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words, the right translation of words, and they have given to certain forms of words a peculiar importance which places the Christian believer in a more imposing position than the Christian doubter. They have proved and continue to prove that perfectly irreconcilable facts may

become accepted tenets of Faith. They have at once provoked and defied criticism. They can mean anything that the Salvation Army or the Vatican chooses them to mean; and they are at once condemnation or consolation to the generality of mankind!

## Irenæus and the Fourth Gospel.

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### IV.

WHY, then, is the testimony of Irenæus so vehemently challenged by a large number of modern scholars? The question as to its relation to the *internal* evidence of the Fourth Gospel is one which I do not propose to deal with in the present discussion. In the region of external evidence, with which alone we are concerned, the crux of the difficulty is found by these scholars in certain statements of Papias.

I. There is, first, the famous passage examined above, in which he is supposed to distinguish between John, the member of the Twelve, and another John called 'the elder' and 'the disciple of the Lord.' We have already noted the extreme obscurity of the statement so far as the two mentions of 'John' are concerned. But upon its basis the assumption is made that Irenæus must have confused John the apostle with John the presbyter. This, of course, also involves a complete misunderstanding of what he had heard from Polycarp, to whom he specially refers his information regarding John. The argument is backed up by an attempt to show that Irenæus was a credulous, unreliable man, of singularly inaccurate memory. The proofs of this seem extraordinarily inadequate. Great stress is laid upon the position he takes against Ptolemæus, mainly based on Jn 8<sup>57</sup> and some testimonies of elders, that Jesus was more than forty years old at the time of His crucifixion. It may be frankly admitted that here he has forced facts to fit a theory which helps his argument. But in a question so obscure as the chronology of Jesus' career, his own unwarranted inference or that of the elders to whom he refers is in no sense an error so grave as to cast suspicion

on the historical statements he ordinarily makes. Nor is it fair to single out one or two eschatological fancies as evidence for the worthlessness of Irenæus' sources and his own uncritical temper. As we have seen, these seem to have been derived from Papias' *Expositions*, and the very scholars who emphasize their absurdity are found, in other connexions, to stake everything on Papias' authority. As a matter of fact, the impression left on the reader by a perusal of Irenæus' great work is anything but that of a facile or second-rate understanding. His arguments against the Valentinian Gnostics are alert and penetrating (e.g. his examination of the doctrine of *Æons*). Like his contemporaries, he often employs the allegorical method, but he is, on the whole, alive to the historical sense of Scripture, as contrasted with his Gnostic opponents. And his well-known conception of the 'recapitulation' of the race in Christ is one of the most impressive doctrinal formulations in early Patristic theology. Moreover, it is of great importance to observe that Irenæus, in speaking of his intimate relations with Polycarp, his chief authority for traditions regarding John, deliberately emphasizes the clearness with which the statements of Polycarp concerning the famous 'disciple of the Lord' stand out in his memory.

But, further, abundant evidence has been adduced to show that Papias was not the sole standard for early apostolic tradition. Polycarp and Polycrates we have dealt with at length. And many unnamed and unknown Christians must have linked the close of the first century to the middle of the second. It is easy to cast doubt on the accuracy of Irenæus' or any other man's

memory in points of detail. But when it is a question of the actual relation of a famous Church-leader to the Founder of Christianity in a society which treasured up the traditions of the past, we must be unusually sure of our ground before we bring dogmatic charges of inaccuracy against those who stood in the main current of the life of the Church.

II. The second decisive reason for distrusting the evidence of Irenæus is found in a further alleged statement of Papias, which does not appear in any early writer, but in one MS. of the Chronicle of the monk, Georgios Hamartolos, belonging to the ninth century A.D.<sup>1</sup> The whole paragraph must be quoted, which is very seldom done in discussions of the subject. 'After Domitian, Nerva ruled for one year, and he summoned back John from the island [Patmos] and sent him away to dwell at Ephesus. There he alone surviving of the twelve disciples and having composed his gospel was deemed worthy of martyrdom. For Papias the bishop of Hierapolis, who was an eye-witness of John, says in the second book of the Oracles of the Lord that he was killed by the Jews (ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων ἀνηρέθη), plainly, along with his brother, fulfilling Christ's prediction concerning them. . . . For the Lord had said to them: "Can you drink the cup which I drink?" And they eagerly assented and agreed. "My cup," he says, "ye shall drink, and be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized." And naturally this was so, for it is impossible for God to lie. So also the learned Origen in his interpretation of Matthew has asserted that John was a martyr (μεμάρτυρηκεν), indicating that he had learnt this from the successors of the apostles. Moreover, the erudite Eusebius in his Church History (iii. 1) says: "Thomas had Parthia as his sphere, but John Asia, where he dwelt, and died at Ephesus."'

When we examine the reference to 'the learned Origen,' we find the following (*In Matth.* iii. p. 719 ff. ed. Delarue): 'The sons of Zebedee have drunk the cup and were baptized with the baptism, for Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword, while the Roman emperor, as the tradition shows, condemned John to the isle of Patmos, bearing testimony (μαρτυροῦντα) on account of the word of truth.' The statement of Georgios shows much confusion, and precisely the kind of confusion which appears in many of the later

<sup>1</sup> The other MSS. have: ἐν εἰρήσῃ ἀνεπαύσατο.

ecclesiastical writers. On the one hand, he agrees with the universal tradition of the early Church that John the son of Zebedee outlived his fellow-apostles and died in Ephesus at the close of the first century, and that he was the author of the Fourth Gospel. He refers, moreover, to the authority of Eusebius for John's death at Ephesus. On the other hand, he reports a statement of Papias in his second book that James and John were killed by the Jews, their martyrdom being the necessary fulfilment of Jesus' words to them as found in the Synoptics. This statement he intends to corroborate by an appeal to Origen, but he entirely mistook Origen's meaning by giving an erroneous interpretation to the participle μαρτυροῦντα, which, in this passage, has no reference to martyrdom in the literal sense but means 'bearing testimony' to Christ and suffering for it, according to the use of μαρτυρεῖν and μαρτυρία so common in the Apocalypse (e.g. 1<sup>2</sup>.<sup>9</sup> 12<sup>17</sup> 20<sup>4</sup> etc.). The very same mistake seems to occur in a chronicler of the sixth or seventh century, John Malalas, who, in the face of all earlier tradition, makes the martyrdom of Ignatius occur at Antioch, taking μαρτυρεῖν, which he had probably found in some earlier authority, in the sense of literal martyrdom (see Lightfoot, *op. cit.* pp. 79-81). We may connect with this more flexible use of μαρτυρεῖν, μαρτυρία and μάρτυς in the early days (cf. Ac 23<sup>11</sup>, He 12, etc.), Polycrates' description of John, already noted, as μάρτυς καὶ διδάσκαλος. For, as Zahn instructively shows, if he had meant to use μάρτυς in John's case literally, as he does in the case of Polycarp, Thrasea, and Sagaris in the same paragraph, he would, as in their case, have placed the term last in his description (*Einleitung*, ii. p. 465).

If we assign any value to this report of Georgios (which Zahn regards as an interpolation in this particular MS., Cod. Coislinianus 305), his meaning can only be that the Apostle John in extreme old age was put to death either directly or indirectly by Jews at Ephesus. In that case, his martyrdom has no bearing on John's relation to the Gospel, for Georgios assumes his authorship.

The same statement occurs in a late collection of extracts (seventh or eighth century) based on the History of Philip of Sidê, a sixth-century writer. 'Papias,' he observes, 'in his second book says that John the Divine (ὁ θεολόγος) and James his brother were killed by the Jews' (ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων ἀνηρέθησαν). It seems more than probable, even

apart from the noteworthy fact that the very same Greek phrase occurs in both places (*ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων ἀναμειθῆναι*),—a most unlikely coincidence—that the one writer copied the other. From all we hear of Philip, in historians like Socrates and Photius, Neander's estimate of another fragment of his History, pronounced long before De Boor discovered our passage, seems completely justified: 'The known untrustworthiness of this author; the discrepancy between his statements and other more authentic reports: and the suspicious conditions in which the fragment has come down to us, render his details unworthy of confidence.' Thus, in the brief sentence quoted above, he makes Papias call John *ὁ θεολόγος*, a title not ascribed to the apostle before the fourth century.

But even if this statement were found in any writer in whose veracity we could believe, a supreme difficulty confronts it. Both Irenæus and Eusebius were intimately acquainted with the work of Papias. 'But,' as Dr. Denney has admirably summed up the facts, 'both Eusebius and Irenæus believe in the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel, and in the residence of the Apostle, in his old age, in Asia Minor; and it is simply incredible that in a book with which they were both familiar, and which one of them at least regarded as of high value, there was an explicit statement that the Apostle had been killed by the Jews at a date which precluded his residence in Asia and his authorship of the Gospel—and that they took no notice of it' (*British Weekly*, May 18, 1911). Hence the writer ultimately responsible for the assertion must have mistaken the meaning of some passage in Papias, who, as we have seen, can be anything but clear in his writing, and if that

writer, as there is strong reason for believing, was Philip of Sidê, such an error would be thoroughly in keeping with his character as a historian.

I do not dwell on the use of Mk 10<sup>35a</sup> as an argument in favour of the early martyrdom of John. To interpret Jesus' words in that passage in a baldly literal sense is to misunderstand (as has so often happened) the character of His language in moments of deep emotion. His reply to the ardent aspirations of the sons of Zebedee simply expresses His conviction that as loyal followers of His they shall indeed share with Him the lot of suffering. But it is easy to see how His impassioned utterances might be made by prosaic minds of a much later age the basis of assertions concerning the martyrdom of John, especially in view of the fact that his brother James had actually died a martyr's death.

I hope that enough has been said to give us pause as regards the dogma of the worthlessness of Irenæus' testimony to John of Asia and the Fourth Gospel, and to show the risk of making the question virtually turn on the interpretation of a single obscure passage in Papias, backed up by a confused statement put in circulation by an untrustworthy writer of the fifth century. But, as was suggested at the beginning of the present discussion, the evidence of Irenæus constitutes only one factor in the solution of the complex problem created by the Fourth Gospel. It must be estimated at its rightful value, as attesting the fact that this Gospel was ascribed to John the apostle at a very early date. But various delicate and difficult inquiries must be carried out before we are in a position to determine the precise relation of John to the Gospel which bears his name.

## In the Study.

### Rehoboam.

'A foolish son is the calamity of his father.'—Pr 19<sup>13</sup>.

In the rise and fall of dynasties, the civil and foreign wars, the political and religious convulsions that occurred in Israel, we can see at work the very principles which underlie similar movements in our own history. The tribes of Israel resembled the inhabitants of Britain before the Saxon

invasion. They were separated into various clans under their own chieftains, and by their endless contentions among themselves became an easy prey to the foreign foe. In the course of time this spirit of rivalry was concentrated in two only—Judah and Ephraim—Benjamin in the south taking sides with the former, while the northern tribes combined with the latter.

The pre-eminence of Ephraim among the