is quite different from Philo's. Of course that follows the moment it is said, “the Word was made flesh.” It would be equally true to say that Paul's conception of the meaning of Messiah is entirely different from any in the Old Testament or in contemporary

¹ *λόγος* would be a more exact equivalent of Memra, but would be rejected as in no way connoting the idea of “reason.”

² *Harvard Theological Journal*, January 1922, p. 41 ff.

Jewish thought. Once you say that the Jesus who died on the Cross is Messiah, that word takes on a meaning radically different from what it bore to the ordinary Jew. But no one on that score labours to prove that Paul derived the conception "Christ" from some other source than the Old Testament. Philo wrote fifty years at least before John. He and his family were famous throughout the Jewish world. His brother had covered the gate of the Temple with gold; he himself had been chosen to lead a deputation of Jews that waited on the Emperor Caligula, at the most dangerous crisis that had ever yet occurred in the relations between Roman and Jew. John may not have actually read anything of Philo—there are many to-day who talk, and even write, about Evolution without having read Darwin, or about an *élan vital* or Life-Force without having opened a book of Bergson. It is not, I believe, quite certain that the Memra usage was earlier than John. But if it was, John was probably familiar with it, and may even on that account have been the more attracted to Philonic thought. But the essential consideration is that the Word in John is philosophically conceived; it expresses the idea of the Divine as an indwelling principle in the Universe. And it was Philo who had popularised the term in that sense in an attempted synthesis of Greek and Hebrew thought. Seeing that the whole of Christian theology is based on the interpretation of the Logos doctrine of John as being a conception of philosophical import, it has always been a matter of no little surprise to me that defenders of orthodoxy, of all people, should be so anxious to find its ancestry, not in a conception of Philo, which (whatever its ultimate value) is at least a noble effort at clear thinking about God and His relation to the world, but in a Rabbinic paraphrase which is at best a rather childish attempt to dodge the necessity of thought.

I am far from asserting—indeed the contrary is probable—that the author of the Gospel was either unfamiliar with, or uninfluenced by, Rabbinic interpretations. What I do say is that to ignore or minimise the Hellenic element in the Logos

doctrine of John is to miss the point of the whole Gospel. For the same reason the suggestion—negligible were it not backed by the great name of Harnack—that the Prologue is a mere accessory or afterthought is one that I cannot entertain for a moment. I cannot but think that Harnack has unconsciously allowed his historical judgement to be warped by his own philosophical proclivities. The neo-Kantian reaction in Germany begot the idea that to seek a metaphysical basis for religion is to plough the sand. This may be true or false—personally I think it false; but it is beyond dispute that it is the precise opposite of the conviction of the Greek world for whom the author of the Gospel wrote.

THE QUEST FOR SOURCES

Much the larger part of the Fourth Gospel consists in discourse. And many of the incidents—the visit of Nicodemus, for example—are merely a peg on which to hang discourse. This fact alone should have warned critics against the naïve attempt to apply to this Gospel methods of source-criticism which are appropriate to the Synoptics or the historical books of the Old Testament.

Dr. Stanton¹ is at pains to discuss various “partition theories” which aim at getting behind the present text of the Fourth Gospel to earlier documents supposed to have been used by the author. I confess I think he pays them the compliment of a more serious consideration than is properly their due. Some of them are so intricate that merely to state is to refute them. For if the sources have undergone anything like the amount of amplification, excision, rearrangement and adaptation which the theory postulates, then the critic’s pretence that he can unravel the process is grotesque. As well hope to start with a string of sausages and reconstruct the pig. But even the more sober seeming of these partition theories appear to me to be based on a method essentially unscientific, for three reasons.

¹ *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, part iii. p. 32 ff. (Cambridge, 1920).

(1) The analogies and methods of Old Testament Criticism cannot be transferred to the New without considerable qualification. In the Pentateuch the main documents are removed from one another by periods centuries in duration, during which the whole social, religious, and political outlook of the people and the very language they used were profoundly changed; and these changes are clearly reflected in the different sources used by the compiler. Again, the literary aim of each several document is quite different. J E is a national Epic, D a book of state legislation, P is a historically framed manual of Church Law. Yet again, the method of the compiler is what we should style "scissors and paste"; probably of set purpose, he refrains in general from any attempt at rewriting the original. Thus even when the Synoptic Gospels only are concerned, Old Testament analogies do not hold. In Mark we have extant one of the main sources of both Matthew and Luke. But if we had before us *only* Matthew, or *only* Luke, no critic on earth would have been able to reconstruct a source like Mark. Even where we have two copies of a lost document to help us, we are at times baffled; witness the fact that no one has yet made a convincing reconstruction of Q.

But John's method is much further removed from that of Matthew or Luke than theirs is from that of the editor of Genesis. An example will make this clear. Mark (xiv. 3 ff.) tells how in the house of *Simon the leper* at *Bethany* a woman *unnamed* anointed our Lord's *head*. Luke mentions an anointing of our Lord's *feet* in the house of *Simon the Pharisee* by a woman *unnamed* in Galilee; in another context he tells the story of *Martha* cumbered with much serving and her sister *Mary* in a *certain village*. Now in John all these names, places, actions are, so to speak, sorted out and re-combined. The "certain village" is identified as Bethany; the house of the anointing is that of Mary, Martha and Lazarus; the unnamed woman is Mary. Thus the place of the anointing (Bethany) is Mark's, the mode of it (feet not head) is Luke's, while the serving of Martha is alluded to in

another context, but in connection with the Lazarus whom John represents to be her brother. Now these facts are susceptible of more than one interpretation. We may either suppose that John knew all about the family of Bethany, and that therefore his account of the Anointing and of the family of Lazarus gives the tradition approximately in its original form, while the stories given by Mark and Luke in different contexts and in diverse versions are, as it were, dislocated fragments of the true account. In that case John did not use a written source at all. Or, on the other hand, we may take the view that the Johannine version has been reached as the result of a fusion of traditions which are preserved separately, and in a more original form, in Mark and Luke. But, supposing Mark or Luke had not been before us, where is the critic with an insight so magical that he would even have suspected that a critical problem of this complexity is involved the moment we ask the source of the simple vivid story of the Anointing as it is told in John ?

(2) Exponents of source criticism, in this and other fields, have not always, I think, sufficiently considered the psychology of authorship. They have an eagle eye for the slightest tendency towards unnecessary repetition, a digression that could be dispensed with, or a qualification of a previous statement, an obscurity of connection between paragraphs, the slightest inconsistency, real or apparent, in thought or expression ; and if they detect anything of the sort in the smallest degree, it is evidence of interpolation, excision, or of a suture with another source. But has anyone ever written anything of which the first draft was not full of this kind of thing ? and how many have published work from which such blemishes have been completely eliminated ? The fact is that the human mind is not naturally tidy. Intellect, at least so Bergson would have us believe, was developed through natural selection, in order to enable man to stone rabbits, not to deploy philosophic arguments. It is only as a result of long training and much effort that most of us can think coherently, still less convey a train

of thought to other minds. Only by the few, and by these as a rule only after a process of careful revision, can a perfect articulation of thought and expression be reached. The author of the Fourth Gospel was a genius. We may presume, then, that he thought more consistently, and could express himself more clearly, than other men. But very likely he dictated his book, and that amidst many interruptions. What is most unlikely is that he would have cared to spend time on that "labour of the file" which is the sole method of perfecting a literary exposition. He did not know that he was writing, he did not aim at writing, a book that would outlast the centuries. He wrote to proclaim a Gospel. His passion was not to produce good literature, but to save souls; also he was an old man and maybe he wrote in haste.

(3) The only instances in this Gospel where the lack of sequence of thought between one paragraph and another is in the slightest degree remarkable can be explained in a way which is far more satisfactory than the hypothesis of clumsy editing. Everyone who has ever sent manuscript to be copied on a large scale knows that, either through his own inadvertence or that of the copyist, sheets often get transposed, and paragraphs added by way of correction get inserted in the wrong place. The same kind of thing is frequently to be observed in ancient MSS. of classical authors;¹ and there is not the slightest improbability in its having happened in one of the earliest, or even in the earliest, copy of this Gospel. At any rate there are certain places where the connection is immensely improved if we suppose there has been an accidental transposition of paragraphs or sections. Thus it is difficult to believe that Jn. xiv. 25-31, which reads like a concluding summary,

¹ The most remarkable is the series of dislocations in the Commentary of the Pseudo-Asconius, where the original order can be securely reconstructed from the order of the text of Cicero, upon which he comments. These dislocations go far beyond anything that the wildest critic has ever suggested in regard to the Fourth Gospel. Cf. A. C. Clark, *The Descent of Manuscripts*, p. 374 ff.

There is a very interesting discussion by F. W. Lewis, *Disarrangements in the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1910; cf. also Moffatt, *Introd. N.T.* p. 552 ff.

leading up to the words "Arise, let us depart hence," was intended by the author to be followed by chap. xv.-xvi. But move these seven verses to the end of chap. xvi., and they make a magnificent close to the discourse, xiv. 1-24, xv., xvi. Again, vii. 15-24 would follow excellently on v. 47; while vii. 25 would follow more naturally the thought of vii. 14. Yet again, as was long ago pointed out, to transpose ch. v. and vi. would much simplify the sequence of events. Thus from Cana, where He is at iv. 54, Jesus proceeds (vi. 1) to cross the Sea of Galilee at a time defined (vi. 4) as shortly before "the Passover, the feast of the Jews." After feeding the multitude He recrosses the lake to Capernaum (vi. 17) and discourses in the synagogue there (vi. 59); then (v. 1) He goes to Jerusalem to a feast unnamed, which has been a standing puzzle to commentators, but which (the chapters being thus transposed) is seen to be a reference to the Passover already mentioned (vi. 4) as at hand. The visit leads to a breach with the Jews of Jerusalem, ending with His denunciation of them (v. 44-47).¹ This is naturally followed by vii. 1: "after this Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Judaea, because the Jews sought to kill him." If the author of the Gospel wrote on a series of waxed tablets, or if he dictated to someone using a number of papyrus slips, such disarrangements could easily occur; and since the extant order does make sense, the disarrangement might not be noticed.

There is one rearrangement of the text of John which is especially interesting as having actual support in an existing MS. In Syr. S. the order of the verses in Jn. xviii. 12-27 is modified in a way which much improves the sense.² Verse 24 is inserted between 12 and 13, so that there is no trial before Annas, but merely a halt at his house on the way to that of Caiaphas. A mystic significance is attached in this Gospel to

¹ Or with vii. 15-25, if the additional transposition suggested above be effected.

² On the question whether the lost leaf of *e* supported Syr. S., cf. C. H. Turner, *J.T.S.*, Oct. 1900, p. 141 f., and F. C. Burkitt, *Ev. Da-Mepharreshe*, ii. p. 316.

Caiaphas being "high priest that year" (xi. 49-52), and the fact is re-emphasised again in this very context (xviii. 13-14); this makes it very hard to make the high priest in xviii. 19 refer to Annas—whatever claims he may have had, as a matter of usage, to bear the title. But in the text of Syr. S. the difficulty disappears; the high priest who conducts the trial is Caiaphas. Verses 16-18 are also transposed in this MS. so as to follow verse 23 (25a, which is a repetition of 18b, being omitted), so that the whole account of Peter's Denial is given in a single section.

It is possible that the Gospel, like the *Aeneid* of Virgil, was published posthumously. The obscure remark attributed to Papias in a IX^{cent.} Latin MS.¹ that "the Gospel of John was revealed and given to the Church by John, *adhuc in corpore constituto*, i.e. while still in the body," may be one of those "official denials" which are evidence of a by no means groundless belief in the fact denied. If so, the author may have died, leaving a pile of tablets or a number of loose dictated pieces on sheets of papyrus, and a pupil may have arranged them as best he could for publication. In that case there would be no objection to our supposing a large number of disarrangements, and also a few editorial additions—v. 28-29, for example, which reflects the Apocalyptic conception of an external judgement, thus directly contradicting the tenor of the previous verses. The Appendix, too, ch. xxi., may have been added by the pupil who edited the work. With possibilities of this kind open, considerations drawn from apparent breaks in the flow of argument or narrative, were they twice as many or as striking as they are, would not, to my mind, weigh for a moment against the extraordinary impression of unity of style, temper, and outlook in the Gospel as a whole. It is a book of which every chapter reflects the genius and experience of a tremendous personality—and all through the personality reflected is the same.

¹ Printed in Lightfoot and Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 524.

CREATIVE MEMORY

And the personality reflected is not that of a man likely to copy painfully other men's writings. Every scene he depicts, every discourse he relates—whencesoever originally derived—is the distilled essence of something that has been pondered upon and lived out in actual life until it has become of the very texture of his soul. But the subconscious depths of the human mind are never inactive, least of all so where thoughts or incidents fraught with passionate interest are concerned. Things disconnected are brought together, things dark become illuminated. Given also a mystic with the creative imagination of the artist—and no one without the artist's mind could have drawn the word pictures of the Fourth Gospel—old scenes will be flashed up into recollection, with new but vivid details embodying the altered emphasis caused by later meditation on the meaning of the original experience.

We must also remember that the stories told by John are avowedly selected to illustrate certain fundamental religious principles. The presumption is a strong one that he has given us the selection which he had found most effective for that purpose, and had already used time after time in discussions with individuals or in addresses to the Church. But whenever any one tells and retells the same story to illustrate some special point—whether the point be a jest, a trait of character of some well-known individual, the magnificence of an exploit, or the enormity of a crime—quite insensibly minor details of the story get modified so as to throw into greater emphasis the main point. The subconscious mind is more primitive than the conscious; it thinks in pictures; it dramatises; thus every time a story is told, it is told more effectively. But that is always at the expense of the minor accuracy which a cross-examining counsel demands of a witness, and which a historical critic ought to be aware cannot often be expected in an ancient document. Indeed, it is only in modern times, and under the influence of

the demand for meticulous accuracy which modern science and its methods have made insistent, that people have begun to trouble at all about minutiae of description, so long as these do not seriously affect the general impression. An illustration of this relative indifference to minor details can be found in the Acts. The Conversion of Paul is described no less than three times¹ in that book. The second and third occasions occur in speeches of Paul separated by only three chapters, and the context shows that the difference cannot be explained by the theory that the author is combining two parallel sources. Yet the exact details as to what was seen and heard, and how much of it was experienced by Paul only, and how much by his companions as well, is differently related in each of the three accounts.

That tendency in John, to which attention is so often called, towards an enhancement of detail in the miracle stories he records is to be accounted for in this way. He writes, not with the written document in front of him, but from the vivid reconstruction of the scene as, at the moment of writing, it stood out before his own mind's eye. I may perhaps be pardoned in adducing a modern illustration—the point of which lies precisely in the fact that the person who is the subject of the illustration is notoriously a man of unimpeachable veracity, and was, at the moment of speaking, engaged in emphasising the supreme importance of historical fact and historical evidence. In the peroration of a sermon preached some years ago by a distinguished ecclesiastic on the evidence for the Resurrection, there occurred the words, "And finally He appeared to 500 brethren at once on a mountain in Galilee in broad daylight." As a correspondent of the *Guardian* newspaper, in which the sermon was published, pointed out, this unqualified statement of fact really involved two unconscious inferences: (1) the identification of the appearance to 500 brethren mentioned by Paul in writing to the Corinthians with the appearance to the eleven on a mountain in Galilee recorded in Matthew, which, though not

¹ Acts ix. 3 ff.; xxii. 6 ff.; xxvi. 12 ff.

uncommonly made in popular commentaries of the period, is an artificial combination and one of very questionable validity ; (2) the affirmation that the appearance took place in broad daylight. This, though possibly quite correct, is unsupported by any definite statement in the New Testament. The preacher had quite unconsciously described the scene, not from the original authorities, but from the vivid picture, a " composite photograph " as it were, reconstructed by his own imagination on the basis of contemporary apologetic.

FACT AND SYMBOL

To most of the mystics symbolism in one form or another appeals. But from the first century A.D. till well after the Renaissance the peculiar form of symbolism known as Allegory had an attraction for some of the finest minds with which it is difficult for the present age to sympathise. Much has been made by recent scholarship of the idea that the author of the Fourth Gospel was one of them. I quote again from the article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* by Baron F. von Hügel :

" Philo had in his life of Moses allegorised the Pentateuchal narratives so as to represent him as mediator, saviour, intercessor of his people, the one great organ of revelation, and the soul's guide from the false lower world into the upper true one. The Fourth Gospel is the noblest instance of this kind of literature, of which the truth depends, not on the factual accuracy of the symbolising appearances, but on the truth of the ideas and experiences thus symbolised."

This reference to Philo is misleading. What Philo allegorises is the legislation. Only rarely does he detect allegory in the Pentateuchal narratives, and he never *invents* stories for their symbolic intention. In the case of John the desire to find in events an allegorical expression of spiritual realities might possibly act as a moulding influence on the imaginative pictures in which the memory of them was stored. Since memory is essentially interpretative, such a desire might

easily determine the character and direction of the modification the mental picture of events would undergo. But the suggestion that John consciously and deliberately composed stories for the sake of their allegorical meaning seems to me to go too far. Such a proceeding on his part would, so it seems to me, be incompatible with the objects which he had in view, so far as we can estimate these by what we know of the circumstances and special needs of the Church of his day.

The Church in Ephesus, and indeed the Church throughout the world at the end of the first century A.D., was fighting a battle on two fronts. On the one side there was the impingement of Gnosticism from without, with the even more dangerous drift towards a gnosticising Christianity within. This threatened to undermine both the monotheism and the ethical soundness of the Hebrew and Apostolic religious tradition, and to substitute a vague mysticism, based upon speculations about complicated series of graded divinities, along with a belief in the inherent evil of matter. This tendency was accompanied by an insistence either that Christ was not really human—the Body which men saw in Palestine being merely an appearance—or that the Divine Christ was a separate Being from the man Jesus. On the other side was the conservative Jewish party, ethically sound and firmly monotheistic, but conceiving of the Person of Christ and His relation both to God and man in terms derived from Jewish eschatology—a naïve form of “picture-thinking” which must somehow be transcended if Christianity was to mean anything to the average Greek. The Gospel of Matthew stereotypes this phase of Christian theology, or rather the more progressive wing of it, at the stage which it had reached in Antioch about A.D. 85. The Apocryphal Gospel of Peter, the surviving fragment of which describes how the Divine Christ went back to Heaven leaving the human Jesus to die upon the Cross, represents the more conservative wing of the Gnostic tendency.

John saw clearly that the salvation of the Church lay in a *via media* between these two tendencies, in the position which

he summed up in the idea of the Word made flesh. Christ was truly, really, and completely man; but in Him is incarnate the "Word of God." To John the Word means, roughly speaking, what a modern thinker would speak of as Divinity considered as immanent—that which is really God, not a subordinate emanation from God. But of the two tendencies John is combating, much the more alarming was that which came from the Gnostic; for the *Zeitgeist* was on that side. Orthodox Christians are so preoccupied nowadays in asserting the Divinity of Christ that it is easy to overlook the fact that in the early Gentile Church, especially in Asia, it was the reality of His Humanity that most needed emphasis. The age was obsessed by the problem of evil, and the Gnostic solution, that evil arose because matter is essentially and eternally bad, necessitated the rejection of the belief that Divinity could possibly have worn a real body of material flesh and blood. That is why, while John dwells far more than the Synoptics on the miraculous power of Christ and the all-seeing intelligence that knows all without needing to ask questions or await information—the evidence of Divinity—he also, to an extent unparalleled in the Synoptics, emphasises the susceptibility of Christ to purely physical and simple human experience. John alone records that Jesus was wearied with a journey (iv. 6), wept for a friend (xi. 35), and in the agony of death could say "I thirst."

Does it not follow that to the mind of a philosophic mystic of that epoch a "mediating theology" would involve a double attitude towards the historical facts of the life of Christ?

On the one hand, seeing that every action of the historic Jesus is an expression in time of the Universal Divine, it is much more than a mere historical event. The visible fact must necessarily in every case be a symbolic expression of an invisible spiritual principle. If a multitude is fed with loaves and fishes, this is not a mere event which once happened by the Lake of Galilee, it is also symbolically the expression in time of the eternal verity that man attains to the Life Divine by feeding spiritually upon

Christ the Bread of Life. If Lazarus rises from the tomb, this is not merely a wonderful miracle wrought on an individual, it is also an individualised instance of the universal principle that the Immanent Divinity revealed in Christ is eternally the Resurrection and the Life of Man.

On the other hand, from the logic of his position, John is no less bound to emphasise the idea that, because the Word *became flesh*, therefore these things *factually* occurred. To the Gnostic this world of fact was alien to the spiritual; it was a world in which the Ultimate Divine had no part. John affirms that the Word in becoming flesh demonstrated that this world of concrete fact was the expression of, and was in the control of, the same world-creating Spirit that appeared as a Redeemer in Jesus Christ. It would seem to follow that John could not, consistently with his purpose, have recorded as history any incident which he did not himself believe to have actually occurred.

History to all the ancients, except perhaps Thucydides and Polybius, was a branch, not of science, but of letters. Effective presentation was more valued than accuracy of detail. There is hardly a battle in Livy described in a way which would work out correctly on the actual ground—and yet war was the “leading industry” of Rome. About minor details no one in those days troubled; what was asked for was the broad facts graphically described. And so far as the broad facts are concerned I think one must affirm that John recorded nothing which he did not believe to be historical. It does not follow that his belief was always justified. He records four stupendous miracles—the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the Walking on the Water, the Changing of Water into Wine, and the Raising of Lazarus. The difficulty to the modern mind of supposing that such events happened exactly and in all particulars as they are described by the Evangelist is a point that needs no elaboration. All I would insist on is that, from the point of view of intrinsic credibility, all four stories stand upon exactly the same level. But two of

them could have been derived by John from Mark, a work accepted in the Church at the time he wrote as an unimpeachable historical authority. The obvious presumption, then, is that he derived the other two from an authority which, whether mistakenly or otherwise, he regarded as no less authentic.

Some eminent critics hold that the raising of Lazarus in John has been developed out of the concluding sentence in Luke's parable of Dives and Lazarus. This suggestion is one which has never seemed to me particularly plausible. It will at least be conceded that, on the surface, the two stories and the morals drawn from them are very different. But even if it be granted that a sentence in the parable is the germ out of which the story of the miracle has grown, it is surely psychologically far easier to suppose that the growth had already taken place during an intermediate stage of oral tradition, rather than that the transformation was effected through a conscious manipulation by John of the written text of Luke.

To sum up, John may have been mistaken about his facts, but to him it is as important to emphasise the historical as to see in the historical a symbol of the Eternal. But he was interested in these stories, not so much because they were marvellous, as because they seemed to him to embody eternal truth. To him fact and meaning are related as flesh to spirit—the flesh is a necessary vehicle, but it is spirit which really counts. The familiar observation that in John the miracles are “acted parables” is absolutely correct; only it does not go far enough. To John the whole of the appearance in history of the Word made Flesh is an acted parable—including the Death and Resurrection. That being so, it is essential surely to his whole theological position, whether against the Docetic Gnostics, who denied the reality of Christ's human body, or against the passionless Christ of Cerinthus, to affirm that the parable *really was acted out* in the plane of material existence in this world of fact.

THE MYSTIC VISION

In reply to this contention it may be urged by some that the symbolism manifest in some of the stories has an allegorical appropriateness not to be accounted for by the normal working on the author's memory of the various unconscious processes I have indicated. The five earlier husbands, for example, of the Woman of Samaria (contrasted with the present husband not her own) are said to symbolise the gods of the five nations planted in that territory by the Assyrians¹ whom the Samaritans worshipped before they accepted the God of the Jews. Again, the number 153 in the miraculous Draught of Fishes is said to represent the inclusion of all nations in the Church, since the ancients believed that this was the total number of species of fish. Personally I am not much attracted by these suggestions; but what I am concerned to argue is that, while the *numbers* and other such details *may* have been modified by the search for allegory, the stories themselves were not invented *ab initio* as allegories. The Draught of Fishes we know was not so invented, since it occurs in Luke: is it not probable that John found also ready to hand a story of a meeting of Christ with a Samaritan woman, which no doubt to some extent he rewrote?

Even if it should be thought that some scenes in the Gospel have no basis either in fact or in tradition, I would submit that the hypothesis of conscious literary invention is still improbable. An alternative explanation can be invoked which is far more consonant with the psychology of the mystic's mind. Evelyn Underhill, quoting analogies from Mediaeval Mystics, hazarded the suggestion that the author of the Fourth Gospel may not only have *heard* (with the prophet's inward ear) the discourses he reports, but may have *seen* some of the events which he depicts—in mystic trance. As this suggestion has not, I think,

¹ 2 Kings xvii. 24.

received from scholars the attention it deserves, I venture to quote a significant passage.

Now, as the discourses in which the Divine Nature discloses itself in its relation to man seem to reflect back to "auditive" experiences on the part of the Evangelist, so these incidents—so sharp and realistic in their detail, yet so transfigured by the writer's point of view—suggest to us that another form of automatic activity had its part in the composition of his gospel. As we read them, we are reminded again and again of those visionary scenes, formed from traditional or historical materials, but enriched by the creative imagination, the deep intuition of the seer, in which the fruit of the mystic's meditation takes an artistic or dramatic instead of a rhetorical form. The lives of the later mystics show to us the astonishing air of realism, the bewildering intermixture of history with dream, which may be achieved in visionary experience of this kind; and which can hardly be understood save by those who realise the creative power of the mystical imagination, the solidarity which exists for the mystic's consciousness between his intensely actual present and the historical past of his faith. In his meditations, he really lives again through the scenes which history has reported to him: since they are ever-present realities in that Mind of God to which his mind aspires. He has a personal interest in doing this, in learning as it were the curve of the life of Christ; for *vita tua, via nostra* is his motto—"he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked."¹

Further, his vivid sense of actuality, the artistic powers which are part of his psychic constitution, help to build up and elaborate the picture of the events upon which he broods. He sees this picture, in that strong light and with that sharp definition which is peculiar to visionary states. He has not produced it by any voluntary process: it surges up from his deeper mind, as do the concepts of the artist, invading that field of consciousness which his state of meditation has kept in a mood of tense yet passive receptivity. So real it is to him, so authoritative, so independent of his deliberate efforts, that the transition is easy from "thus it must have been" to "thus it *was*."²

A study of dream psychology and of visions recorded by Mystics affords evidence that the solution of problems, on which the mind has pondered long and deeply, does sometimes come in the form of visions, the symbolism of which is quite as obvious

¹ 1 John ii. 6.

² *The Mystic Way*, p. 235 ff. (Dent, 1913).

and as elaborate in detail as that of allegories worked out by the conscious mind. And not infrequently these visions have a certain quality which, both at the moment of experiencing them and in subsequent reflection, compels conviction that they are veridical—that is, that they are not dreams or guesses, but revelations of actual fact.¹ I am not, however, concerned to argue that any scene or any detail in a scene came to John in this way. All I would contend is that, *if* any incident in the Gospel is recorded in a form which seems too like allegory to be accounted for by the normal working of interpretative recollection, there is an alternative to the hypothesis of conscious allegory which is, to my mind, psychologically more credible.

From the various considerations I have adduced it would seem clear that the hope that by critical analysis sufficiently refined we can reconstruct sources used by John is chimerical. It is, however, quite another matter to raise the broad question, On what authority does John rely when he takes upon himself to supplement, correct, or contradict the Synoptic story? Had he some august written source to which he could appeal, or was he in a position to speak from personal knowledge? If the latter, was his authority that of an eye-witness, or that of one supposed in some other way to have first-hand knowledge of the facts?

It may be that a critical examination of the documentary relations between John and the Synoptists will place us in possession of materials with the aid of which an answer to this question can be given. At any rate, since such an examination is likely to bring out facts in other ways of interest to the student of the Gospels, it must be essayed.

¹ I have put together some evidence bearing on this subject in an article, originally intended as an *excursus* to this volume, which appeared in the *Hibbert Journal* for January 1925; also as an appendix in my book *Reality*.