The Evangelical Quarterly

APRIL 15TH, 1942.

THE APOSTLE JOHN'S DICTION

I

WRITERS of any distinction carry with them marks of identity not to be counterfeited. Samples of Bacon's frugality of words or Jeremy Taylor's exuberance, of Gibbon's circumlocutions or Macaulay's limpid flow, disclose their authors to every intelligent reader of " elegant extracts ". Sometimes narrow inspection may be requisite to detect the respective hallmarks of the composer's style; but there they are for him who has eyes to discern them.

The style of the apostle John admittedly teems with differential features. They are altogether unique in their combination, and diverge completely from those of the other sacred penmen. Who, for example, can peruse that most characteristic document, his First Epistle, without remarking them? Who can fail to recognise its Hebrew garb, its simple, yet pregnant, profundity, its unqualified propositions limited by one another, and the changes which it rings on a few grand elemental images?

But a closer scrutiny may descry yet more intimate traits of his composition, the very latency of which supplies cumulative evidence of their source. We wish to call attention to one of these minor characteristics which, so far as we are aware, has escaped the notice of expositors. Its prevalence in his writings and virtual absence from the rest of the N.T. Scriptures gives it peculiar interest and value as a testimony to his handiwork. In an article on the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel which appeared four years ago in the *Evangelical Quarterly* (Vol. x. 2), the present writer took occasion to mention the pervading use of the figure *chiasmus* in the books which bear the apostle's name, but considerations of space precluded

the adducement of particulars. We now propose to repair that omission.

The figure known to grammarians as chiasmus wears a variety of shapes. Its more elaborate guises are well known to students of Ciceronian rhetoric; for it was a favourite with Latin authors. But these artistic counterpositions would be utterly foreign to the beloved disciple's genius. What we do find in him is a frequent resort to chiasmus of a simple recapitulative type. To render the species familiar to the reader, let us cite two examples of it, one ancient and one modern. Here is an instance from Ovid:

> Et placet et video; sed *quod videoque placetque*
> non tamen invenio.

and a second from the poet Keats:

> It was a dream; or say *a dream it was.*

It will be seen that it consists in the transposition of identical, or almost identical terms, repeated anew, to draw attention to them.

John's type of this device is the more noteworthy because it is not a feature of Biblical language in general, and least of all of those Hebrew Scriptures in whose diction his mind may be said to have been steeped. Their repetitions almost invariably preserve the order of the original statement. The sole instance of inversion we have noticed occurs in Ezek. vii. 6, where, both in the Hebrew and LXX text, though not in our version, the wording runs: "An end is come, *is come the end.*"

II

But it is time to refer to John's own usage. We will start with his First Epistle, fraught with the very quintessence of his specialities of manner and matter. Now its opening sentence (1. i, 3) presents us *in limine* with the object of our quest; for the very first words consist of the relative clauses, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἑωράκαμεν, and these are recapitulated in reverse order ὃ ἑωράκαμεν, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν: "What we have heard, what we have seen, . . . *What we have seen, what we have heard.*" We shall soon learn to regard this inversion as the apostle's sign-manual;

for we come across two more instances of the same mannerism in the second chapter. In v. 19 we read: "they were not of us; for if *of us they were*"; and, lest we should ascribe the chiasmus in this case to the interposition of a conditional clause, again in v. 24: "which ye heard from the beginning . . . *which from the beginning ye heard*" (ὃ ἠκούσατε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς . . . ὃ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἠκούσατε). The English reader misses these notable metatheses; for they are ignored both in the A.V. and R.V. But they cannot be reckoned accidental; for a fourth example greets us later on in the sentence: "he that hath the Son hath (the) life: he that hath not the Son (*the*) *life hath not*" (v. 12): ἔχει τὴν ζωήν . . . τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἔχει.

If additional proof be sought that we have here a Johannine watermark, it is furnished by that brief SECOND EPISTLE which in so many other respects reflects his lineaments. In vv. 10, 11 we encounter the inversion: χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε · ὁ λέγων γὰρ αὐτῷ χαίρειν. We submit that the reiteration of such a *Kennzeichen*, to borrow an expressive German term, suffices to establish its connection with the author of these Epistles.

What then, we ask, has the GOSPEL bearing his name to say in the matter? Its testimony is concurrent and conclusive. No less than sixteen examples of the employment of the self-same figure can be cited from its enthralling pages, in some respects the most wondrous ever penned, both for their revelations and their silences, for the precious gems which this merchant of heavenly pearls garners in his unique casket, and for those left in "unfathomable caves" till the final apocalypse of Time's secrets.

1, 2. The first chapter supplies two antiphonal transpositions (vv. 48, 50), quite disregarded in the A.V. and R.V. "Whilst under the fig-tree I saw thee . . . *I saw thee underneath the fig-tree*": is one; and it is echoed in Nathanael's reply: "Thou art the Son of God, Thou *King art* of Israel." These transpositions seem to be adopted mainly for the sake of emphasis, and may be held to supply the place of our modern italics. Be that as it may, they are John's patent, or shall we rather say, his Lord's. For we think there is considerable ground for the inference that he derived this personal touch from his Master, whose manner of tuition of his inner circle he unquestionably reproduces more exactly than the Synoptists. Certainly many of the samples to be found in the Fourth Gospel issue from

the lips of Christ Himself, and seem native to the Divine Speaker.

3. The next instance, however, exemplifies John's own characteristic phraseology. It crosses our path in iii. 32, 33, where the Greek text reads: "His witness no man receiveth; he that *hath received his witness* hath set to his seal that He is true"; a double specimen of the apostle's habit of transposition and of laying down unqualified propositions and then modifying them.

4. Another interlocutory chiasmus presents itself in the interview with the Samaritan woman (iv. 17). She makes the confession: "I have no husband" (*οὐκ ἔχω ἄνδρα*); whereupon the Saviour rejoins: "thou hast well said, *husband have I not*" (*ἄνδρα οὐκ ἔχω*), the entire stress falling unmistakably on the substantive.

5, 6. Similarly we find in vi. 46: "not that any man *the Father* hath seen (*τὸν Πατέρα ἑώρακέν τις*) save He who is of God; He hath seen the Father" (*οὗτος ἑώρακεν τὸν Πατέρα*); and in vii. 7, where our translation for the first time reproduces the metathesis: "the world cannot hate you; but *Me it hateth*."

7, 8. Two other specimens of this idiom reward our search in this chapter: "*Me* ye know and ye know whence I am" (v. 28), and still more distinctly in vv. 41, 42: "out of Galilee doth Christ come? . . . from Bethlehem *cometh Christ*."

9. A noteworthy case recurs in viii. 21, 24, where Jesus repeats His warning to the Jewish leaders with a change of number: first saying pointedly, "in your sin ye shall die" (*ἐν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ μοῦ ἀποθανεῖσθε*), and clenching his rebuke in the form, *ἀποθανεῖσθε ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν*, "ye shall *die in your sins*".

10. We have spoken of the usage as familiar in the mouth of Christ Himself. In xii. 26 we first of all encounter the clause, "if any man serve *Me*" (*ἐὰν ἐμοί τις διακονῇ*), which is thus repeated, *ἐὰν τὶς ἐμοὶ διακονῇ*, "if *any man* serve Me", with the emphasis shifted. Something of the same kind appears in the scene of the feet-washing (11), where we have Peter's quick remonstrance (xiii. 6), rendered livelier by the inverse order of the literal exclamation: "*Thou my* washest feet!" and the calmer repetition succeeding it: "Thou shalt *never* wash my feet."

12. Immediately afterwards the Lord Himself deliberately adopts the method of transposition (vv. 13, 14); for He entitles Himself (1) ὁ διδάσκαλος καὶ ὁ Κύριος and (2) ὁ Κύριος καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος: Master or Teacher and Lord, *Lord and Master.*

13, 14. How characteristic of the Saviour's utterance this mode of speech was may be gathered from its recurrence in the sacred accents of the high-priestly prayer. We hear the great Intercessor saying: " they are not of the world " (xvii. 9) and a few moments later (v. 16): " *of the world they are not* " οὐκ εἰσὶν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου . . . ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου οὐκ εἰσίν. Then finally, resuming the prior sequence, " even as I am not of the world ".

15. Pilate himself furnishes a salient instance of the figure in John's narrative of the trial of Jesus; for in xix. 4, 6 he protests: " I bring Him forth to you that ye may know that *no guilt do I find in Him.*" By assigning them the premier place the words οὐδεμίαν αἰτίαν are set in peculiar relief. But when he assumes the role of judge, the procurator repeats them in the commonplace order: " I find not in Him guilt," thus paying an unconscious homage, like Caiaphas and even Judas, to the sinless Sin-bearer.

16. Once again, in the glad light of the resurrection-dawn, St. John resorts to this mode of signalising the point in hand. It is found in the story of his speeding with Peter to the empty sepulchre. The younger of the twain outstrips the elder—a convincing touch of reality—seeing that love as well as juniority gave him wings, and looking in, " seeth there lying the linen-cloths " (xx. 5) and in dumb wonder turns to his companion in the rear. Possibly he had run himself out of breath and could not articulate. But Peter's heavier momentum oversteps the open threshold of the rock-tomb, and he " surveys the linen-cloths as they lay ", upfolded in nicest order and revealing a calmly disposing hand. All this is implied in the variation of sequence: βλέπει κείμενα τὰ ὀθόνια and θεωρεῖ τὰ ὀθόνια κείμενα.

III

Do not these luminous finger-posts tell their own tale, not only of their design, but of their designer? Such *instantiae crucis*, in Bacon's phrase, can no more be regarded as casual than the rearrangement of the shroud of the Crucified. As that testifies to an unhurried rising again of the Vanquisher of death,

so these significant tokens of the Johannine pen bear record to their inditer. Unbelief may scan both these imprints of personal volition with a glazed eye; but rectified sight, or shall we say, faith's eagle vision, sees in them lively traces of the working of a percipient mind and will, well aware of the significance of its acts.

It is the fashion with our present-day clairvoyant critics to treat negatively the church's witness that the apostle John wrote the Apocalypse which bears his name. Yet it begins with an affirmation of his personal identity applicable to no one save *the* John of the Gospel history. Note how he recognises immediately his beloved Master at the outset of the vision, glorified, yet the same Jesus; whereas Paul on the Damascus road has to falter out the question, "Who art thou, Lord?"

Of course, the solecisms of the Greek text and its deviations from John's style elsewhere, give a plausible air to the negative theories of its origin. It can scarcely have been written at quite the same period of his life as the Fourth Gospel or the Epistles. But into the vexed question of its earlier or later date we cannot enter. There are points of resemblance as well as of difference; covert similarities counterbalancing patent divergences. But in closing we may point out that examples of John's chiasmus are not entirely absent from the book of REVELATION. If somewhat infrequent, they are nevertheless legible. We note at least five such signposts. In the Letters to the Churches, where the spokesman is Jesus Himself, two occur: *ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ζῶν . . . καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας* (ii. 17), and again: "neither cold art thou nor hot . . . thou art lukewarm and *neither hot nor cold*" (iii. 15). We encounter three more in subsequent chapters, two of them occurring together in xi. 5, 6. "If any man desireth to hurt them" first takes the form: *εἴ τις αὐτους θέλει ἀδικῆσαι* and then *εἴ τις θελήση αὐτοὺς ἀδικῆσαι*, and in the following verse, "they have the power . . . *power they have*" *ἔχουσιν τὴν ἐξουσίαν . . . ἐξουσίαν ἔχουσιν.* This is a striking exemplification of John's style. And another may be viewed in the final chapter (vv. 18, 19), where the phrase "the words of the prophecy of this book" is, with evident design, exchanged for the expression "*the words of the book of this prophecy*". This reversed locution seems to us to embody something more than verbal repetition. The former phrase we take to refer to the Apocalypse itself, the closing seal of inspiration; but the latter appears to embrace

the whole of the sacred oracles now finally intact, and to pronounce an anathema on those who tamper with them by way of subtraction of the true as well as addition of the false.

We are of opinion that we have brought to light a token of John's workmanship which may be compared to the artist's signature on the margin of his canvas. It forms an attestation of the authenticity and common source of the writings that have come down to us as his, three of which wear his name stamped on their foreheads, and the fourth, though wishful to conceal it, so instinct with his unique peculiarities that his very disguise unveils his identity.

To avoid misapprehension two remarks may be added. As variants in the order of words occur in some of the uncials, it should be stated that we have followed Nestle's "resultant text" in our quotations. And, with regard to chiasmus in Hebrew, we are not unaware that inverted parallelisms are common in the poetical O. T. Scriptures. But these complex inversions differ from John's repetitionary chiasmus by iterating the statement *in other terms* than those which precede.

E. K. SIMPSON.

Malvern.