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The Presbyterian John Controversy

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THE PRESBYTER JOHN CONTROVERSY

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of New Testament Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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THE PRESBYTER JOHN CONTROVERSY

Introduction

"The Catholic Church conquered the Roman Empire because it achieved an intellectual adaptation to its environment, which saved it from becoming merged in the general welter of syncretistic religion, before the generation brought up in Jewish ethical monotheism had died out. John the Elder¹ was the most striking leader in this process."² "After Peter and Paul, John the Elder is the most striking figure in the early church."³

"The pious presbyter can have been only a second rate man."⁴

"One of the most shadowy personages of ecclesiastical history is John the Elder His existence was discovered by Eusebius, and it is still a disputed matter whether the discovery was a real one."⁵

1. "Presbyter" and "Elder" are used as interchangeable terms throughout this thesis.

2. Burnett Hillmann Streeter, The Four Gospels, p. 463.

3. Ibid. p. 467

4. F. Godet, Commentary on St. John's Gospel, Vol. I, p. 275

5. George Salmon, Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament, p. 268.

"The alleged Elder John of Ephesus is a higher-critical myth."⁶

These four quotations state some of the divergent views in the battle that has been raging around the figure of an Elder John presumed to have been living in Ephesus at the close of the first century A.D. This battle is a major engagement of the more wide-spread conflict concerning the whole Johannine literature of the New Testament. This conflict centers around the Fourth Gospel. As will be noted from the bibliography, the materials for the study concerning the Presbyter John are mainly found as incidental to the discussion of the Fourth Gospel and the other Johannine literature.⁷

Did there exist a real Elder John of Ephesus, a man of great prestige and authority, who is to be distinguished from the Apostle John? Did the tradition of him become confused with that of the Apostle John? Or is Bacon right when he says that this Elder John is merely a 19th century fiction that leaped full panoplied from the teeming brain of Harnack after an earlier incarnation, fathered by Dionysius and Eusebius, in 325 A.D.⁸ What bearing will our conclusions have on the whole problem of the Johannine literature? The purpose of this paper is to investigate the problem of the Presbyter

6. B. W. Bacon, "The Mythical Elder John of Ephesus", The Hibbert Journal, XXIX (1931), p. 318.

7. I have been able to discover the title of only one book that purports to deal chiefly with the Presbyter John problem, viz., D. J. Chapman's John the Presbyter and the Fourth Gospel. This book unfortunately was not available. Another unavailable book, references to which indicate that it would have been valuable in the study of our problem is W. F. Howard's The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation. However the considerable number of authorities who were consulted expound nearly every shade of opinion and show the general trend of thought.

8. Bacon, op. cit. p. 319.

John by following the controversy that has raged around his name, by taking a look at the status of the controversy today, and by considering the evidence in regard to some of the chief matters in the controversy.

Since eminent critics have reached such opposite conclusions, we can well know that clear answers will not be easily derived and the evidence will likely not be satisfactorily conclusive. But since the Johannine books, in particular the Gospel, are highly praised and greatly loved treasures of the church, we want to investigate all phases in connection with them and come to as satisfactory a conclusion as possible.

We may also state that in attacking this problem it is not with the foregone conclusion that we must maintain at all costs that the Apostle John, and only the Apostle John, wrote the Johannine literature, and that the only alternative to defending this position is to give up our belief in the inspiration and authority of these books. None of the books of the New Testament definitely states that it was written by the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee. The Apocalypse only tells us that it was written by someone named John. The Gospel suggests that it was written by the beloved disciple. I John in no way names its author. In II and III John the author's only designation is "the elder." If the evidence leads us to the conclusion that our Presbyter John was the author of any or of all of these books, we still hold them to be inspired, historical and authoritative.

A. THE HISTORY OF THE CONTROVERSY

I. The Controversy - Ancient

The controversy regarding the Johannine literature had its beginnings already in the second century of the Christian era. The details are not clear, but Epiphanius and Philaster of Brescia, writing in the fourth century, tell us of an old party that had declared war on all the Johannine writings.¹ Epiphanius calls them the Alogi, a nickname coined by him to indicate that they were opponents of the Logos Gospel. Their objections seem not to have rested on any grounds of either internal or external testimony but rather seem to have been the result of a reaction against the Montanists, a heretical party in the Church, who used the Gospel of John and the Apocalypse as their principal authorities in support of their view that their own prophets had a new revelation from the Paraclete which superseded that of the official Church.² It was probably about 170 A.D. that these zealous opponents of the Montanists declared all the Johannine Scriptures to be a falsification of the heretic Cerinth.³ Caius of Rome (210 A.D.) in controversy with the Montanist Proclus claimed that the Apocalypse was a work of Cerinth.⁴ The defenses of the Gospel written by Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and that found in the Muratorian Fragment seem to imply that attacks had been made upon it. These early opponents of the Joh-

1. Theodor Zahn, Geschichte des Neutestamentlichen Kanons, Vol. I, p. 223.

2. Streeter, op. cit. p. 441.

3. Zahn, op. cit. p. 255.

4. Ibid. p. 221.

annine writings, the Alogi, soon disappeared, but they left a heritage of distaste for the Apocalypse which continued and found expression in the following decades.⁵

It is to be noted that at this time, all the Johannine writings in the New Testament were assigned by all the Fathers of the Church to the same author without question or explanation. Those who rejected the books did not have the expedient of ascribing them to a second John. If the Alogi or Caius had known anything of the existence of another John they would not have needed to resort to the desperate expedient of making Cerinthus the author of any of the Johannine writings. They regarded the John of whom they knew as the Apostle. They denied only that the writings were his work. It seems certain then that at that time, the last half of the second century, only one important John who belonged to the apostolic age was known. This is one of the most significant facts in our consideration in respect to the Presbyter John.

The first step toward the investiture of a presbyter John was taken by Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria (ob. 265 A.D.). He was strongly opposed to millennialism, and because the millennialists were leaning on the Apocalypse for support of their views, he was prejudiced against the Apocalypse. Basing his views on critical grounds, viz. the difference of style of the Apocalypse from that of the Gospel and the Epistles of John, he reached the conclusion that they were by different authors. So his judgment was that the Apocalypse was written by another John. In confirmation of his surmise that there was

5. Ibid. p. 262.

another John, he states that he had heard of two monuments at Ephesus, each bearing the name of John.

It was Eusebius, however, who was the first to distinguish a presbyter John from the Apostle. He, too, in his opposition to the millennialists, tried to divest the Apocalypse of apostolic authority. He took over from Dionysius the idea of two separate Johns and found its corroboration in the works of Papias. B. W. Bacon, in quoting the following passage from Eusebius's observations of Papias, calls it the birthplace of the Elder John:

It is worth while observing here that the name John is twice enumerated by him. The first one he mentions in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the apostles, clearly meaning the Evangelist; but the other John he mentions after an interval, and places him among others outside of the number of the apostles, putting Aristion before him, and he distinctly calls him an elder. This shows that the statement of those (sc. Dionysius) is true who say that there were two tombs in Ephesus, each of which even to the present day, is called John's. It is important to notice this. For it is probable that it was the second, if one is not willing to admit that it was the first that saw the Revelation which is ascribed by name to John. And Papias, of whom we are now speaking, confesses that he had received the words of the apostles from those that followed them, but says that he was himself a hearer of Aristion and the Elder John. At least he mentions them frequently by name, and records their traditions in his writings.⁶

Thus Eusebius augments the tempting theory of Dionysius that it was a John other than the Apostle who wrote the Apocalypse. He finds a possible candidate in an Elder John mentioned by Papias.

Again Jerome mentions the Presbyter John. He states that the II

6. Bacon, op. cit. p. 321.

and III Epistles of John are attributed by most to the Presbyter John and this because of their superscription, "the elder."⁷

7. Bernhard Weiss, A Manual of Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. II, p. 197.

II. The Controversy - Modern

Through the centuries after Jerome there seems to have been no question as to a Johannine problem. The tendency to ascribe the II and III Epistles to an Elder other than the Apostle John may have continued. In his list of those who ascribed these two Epistles to the Elder, Moffat mentions Erasmus.¹ As the Epistles seemed rather insignificant, it seems no one made a stir about the matter. There continued to be those who looked askance at the Apocalypse, and were inclined to deny its authenticity, e.g. Luther, but that was for no historical reason, but on the basis of the contents of this book. The authenticity of the Gospel was not seriously questioned.

At the end of the 17th century English deists were attacking the genuineness of the Fourth Gospel. One of the Gospel's defenders at that time was Lampe (1724-1726). The opposition to the Gospel began to be more definitely shaped in Evanson's The Dissonances of the Four Generally received Evangelists (1792). Evanson based his opposition on the differences between the Gospel and the Apocalypse. He was immediately answered by David Simpson and the Unitarian J. Priestly. In Germany the question as to the authority of the Gospel was raised by Eckermann (1796). He thought the Gospel should be traced back merely to Johannine notes. Eckermann was opposed by Storr and Sueskind.²

The first really important attack on the Gospel was Bret-

1. James Moffat, An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, p. 480.

2. Weiss, op. cit. p. 388.

schneider's epoch-making work Probabilia(1820), which lifted the question to a higher stage of scientific examination. Already here Bretschneider discusses almost every point of modern criticism. He attributes the Gospel to a presbyter of Gentile origin who lived during the first half of the second century. Bretschneider's work called forth such a deluge of counter-writings of all opinions, e.g. by Olshausen, Tholuck, Schleiermacher, Luecke, and Credner, that he recanted (1826) declaring that his object of inducing a better confirmation of the Gospel's Johannine origin had been attained.³

In 1826 Reuterdahl took up an argument that had already been propounded by Vogel(1801) and assailed as fiction the tradition of the sojourn of the Apostle John in Asia Minor. In 1840 Luetzelberger attacked this tradition in a more thoroughgoing manner.⁴

In 1834 when De Wette claimed it a certainty of New Testament criticism that the author of the Gospel and the Epistles of John could not be the author of the Apocalypse, Schleiermacher's preference for the Gospel prevailed and the Eusebian idea of ascribing the Apocalypse to Papias's Presbyter John started to emerge.⁵

Dr. Strauss caused considerable stir when in his Leben Jesu (1835) he renewed the denial of the Gospel. A host of defenders of the Gospel arose so that Strauss was shaken in his opinion especially by Neander(1837).⁶

3. Ibid. p. 388f.
 4. Godet, op. cit. p. 11.
 5. J. R. Riggenbach, Die Zeugnisse fuer das Evangelium Johannes, p. 30.
 6. Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. I, p. 718.

The full fury of the attack on the Gospel was unleashed by the Tuebingen School led by Christian Baur with the publication in 1844 of "one of the most ingenious and brilliant compositions that theological science has ever produced," viz., "Ueber die Composition und der Charakter des Joh. Evangeliums," an essay in the Theologische Jahrbuecher of Zeller. He was followed in the main, with different detail, by a number of able critics in Germany and other countries who continued the theory that Revelation and the Gospel could not stem from the same author. Baur emphasized the earlier evidence of Johannine authorship for Revelation. Also from its contents he judged that it must be the Gospel that is unauthentic. He represented the Gospel as a purely ideal work, growing out of controversies. It was not intended to be a history but was propounded as a system of theology. Baur concluded that it was written c.170 A.D. by some great "unknown."⁷ This theory places the Apostle in Asia Minor as author of Revelation and leaves no place for a Presbyter John.

A deluge of writings in defense of the Gospel came forth, probably the most able and learned reply being that of Bleek(1846).⁸

In 1862 Michel Nicolas advanced the hypothesis which is in its essentials the popular one today, viz. that it was a Christian of Ephesus who, having derived his material from the Apostle John, wrote the Fourth Gospel. This is the personage who in the two small Epistles designates himself as the presbyter or elder and whom history knows under the name of Presbyter John.⁹

7. Ibid. p. 718 f.

8. Godet, op. cit. p. 15.

9. Ibid. p. 16.

In 1864 two more important works, by Weizaecker and Scholten, appeared attacking the authenticity of the Gospel. But the third really great assault against the Gospel was that by Dr. Keim. In 1867 appeared his Geschichte Jesu von Nazora in the introduction of which he energetically opposed the authenticity of the Gospel. He denied the whole tradition of the Apostle's sojourn in Asia Minor as a mistake of Irenaeus who applied to John the Apostle what Polycarp had related of another person of the same name. He claimed that the Gospel was written by a Christian of Jewish origin, belonging to the "diaspora" of Asia Minor.¹⁰

Another host of defenders of the Gospel arose. Among those who after careful study of the famous Papias passage concluded in the negative as regards the existence of the Presbyter John as distinct from the Apostle are Zahn(1866), Milligan(1867), Riggenbach(1868), and Leimbach(1875). The tradition of John's sojourn in Asia Minor was vigorously defended by Wabnitz (1868) and Steitz(1869). Wittichen(1869) gives up the sojourn of the Apostle John in Asia Minor, but that in order better to support the authenticity of the Gospel, maintaining that it was composed by the Apostle in Syria. As to the John in Asia Minor, he was the Presbyter, the author of the Apocalypse.¹¹

Scholten in Der Apostel Johannis in Klein Asien(1872) accounts for the tradition of the Apostle's sojourn in Asia Minor through a confusion of the Apostle with the author of the Apocalypse who was

10. Schaff, op. cit. p. 719.

11. Godet, op. cit. p. 28.

not the Apostle but had borrowed his name.¹²

The hypothesis that the Gospel is to be ascribed to a Presbyter John of Ephesus was developed in full detail by the novelist and dramatic poet Fr. V. Uechtritz(1876) and by the philosopher H. Delf (1889). Both agree that the nameless disciple in the Gospel is the author of the Gospel; yet he is not the Apostle John, but the Presbyter.¹³

During these years some erstwhile defenders of the authenticity of the Gospel changed their views. Among these were Hase(1876), Renan(1879), Reuss(1879), and Sabatier(1879). Hase mentions the Presbyter John as a possible author. Renan suggests that two Ephesian disciples of the Apostle, John the Presbyter and Aristion, wrote the Gospel 20 or 30 years after the apostle's death.¹⁴

Among those on the conservative side at this time were Abbot, The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel(1880), Westcott, St. John's Gospel(1880), Weiss, Das Johannes Evangelium(1892), and Lightfoot, Biblical Essays(1893). Zahn, the most learned of all the workers in the field of early Christian literature, came out on the conservative side with Introduction to the New Testament(1899), and Forschungen z. Geschichte d. Neutest. Kanons(1900).¹⁵

During the years 1870 to 1900 the dominant tendency in the criticism of the Johannine literature seemed to gravitate toward a middle position. The critics seemed increasingly to admit that the

12. Ibid. p. 18.

13. Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, p. 230.

14. Godet, op. cit. p. 20.

15. William Sanday, The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel, p. 6.

Gospel might be the work of a near disciple of the apostle. Then around the turn of the century came out an increased flood of literature on both sides of the question. Attacking the authenticity of the Gospel, presenting it as more or less downright fiction, were Introduction to the New Testament by Juelicher, a massive article on "John, Son of Zebedee," in the Encyclopedia Biblica by Schmiedel, a monograph on the Fourth Gospel by Renan, and a commentary on the Gospel by Abbe Loisy. To answer these appeared The Gospels as Historical Documents by Stanton, The Character and Authorship of the Fourth Gospel by Drummond, and John the Presbyter and the Fourth Gospel by Chapmann.¹⁶

One would think that the material on the Johannine problem would be long exhausted, but the literature continues to pour forth. Mostly it is a rehash of old arguments but now and then a new discovery is made. For a consideration of the trend in more recent years we shall in the next chapter summarize separately the opinions of some of the twentieth century critics in regard to the controversy about the Presbyter John and the Johannine literature.

16. Ibid. pp. iff.

III. The Controversy - Its Present Status

A.

Some hold that the Apostle John wrote all the Johannine literature and deny the existence of the Presbyter John or relegate him to a minor position.

The number of those who make an outright denial of the existence of the Presbyter John is surprisingly small. However there is a large number of those who write on the Johannine literature who make no reference to the Presbyter and thereby tacitly or by inference do deny his existence. Nold¹ and Simpson in their articles do not mention the Presbyter, but are militant defenders of the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel, and it is safe to conclude that they reject the Presbyter John hypothesis.

Among those who explicitly deny that the Elder John ever existed is T. Zahn. His opinion carries much weight. Not only does his learning probably surpass that of all others in this field, but he is one of the few whose approach seems to be without bias and preconceived opinions. While not stating his opinions dogmatically he does make it clear that he is firmly convinced from the evidence that the traditional view is the true one. Only one John was known by the early Church, and he was the beloved disciple, and apostle and evangelist.² Zahn rejects the theory of the early martyrdom of

1. Cf. the Bibliography.

2. Zahn, Geschichte d. Neutest. Kanons, p. 208.

John, believing that the tradition derived from Papias refers to John the Baptist.³ He says that the Presbyter John owes his existence only to the critical needs and desires of Eusebius.⁴ Lenski, in his commentary on John's Gospel, makes an outright denial of the existence of the Presbyter John. A.T. Robertson in his Epochs of the Life of the Apostle John (1935) holds that the Presbyter John is a figment of critical desires and that all five Johannine writings come from the Apostle John.

Among those who ascribe all the Johannine literature to John the Apostle, and who do not venture a definite decision as to the existence of the Presbyter John, are Sanday, Cartledge, and Salmon. Sanday doubts the existence of John the Presbyter and shows how the attacks on the authenticity of the Johannine writings rest on fallacies. He defends the traditional view. Cartledge says that the case for an Elder John distinct from the Apostle does not rest on a very firm foundation. He takes the position that we have good grounds for believing that the Apostle John was the author of all the Johannine literature.⁵ According to Salmon we cannot definitely say whether Papias wrote of one or of two Johns. If he refers to a distinct John the Elder, this must have been a notable person. However it was John the Apostle who wrote the Gospel.⁶

3. Zahn, "John the Apostle," Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia, Vol. VI., p. 206.
 4. Zahn, Intro. to the N. T., Vol. II. p. 250.
 5. Samuel A. Cartledge, A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 196 ff.
 6. Salmon, op. cit. p. 269 f.
 In a posthumous volume, The Human Element in the Gospels,

Among the conservatives are those who subscribe to the existence of the Presbyter John but do not ascribe any importance to him. These include Weiss, Clemen, and Godet. Weiss says that the Presbyter John is to be distinguished from the Apostle, but that the Apostle did live in Ephesus and wrote the Johannine literature.⁷ Clemen finds no proof that John was martyred early nor that he did not reside at Ephesus. He says that Papias does distinguish the Apostle John from the Presbyter but does not say that the Presbyter is in Asia; at least he cannot have played an important role there. There is no proof that the Gospel and the Epistles are not from John the Apostle.⁸ Godet says that Papias expressly distinguishes the Apostle and the Elder John. The Elder is probably one of the two "other disciples" of John 21,2. He is not known otherwise and is a figure of no importance. The traditions of the Apostle's long life in Ephesus are true. He wrote the Gospel and the Epistles there.⁹

B.

Many take a mediating position as to the historical truth and authority of the Gospel, and are inclined to ascribe a decisive role in its writing to the Presbyter John.

(1907), Salmon suggested that it was John's "hermeneutes" or assistant who wrote the Gospel. Also Sanday, in his old age, weakened in his previous conviction. (Robertson - Epochs in the Life of the Apostle John, pp. 155 f.)

7. Weiss, op. cit., pp.47 ff.

8. Carl Clemen, "The Sojourn of the Apostle John at Ephesus," The American Journal of Theology, IX (1905), pp. 643 f., 673 f.

9. Godet, op. cit. p. 24.

In the following paragraphs are summarized the views of these critics as they are found in their writings. Most of these views are culled from the books listed in the bibliography. The books of others were not available but their views were derived from sources as noted in the footnotes.

Baur, W.: The Apostle John was never in Asia ^Minor. The Gospel was written by the Presbyter John.¹⁰

Bernard: Eusebius was right in distinguishing the Apostle John from the Presbyter John. The claim that the Apostle was martyred is not justified. The title "elder" of the Epistles, their relation to the Gospel, plus the tradition that the Gospel was not in the Apostle's own hand, but was dictated to a disciple, leads to the conclusion that John the Presbyter was the writer and editor of the Fourth Gospel, although he derived his narrative material from John the son of Zebedee.¹¹

Bousset (Offenbarung - 1906): The author of the Apocalypse was a John of Asia ^Minor, not the Apostle, probably the Elder John of Papias, who is the Elder of the 2nd and 3rd Epistles of John, the unnamed disciple of John XXI, and the teacher of Polycarp.¹²

Burney (The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel -1922): The Fourth

10. Walter Bauer, Lietzmann's Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, Vol. 2, p. 4.

11. J. J. Bernard, "Gospel According to St. John," Vol. 1, International Critical Commentary, p. XLIV.

12. R. H. Charles "The Revelation of St. John," International Critical Commentary, Vol. 1, p. XLI."

Gospel was probably written in Aramaic at Antioch about 75 or 80 A.D. by the "disciple whom Jesus loved," who is not the son of Zebedee, but unnamed in the Gospels. From Antioch he journeyed to Ephesus where he appears as John the Presbyter, where in his last years he may have produced the Epistles of John and the Apocalypse.¹³

Carpenter: For those who accept the Gospel and the three Epistles of John as the work of one writer, the way is open for their ascription to the Ephesian Elder who may have been Bishop of the Church in Ephesus as Polycarp was in Smyrna. This identification of the Evangelist and the Elder leaves us without any information about the Elder's personality unless we see through or in him "the Beloved Disciple."¹⁴

The Apocalypse was probably edited about 95 A.D. by a prophet named John, whom Justin Martyr later identified with the Apostle. The Gospel was probably produced about 100 A.D. in a fellowship possessing a store of materials, partly oral, partly written, by an Elder (probably of Ephesus) who may have been named John. If the Elder presided over the composition of the Gospel, he may have introduced the Apostle under the figure of the Beloved Disciple. If the Elder is the Elder John of Papias, Papias must have been mistaken in supposing that he had ever been a

13. Charles C. Torrey, "The Aramaic Origin of the Gospel of John," The Harvard Theological Review, XVI (1923), p. 332.
 14. J. Estlin Carpenter, The Johannine Writings, p. 216.

disciple of Jesus.¹⁵

Charles: John the Apostle was never in Asia Minor, but he died a martyr's death between 64 and 70 A.D.

The theory of Dionysius that the Gospel and the Apocalypse must have had different authors has passed out of the region of hypothesis and may now be safely regarded as an established conclusion. The John who wrote the Apocalypse claims to be a prophet, not an apostle. He was a Palestinian who migrated to Asia Minor when probably advanced in years. The elder of II and III John is likely the Elder of whom Papias speaks. The Johannine Epistles are linguistically so closely connected with the Gospel that they must have the same authorship. The internal evidence indicates a connection of the Apocalypse with the Fourth Gospel. The Evangelist was apparently once a disciple of the Seer, or they were members of the same circle.¹⁶

Dibelius: Papias knows of two Johns. In II and III John we have the "elder." Since he is also called "disciple of the Lord," Irenaeus probably made the wrong deduction that the Apostle is referred to. Polycrates of Ephesus says that the John who was there had lain on the breast of the Lord and was a priest who wore the frontlet. Since the Beloved Disciple appears only in the Passion Story, we have the picture: A Jerusalemite of a priestly family who became an adherent of Jesus in His last days

15. Ibid. p. 250.

16. Charles, op. cit. pp. XXXII, XXXIV, and XLIII.

and an eye-witness of part of the Passion, became in extreme old age in Ephesus the head of a district. He is called a disciple of the Lord on account of his personal relationship with Jesus, and the "elder" because his life extended over a long period of time, but he is not called Apostle. This John the Elder was probably the author of the Apocalypse, but he was not the author of the Gospel, for his apocalyptic tendencies agree poorly with the spirit of the Gospel. He was probably the founder and leader of a circle in which the Johannine writings of the New Testament were at home.¹⁷

Filson: The Gospel was probably written at Ephesus at the end of the first century. The testimony of a Jerusalem disciple, probably not the Apostle John, was set down by one of that disciple's admirers named John. This admirer and actual writer of the Gospel was called the Elder (II and III John). Tradition has probably confused John the Elder with John the Apostle.¹⁸

Garvie, A.E. (The Beloved Disciple - 1922): The Gospel of John is a product of a Jerusalem disciple of Christ who was but a youth at the time of Christ's ministry, and who was connected with the priestly clan. He is "the beloved disciple." His witness and meditations were recorded by the Elder John of Ephesus, who added comments as he wrote the Gospel.¹⁹

17. Martin Dibelius, A Fresh Approach to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature, p. 107 f.

18. Floyd Filson, Origins of the Gospels, p. 205 ff.

19. Ibid. p. 204.

Harnack: It was probably John the Presbyter who wrote the Gospel for a small circle of intimate students. He was guided by information which he got from the Apostle. Our Gospel may be considered as a Gospel of John the Presbyter according to John the son of Zebedee. The same Presbyter also produced the Epistles and the Apocalypse. The Apostle John may have visited Ephesus, but the John who lived there long was the Presbyter. It was probably intentionally that the Johannine writings were later ascribed to John the Apostle.²⁰

Lohmeyer ("Exposition of Revelations" in Lietzmann's Handbuch zum Neuen Testament): The Seer of the Apocalypse is John the Presbyter who may have written the Gospel in Aramaic in Syria, and some time afterwards the Apocalypse in Greek.²¹

Streeter: Evidently the Apostle John was not living in Ephesus at c. 96 A.D.: otherwise the hesitation in some quarters toward acceptance of the Ephesian Gospel is hard to explain. The tradition that he was there arises from the fact that John the Seer, author of the Apocalypse, was already by Justin Martyr identified with the Apostle. John the Elder is described by Papias as a "disciple of the Lord," by Polycarp as one "who had seen the Lord." As a youth he may have known Him in Jerusalem. John the Elder was probably the last Jew to be a dominating figure in the Great Gentile Church. His age, his personal gifts, his having

20. Adolf Harnack, Die Chronologie der Altchristlichen Literature bis Eusebius, Vol. I, pp. 679 ff.

21. W. F. Howard, Christianity according to St. John, p.13.

seen the Lord, gave him an authority all but apostolic. By "the elder" in II and III John he affixes his signature to the closely related I John and the Gospel. He was a disciple of the Apostle John of whom "the beloved disciple" is an idealized portrait. His Gospel is the climax of the development of theology in the New Testament. The writings, character, and career of this Elder John were in later tradition ascribed to the Apostle John.²²

Von Dobschuetz: The personage in Ephesus is not the Zebedee's son but the Presbyter. He is from Jerusalem, perhaps having known the Lord. He abhors all heathen idolatry and all contact with heresy. By his sense of exclusiveness and fear of uncleanness he kept the Church in Asia free from heathen libertinism. The Church is indebted to this Presbyter John for the establishment of the real historical personality of Christ, and of Christianity as a practical religion.²³

Wright, C. J. (The Mission and Message of Jesus - 1937): The beloved disciple is John the Apostle. A follower of the Apostle, probably John the Elder, actually wrote the Gospel. He was of a priestly family and very probably had himself known Jesus.²⁴

C.

Some tend to deny the historicity of the Gospel, but may con-

22. Streeter, op. cit. pp. 467 ff.

23. Ernest Von Dobschuetz, Probleme des Apostolischen Zeitalters, pp.91 ff.

24. Filson, op. cit. p. 205.

nect it with the Presbyter.

Moffat: John the Apostle early suffered a martyr's death. To account for the second century tradition of John's long life in Asia, we must assume a definite historical figure who lived to a great age in Asia Minor and became an authority there. This John the Presbyter of Ephesus, who must have shared the prophetic and even chiliastic aptitudes of the Asiatic circle to which he belonged, is probably the author of the Apocalypse and of II and III John. The Apocalypse and the Gospel are to be attributed to the same school or circle in Asia Minor, but to different authors. The author and the editor of the Gospel are unknown.²⁵

Scott: A better case can be made out that the Elder John wrote the Apocalypse than that he wrote the Gospel and the Epistles. The Gospel has undergone a process of editing, but its genius stamps it as originally the work of one man. We cannot even form a guess as to his identity.²⁶

Heitmüller: The Apostle John early suffered martyrdom. In Ephesus a circle of people formed about the Presbyter John who was their Hero. They made him an authority and legitimized their ideas by ascribing them to him. This circle promoted the Apocalypse, the Gospel, and the Epistles of John, however these may have come into existence.²⁷

25. Moffat, op. cit., pp, 480, 513, 550, 616.

26. Ernest Findlay Scott, The Literature of the New Testament, pp. 244 f.

Hirsch, Emanuel (Studien zum Vierten Evangelium - 1936):²⁸ There is no historic foundation for the sojourn of the Apostle John at Ephesus. He suffered martyrdom in Jerusalem. Tradition has confused him with another John at Ephesus called "the presbyter" by Papias. This title indicates that he was a member (presbyter) of the mother church at Jerusalem. With others he came to Ephesus by way of Antioch. It was due to him that the work of Paul did not perish but was transformed in the interest of sound and permanent doctrine and practice so that the church of Asia could become the staunchest defender of the orthodox faith.

The Apocalypse is composed of two parts. The Presbyter John originated the older part in Jerusalem and revised it at Ephesus. The later part he wrote at Ephesus. The two were unified and edited after his death.

The original Gospel is the work of an unknown disciple in Antioch Syria. Before 140 A.D. it fell into the hands of a theologian in Asia Minor who was convinced that it was written by the disciple whom Jesus loved, and in his imagination this disciple became fused with the Presbyter John. The Epistles were written by this same unknown .

Bacon: The Elder John of Ephesus is an improvisation of defenders

27. W. Heitmüller, "Zur Johannes-Tradition," Zeitschrift fuer die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XV (1914), p. 203.

28. H. Offermann, "The Fourth Gospel in Recent Research," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, IX (1936), pp. 355-63 is a review of Hirsch's book. Offermann himself considers the Presbyter John a mythical figure.

of the Fourth Gospel who have been forced to retire from the traditional theory of its apostolic authorship. The Elder John mentioned by Papias never was in Ephesus but is the John of Jerusalem who stands seventh in order of the Jerusalem "elders" midway between James the Lord's brother (ob. 62 A.D.) and Judas who closes the list in 135 A.D.²⁹

The Apostle John suffered martyrdom before the writing of the Apocalypse. The youthful disciple with priestly connections, resident in Jerusalem and "adoptive" son of Mary was John Mark who was early confused with the Apostle.³⁰

Ephesus had long been equipped with elders. Probably the two Epistles superscribed "the elder" were written by one of them. There is strong evidence that the same one, nameless, gathered traditions from Hellenists dispersed from Jerusalem, and the principal mass of the Fourth Gospel is due to his hand.³¹

These some thirty viewpoints included above seem to cover the field except for the ultra-radical school of thought which arbitrarily denies any semblance of authenticity and historicity to the Scriptures. It is evident that the general tendency is to reject the Apostolic authorship of part or all of the Johannine literature and to assign it to a greater or lesser extent to the Presbyter John of Ephesus. There is however no general agreement as to which books he may be responsible for or to what extent.

29. Bacon, op. cit., p.323.

30. Bacon, "John and the Pseudo-Johns," Zeitschrift fuer die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XXXI (1932), pp. 140 f.

31. Bacon, "The Mythical Elder John," p.325.

In the second part of this paper we propose to consider in a rather condensed manner some of the materials which are behind all this variation of opinion.

The starting point for the investigation is a collection of fragments preserved by Aristotle, (Eth. Nic. 1094a, 1095a) and known as the fragments in Aristotle. The fragments have been mostly lost but the fragments in Aristotle, from the disposition of the fragments of the text, has been reconstructed by us by Aristotle, E. B. 1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments.

But I shall not hesitate also to get down for you with a few illustrations. Aristotle's fragments I have all my time looked carefully from the others and carefully examined, reconstructing their truth. For I did not, like the other writers, take pleasure in those that speak well but in those that speak the truth, not in those that believe strange circumstances, but in those that deliver the circumstances, given by the laws to truth and springing from the truth itself. If I had not examined with regard to the laws - Aristotle of the fragments, I could not have given you the details of the fragments, (Eth. Nic. 1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments) which belong to Aristotle's fragments, or Aristotle, or Aristotle, or Aristotle, or Aristotle, or Aristotle, or any other of the fragments of the laws, and what Aristotle's fragments and the fragments of the laws (Eth. Nic. 1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments) and the fragments of the laws (Eth. Nic. 1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments). For I did not expect to give you these fragments, as from that time there is living and speaking truth.

These other points of Aristotle's fragments have been called into existence, but the other fragments of Aristotle's fragments have been called into existence as to the laws. Aristotle states that Aristotle's fragments (Eth. Nic. 1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments) and the fragments of the laws (Eth. Nic. 1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments) and the fragments of the laws (Eth. Nic. 1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments) and the fragments of the laws (Eth. Nic. 1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments).

1094a, 1095a, Aristotle's fragments.

B. THE MATERIALS OF THE CONTROVERSY

IV. The Papias Fragment

The starting point for the Presbyter John controversy is a quotation from Papias reproduced by Eusebius. Papias (70 - 146 A.D.) was bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia. His writings have been mostly lost but the fragment in question, from his exposition of the Oracles of the Lord, has been transmitted to us by Eusebius (Eus. H. D. III. 39). Papias writes thus:

But I shall not hesitate also to put down for you along with my interpretations whatsoever things I have at any time learned carefully from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteeing their truth. For I did not, like the multitudes, take pleasure in those that speak much but in those that speak the truth, not in those that relate strange commandments, but in those that deliver the commandments, given by the Lord to faith and springing from the truth itself. If I met anywhere with anyone who had been a follower of the elders, I used to inquire what were the sayings of the elders, (ΤΟΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΩΝ ΔΙΔΑΧΜΩΝ ΛΟΓΟΥΣ); what Andrew or Peter said (Ἐἴρηκε), or Philip, or Thomas, or James, or John, or Matthew, or any other of the disciples of the Lord; and what things Aristion and the presbyter John (ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης) and the disciples of the Lord say (λέγουσιν). For I did not expect to gain so much from books, as from what came from a living and abiding voice.

Also other points of this fragment have been called into dispute, but the chief question at issue is whether Papias here refers to one John or to two Johns. Godet states that already Leimbach (1875) quotes as many as 45 writers who had treated the subject of the Papias fragment in his time.¹

1. Godet, op. cit. p. 51.

At first reading, since Papias names John twice, it does seem as if he were speaking of two Johns. We notice that with the first group of names Papias uses the past tense "said," whereas with the second group of two names he uses the present "say." That would seem to indicate that the latter two were living and that the former ones had died at the time Papias made his inquiries.

In the first group Papias names seven apostles including John and he calls them "presbyters" and "disciples of the Lord." In the second instance he uses the very same two terms in referring to John. That would seem to indicate that he wants to make clear that he is designating the same John both times.

Some argue from this passage that Papias's informants were twice-removed from the apostles; that the "elders" in the first instance does not refer to the apostles, but to those who succeeded the apostles and transmitted what the apostles had said. It was with the followers of these elders that Papias came into contact. Such an argument seems to be distorting the words as they stand.

Most writing is done freely without precise aforethought as to what critical examiners who study the individual words may possibly deduce from the words used. The true thought of the writer is more likely to be the one that appears on the surface than one that can be deduced from a critical analysis of the words used. Since my first impression from reading through the passage once was that Papias is here speaking of two different Johns, my conclusion from this passage alone would be that Papias knew, or knew of, a Presbyter John distinct from the Apostle.

Papias does not say that he personally heard the second John whom he seems to indicate was then living (λέγουσιν). Even if we conclude that the natural deduction from this passage is that there were two different Johns in whose sayings Papias was interested, it still does not necessarily follow that the second one was present there in Asia Minor. He could have been an elder in Jerusalem. Or even if we infer that Papias names a second John there in Asia Minor it may have been a person of no further importance than as a transmitter of traditions.

Since this passage is subject to variant interpretations² we cannot base a definite proposition on this passage alone but must look for other indicative evidence as to whether there lived a Presbyter John of importance in Ephesus at the close of the first century of the Christian era.

2. Zahn and others absolutely deny that Papias can be referring to two different Johns. Charles and others say that Papias so carefully distinguishes John the Apostle from John the Elder.

V. The Usage of the Term "Presbyter"

The question of this chapter hearks back to the Papias fragment discussed in the previous chapter. The second time a John is named he is called "the presbyter." The question is whether this term could be used in referring to an apostle. If not, the question is settled - Papias does refer to a John who is not the Apostle.

It would seem that this Papias fragment in itself contains the proof that the term "presbyter" is used in referring to apostles. When Papias writes, "I used to inquire what were the sayings of the elders, what Andrew or Peter said" is he not calling Andrew, Peter, and the other Apostles "elders!" It is possible that Papias did not write clearly and meant to differentiate, and that is the view we would take if we knew that apostles were never referred to as "presbyters." Such is the claim of Bernard: "Apostles were the original leaders, the 'presbyters' were those who carried on their work. There is no example in the literature of the second century of the equation $\kappa\rho\epsilon\sigma\beta\acute{\upsilon}\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma = \acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\omicron}\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\omicron\varsigma$."¹

In the New Testament the apostles and the elders are usually clearly differentiated, e.g. Acts 15:6,22,23. However Peter does call himself $\acute{\omicron}\sigma\upsilon\kappa\kappa\rho\epsilon\sigma\beta\acute{\upsilon}\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$ (1 Pet. 5:1). Those who deny this title for an apostle say that this case does not count because Peter had in the same letter previously designated himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ"(1 Pet. 1:1), and hence there was no risk of confusion.

1. Bernard, op. cit. p. XLVI.

But this passage clearly shows that to call an apostle a "presbyter" would be no unheard of thing.

The point of importance for us is how the term "presbyter" was used at the beginning of the second century, and more particularly, how it was used by Papias. Could Papias have used the term "presbyter" in referring to apostles. It is significant that Papias does not use the term "apostle" in any extant fragment.² Following are some statements of men who have presumably studied critically such remnants of Papias as exist, and who should have some feeling of his usage of the term "presbyter."

Salmon: Papias used the phrase "the elders" as we might use the phrase "the Fathers" in speaking of the venerable heads of the church in a former generation.³

Weiss: Papias evidently understood by *πρεσβύτεροι* men of the first Christian generation, who in his day were gradually dying out, with whom he reckons the apostles and those immediate disciples of the Lord who were still alive at his time.⁴

Heitmüller: From Papias we learn that before his time there was a circle or a sort of school in Asia Minor having the honorary title of "presbyter," who were considered pupils of the Lord's disciples.⁵

Brake: The evidence of Papias and Irenaeus points to a prevalent Christian usage of the word *πρεσβύτεροι*, especially in Asia, to denote those who had accompanied with apostles.⁶

Zahn: The term *πρεσβύτεροι* which of itself may de-

2. A. T. Robertson, Epochs in the Life of the Apostle John, p. 23.

3. Salmon, op. cit., p. 269.

4. Weiss, op. cit., p. 50.

5. Heitmüller, op. cit., p. 201.

6. Brake, Johannis Ep., p. 166 f., quoted by Charles, op. cit., p. XLIII.

note men of the distant past, came to signify the teachers of the next preceding generation only when the speaker characterizes those to whom he applies it as his own personal instructors. The succeeding generation calls them the old men or the fathers, when their ranks begin to be thinned, and also after they have altogether given place to the younger."

Scott: "The elder" seems to have been the common title about the beginning of the second century, of all teachers who had some direct relation to the primitive church.⁸

On this point, as on so many others, the judgment of most of the critics seems to be more or less colored by their preconceived notions of what the term ought to mean so as to agree with their theories. But it is evident that the term *πρεσβύτερος*, whatever may have been the purist use of it, was in practice used loosely enough or widely enough that one cannot say that it could not have been applied to apostles. While it is not the term we would ordinarily expect to be applied to an apostle, it easily could be so used. There is then in the term itself no proof for the existence of a distinct "presbyter" John apart from the Apostle.

7. Zahn, Intro. to N. T., Vol. II, p.21.

8. Scott, op. cit., p. 244.

VI. The Alleged Early Martyrdom of the Apostle John

With few exceptions (e.g. Bacon) the critics generally agree that at the end of the first century of the Christian era there lived in Ephesus a notable churchman named John, to whom the title of "elder" was applied. Few of them would place two famous Johns there. So the question of the existence of a notable Presbyter John revolves about the question whether the Apostle John lived to old age in Asia Minor. Before considering the direct evidences on that question, there is another point to consider - Did the Apostle John suffer martyrdom in Jerusalem at a comparatively early age? Such is the contention of an increasing number of critics. If John, the son of Zebedee, was martyred at an early age, we must naturally eliminate the contention that he lived in Ephesus in old age. And if he did not live in Ephesus in old age, then there is an increased likelihood that the Presbyter John was the important man of tradition there.

According to the tradition that reaches us from the early church fathers, the Apostle John lived to extreme old age and was buried at Ephesus. What arguments are there for veering from this view?

Strangely enough some of those who hold the view that John suffered an early martyrdom, mostly the negative "higher" critics, in this point suddenly become advocates of the literary authenticity of the Scriptures. Heitmüller, among others, quotes Mk. 10: 35-45 as evidence that John died a martyr even as James.¹ According to

him, when the Gospel of Mark was written about 70 A.D. the Christian Church knew that the two brothers had drunk the cup of Jesus, and had been baptized with his baptism, i.e. they had suffered martyrdom. That is why this prophecy was included in the Gospel. Therefore we must conclude that John, too, had been killed in Palestine, even if, which is not likely, he was killed later. However the cup which Jesus says the two shall drink and the baptism with which they shall be baptized do not, as Heitmueller and the others imply, necessarily refer to martyrdom. This is not a prophecy after the event. The story here, as well as the entire context, gives the impression that this is an authentic conversation in which Jesus prophesies that the brothers will suffer for His sake.

Bacon finds yet another reference in Scripture to the martyrdom of John, viz. Rev. 11:1-8. According to him this prophecy of the two witnesses to be slain in the streets of the great city, is a prophecy after the event, and had found its fulfillment in the martyrdom of James, the Lord's brother, and John in Jerusalem in 62 A.D.² But this exegesis is so fanciful and lacking of any vestige of proof that few others in their search for indications of a martyrdom of John have had the temerity to broach it.

There is supposed to be a Papias tradition as to the martyrdom of John. A Georgius Hamartolos in his Chronicles (9th century) says: "Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis, who was witness of the deed, relates

1. Heitmueller, op. cit., p. 189.

2. Bacon, "The Elder John in Jerusalem," Zeitschrift fuer die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XXVI (1927), p. 189.

in the second book of the Lord's discourses that he(John) was killed by the Jews, thus fulfilling Christ's words, 'Ye shall drink of the cup which I must drink.'"³ The De Boor fragment, a seventh or eighth century Epitome of the History of Philip of Side, confirms this. In it is the statement that "Papias in the second book says that John the Divine and James his brother were killed by the Jews."⁴ Evidently there is some statement in Papias to which these traditions refer. But even without contrary evidence these statements can hardly be taken at their face value. The manuscript of Georgius Hamartolos, in the words just previous to the reference to the martyrdom of John, contains words which suggest the tradition of John's old age.⁵ Also in the same passage Georgius Hamartolos says that Origen affirms that John suffered martyrdom. But we still have this passage from Origen, where without the slightest hint that John was killed by the Jews, he expressly says that John's exile to Patmos was sufficient fulfillment of the Master's prophecy of the cup for him.⁶ As to the references in the Epitome of Philip of Side, Bernard, in a detailed study, shows that it is a corrupt sentence in a late epitome of the work of a careless and blundering historian.⁷

Certainly if Papias had had any clear reference to John's martyrdom, we would expect that Irenaeus and other church fathers who had Papias's work before them would have given some indication of it.

3. Codet, op. cit., p. 64.

4. Bernard, op. cit., p. XXXVIII.

5. Filson, op. cit., p. 204.

6. Robertson, op. cit., p. 27.

7. Bernard, op. cit., pp. XXXVIII ff.

If Eusebius, for example, had found such a statement in Papias, how could he have left the weapon unused in his fight against the apoc-
tolic character of the Apocalypse?⁸ Zahn concludes that whatever the
reference in Papias is, the John that is meant is John the Baptist.⁹
Quite likely it is that Papias used some such word as *μαρτυρ* or *μαρτυς*
in referring to John and this was mistakenly understood to refer to
tragic martyrdom while Papias used it in the sense of "witness."
There is also a tenth century fragment, rather corrupt, that states
clearly that Papias records in his five books of Expositions that
the Gospel of John was given to the churches by John during his
lifetime.¹⁰ This may not be authentic but it does counter-balance
those fragments, also of dubious veracity, which have Papias speak-
ing of John's martyrdom.

There are traces in ancient writers that seem to imply the mar-
tyrdom of John. Clement of Alexandria quotes a statement of Herac-
leon(c.125 A.D.) commenting on Luke 12: 8 f., where among those
listed who had escaped martyrdom, John the Apostle, who would have
been entitled to first place, is not listed.¹¹ But here again it is
very likely that there is a misunderstanding of the word *μαρτυς* -
that Heracleon is naming those who have not been called to make a
public confession of their faith before a magistrate. Tradition
states that John did make such a confession and as a result was ex-

8. Clemen, op. cit., p. 656.

9. Zahn, Intro. to the N. T., Vol. III, p. 206.

10. Howard, op. cit., p. 12.

11. Bernard, op. cit., p. XLIV.

iled to Patmos.

Clement of Alexandria (Strom. VII.17) says that the teaching of the Apostles was brought to a close in the reign of Nero.¹² But elsewhere he tells the story of John and the robber that is supposed to have taken place in John's old age in Ephesus.

Chrysostom (Hom. LXV on Mt. 20:23) attests John's martyrdom, but in another place (Hom. LXXVI) he says that John survived long after the fall of Jerusalem.¹³

Aphrates, about 344 A.D., writes (De Persecutione, 23) "Great and excellent is the martyrdom of Jesus Simon also and Paul were perfect martyrs. And James and John walked in the footsteps of Christ the Master."¹⁴ But this is late, it does not directly claim martyrdom, and may again show confusion as to the meaning of the term "martyr."

Finally there is the argument for John's martyrdom based on the evidence of ecclesiastical calendars. In a Syriac Martyrology, from before 411 A.D. we find the entries:

Dec. 26. Stephen, chief martyr, etc.

Dec. 27. John and James, the Apostles at Jerusalem.

Dec. 28. At Rome, Paul and Peter, the chief of the Lord's Apostles.

In the Calendar of Carthage (505 A.D.) there is the entry:

Dec. 27. John the Baptist and James the Apostle, whom Herod killed.

12. Charles, op. cit., p. XLVII.

13. Ibid.

14. Cartledge, op. cit., p. 190.

In this calendar there is on June 24 an entry for St. John the Baptist, so it is concluded that for Dec. 27 it is the Evangelist that must really be meant. But these calendars are late, and the insertion of names did not depend on their title of "martyr" in the restricted meaning of one who had suffered death for his christian witness.¹⁵

So there is some evidence to lead to the belief that John did suffer a martyr's death, and while it is by no means conclusive we could grant the probable truth of it unless there is contrary evidence.

The contrary evidence is strong. All the accounts of the Church Fathers agree that the life of John, the son of Zebedee, was prolonged to extreme old age. These include all the traditions about John in Ephesus in his old age. We have the evidence of the Gospel of John, Ch. 21, which implies a natural death. Those who attacked the Gospel in the second century did not claim a martyrdom of John for their position. If they knew of any basis for such a claim we would expect them to have used it. The whole tradition that assigns the Fourth Gospel to this Apostle bespeaks his long life, as does the tradition that John was the only one of the Apostles who did not suffer martyrdom. Without convincing contrary evidence such unanimous tradition certainly warrants credence.

In face of the slender evidence it seems amazing how the alleged martyrdom of John has gained credence. Streeter, who strongly

15. Bernard, op. cit. pp. XLII f.

supports the martyrdom theory states: "The amount of evidence that can be summoned in the support of the tradition of an early martyrdom of John is not considerable," but he says that this is because the Church tried to suppress a tradition apologetically so inconvenient as that of John's early death.¹⁶ But it is just as easy and logical to assert that at this time when martyrdom was held in highest honor, the Church would try to claim martyrdom for all its early leaders and would invent evidences for such martyrdom.

Therefore our conclusion is that the Apostle John was not martyred in his early age, and to the extent that the belief in the existence of the Presbyter John rests on the martyrdom of John theory it is without foundation.

16. Streeter, op. cit., p. 435.

VII. The Ephesian Residence of the Apostle John

The evidence is quite conclusive that there was a John of great prestige in Ephesus at the close of the first century. There is no evidence that there were two important Johns there. If John the Apostle lived there at that time, most of the John the Presbyter evidence falls to the ground. If John the Apostle was not there, it is reasonable to conclude that the Presbyter John was this man of prestige.

There is a strong tradition that John the Apostle did abide in Ephesus until old age. On the other hand there are also disconcerting silences where we would expect this John to be spoken of if he were there at the time.

Our most extensive testimony to the Ephesian residence of John comes from Irenaeus. Irenaeus states that John, the disciple of the Lord, who also lay on His breast, published a Gospel while dwelling at Ephesus. He says that the Church at Ephesus with which John lived until Trajan's time (98-117 A.D.) is a truthful witness to the tradition of the Apostles. In a letter to Florinus he tells of his vivid recollection of Polycarp, stating that the way of the venerable martyr's life, his bodily form, the discourses he gave to the people, and the account which he gave of his intercourse with John and with the rest who had seen the Lord, were clearer to him in memory than many recent experiences. This testimony in a direct line from John to Polycarp to Irenaeus is difficult to discredit without making one or the other out to be a deliberate deceiver, and so this

seems to make the Apostle's presence at Ephesus nearly certain.

Another important witness to the presence of John in Ephesus is Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus. In a letter to Victor the bishop of Rome he says: "John who was both a witness and a teacher who reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, and being a priest who wore a sacerdotal plate. He fell asleep at Ephesus." A bishop may be assumed to speak with good knowledge about things that happened in his own church only two generations before.¹

In regard to Justin Martyr(c. 155 A.D.) the indirect testimony is of decisive importance. He directly states that the Apocalypse was written by John, one of the Apostles of Christ(Dial. 81). There was no doubt that the Apocalypse was composed in Asia Minor. His testimony is the more important since his home was in Palestine, he lived at Ephesus(c. 135 A.D.), and he had learned in his wanderings to know the Alexandrian and the Roman Churches, as also that of Asia Minor, and therefore he represented the universal tradition of the Church of the second century.²

Let us adduce just a few more of the early evidences of John's sojourn at Ephesus. There is Papias's acceptance of the Apocalypse as authentic, which would be hard to explain if he had not known of the Apostle's being in Asia Minor. A Gnostic romance, the Acts of John, which may be as early as 150 A.D. presupposes the tradition of John's living and writing in Asia Minor.³ Apollonius(c. 180 A.D.)

1. Scott, op. cit., p. 236.

2. Weiss, op. cit., p. 47.

3. Streeter, op. cit., p. 436.

relates a story that John at Ephesus brought a dead man back to life. Clement of Alexandria(c.190 A.D.) says that the Apostle in Asia visited churches, appointed bishops, and regulated affairs.⁴ He also tells the story of John's experience in his old age with a robber at Ephesus.

Against these numerous and ancient traditions of John's residence at Ephesus are brought chiefly the arguments of silence and of confusion, viz. that in the first half of the second century we have no definite reference to the Apostle's residing at Ephesus, even in documents that we would definitely expect to mention him; and that it is another John at Ephesus whose life and doings there have through confusion been attributed to the Apostle; that it was the false attribution of the Apocalypse to the Apostle that gave rise to the premise that the Apostle lived in Asia Minor.

The attempt is made to discredit all of Irenaeus's testimony since his writings do contain a number of obvious errors. Also he says that it was as a child($\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma$) that he heard Polycarp speak of John. Since he was so young he may easily have misunderstood and gotten the wrong impression. Also it seems that Irenaeus was dubious about just who the John at Ephesus was since he usually speaks of him as "the disciple of the Lord" and does not directly call him "apostle." Perhaps that was the expression that he heard from Polycarp, who, however, meant another John, whereas Irenaeus thought that he was talking about the Apostle.

4. Godet, op. cit., p.61.

While it is true that not everything that Irenaeus writes is reliable, and if he were our only authority we might hesitate to accept some of his statements, yet the fact that he does state some things that are errors does not discredit his entire testimony. The fact that he was a $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma$ when he heard Polycarp does not mean that he was too young to understand properly. $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma$ frequently denotes a young man. We cannot suppose that Irenaeus's only channels of information were brief intercourses in early youth with Polycarp and Papias's writings. He reports testimony of "presbyters." Churches freely communicated with one another by letters, so news would spread. Irenaeus must have had numerous links with the early part of the century. If there was any confusion in regard to this John it could have been corrected in any number of ways.⁵

The testimony of Polycrates is attacked because in the same letter in which he speaks of John dying at Ephesus, he seems to have confused Philip the Apostle with Philip the Evangelist, since he ascribes virgin daughters to the Apostle. Hence he may in the same way have confused John the Apostle with John the Presbyter. Also he says that this John who died at Ephesus was a priest and wore a sacerdotal plate⁶ which would not be a description of the Apostle.

It does seem as if Polycrates in his letter confuses the two Philips, but it is not certain that the Philip of whom he is writing is not actually the Apostle. Or even if there were confusion in

5. Sanday, op. cit., p. 61.

6. These words of Polycrates have given rise to the prevalent theory that the John of Ephesus was a Jerusalem disciple of Jesus of priestly family.

the one instance it still does not follow that he would be confused in the other instance. Also his description of John would not preclude that he is speaking of the Apostle. Codet says that he evidently means that John, the last survivor of the Apostolate had left on the church of Asia the impression of a pontif from whose forehead shone the splendor of the holiness of Christ.⁷

It is true that there is a lack of testimony from the first half of the second century for John's old age and Ephesian residence. That is not too surprising when we note how little literature we do have from that period. The whole extant literature from between the years 130 and 170 A.D. would not fill more than a thin octavo volume.⁸ This makes the validity of the argument from silence very dubious.

It is true that we have letters in which we would expect John to be mentioned if he had been at Ephesus, but which are silent about him. But the argument from silence is universally recognized as being extremely precarious.

There is extant a letter of Polycarp to the Philippian Church in which he makes no mention of the Apostle. But a disciple does not necessarily mention his renowned teacher in every letter which he writes and in this letter to the Philippians there was no reason for referring to John.

It is harder to account for the silence of Ignatius in his Epistle to the Ephesians, written less than 20 years after the Apostle

7. Codet, op. cit., p. 61.

8. Sanday, op. cit., p. 39.

is supposed to have died there. He compliments the church on its proud traditions. He makes much of its association with Paul but of John he says nothing.⁹ This is certainly contrary to what we would expect. But the argument from silence can hardly be used as proof. Ignatius's letter is full of Pauline thought, and the fact that Ignatius was going to Rome, facing martyrdom, just as Paul had done, may have been the reason why he speaks especially of Paul.

Another argument from silence is based on a letter of Clement (c.93 A.D.) written from Rome to urge the Corinthian Church to submit to the leaders of the apostolic succession. Why does Clement give no intimation that across the Aegean, in the Church of Ephesus, was living the sole survivor of the original Twelve?¹⁰ But letters are capricious things (we wouldn't want future readers to base theories of what we don't know on what we have omitted from our letters) and what seems logical centuries later may not have been so logical in the circumstances of the actual writer.

Another argument used against the Ephesian residence of the Apostle is the general hesitance to accept the Fourth Gospel as apostolic. There is no trace, it is said, of any claim of apostolic authority for it until the period of Irenaeus. Not earlier than 170 A.D. can be found any indication that the Gospel was considered as having more than minor importance.¹¹ But we do find traces of the use of the Gospel early in the second century, and there is no indi-

9. Scott, *op. cit.* p. 237.

10. Bacon, "The Mythical Elder John of Ephesus," p. 316.

11. Bacon, "The Elder John in Jerusalem," p. 190.

cation of its authenticity being questioned until the heretic Gnostics after the middle of the century. Rather we would ask: How could a spurious Gospel of a character so peculiar, so different from the earlier synoptic Gospels, gain currency as the work of the Apostle, both among Christians and among gnostic heretics, at a time when so many who must have known whether he wrote such a work or not were still living?¹²

Again it is said that some of the best early authorities, while they leave no doubt as to the identification of the John of Ephesus with the beloved disciple, abstain from expressions that would identify him with the son of Zebedee. Irenaeus, Polycrates, and the Muratorian Fragment, for example, never call him an apostle. But Irenaeus indicates quite clearly that he considers this John an apostle,¹³ and Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian unequivocally call him an apostle. And to call him the beloved disciple is almost equivalent to calling him the Apostle John, for certainly from reading the Gospel of John one can hardly get any other impression than that the beloved disciple was one of the twelve, for he was present at the Last Supper, and of the twelve it could have been only John.¹⁴

The churches of Asia must have known whether the John that resided there was the last survivor of the original apostolic band. Their opinion must have passed over into tradition. Tradition as-

12. Ezra Abbot, The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel, p. 14.

13. Irenaeus says that the church at Ephesus, having been founded by Paul, and John having resided there, is a true witness of the tradition of the Apostles (Eus. H. E. III 23,24).

14. Sanday, op. cit., p. 105.

serts that the Ephesian Elder was the Apostle. It is easy to claim that tradition confuses the Presbyter John with the Apostle. But with the multitude of links from generation to generation, it is hardly likely that such confusion could arise in one or two generations. The burden of proof rests on those who reject the received tradition. Since any real proof that such confusion did arise is lacking, we assume the correctness of tradition and are convinced that the Apostle John lived to an old age in Ephesus. Nowhere do we have any indication that there were two Johns of importance in Ephesus. On the basis of our conclusion that the Apostle John did live there, either the Presbyter John was a minor figure or he did not exist at all.

Conclusion

For more than a hundred years after Papias, no writer seems to have been bothered with the idea that there was more than one John to reckon with. For the most critical minds of the early centuries, for Hippolytus and Tertullian, for Origen and Clement of Alexandria, there was no Johannine problem.

When the problem does arise it does not rest on external evidence but springs from subjective sources. Either because of prejudice against some of the Johannine writings, or because of the honest opinion, from internal evidence, that the books could not all be from the same writer, the search for another possible author starts. This entails the search for grounds for supporting another authorship.

In the early centuries it was the rejection of the Apocalypse that spurred the search for another John to whom it might be ascribed. Since the eighteenth century it is the prior rejection of and opposition to the Fourth Gospel that has given rise to the rejection of the Ephesian residence of the Apostle, and called forth the Presbyter John as his substitute.

All the the proponents of the Presbyter John theory really have to base their theories on is the superscription "the elder" in the II and III Epistles of John¹ and Papias's calling John the presbyter. Many conjectures have been brought forth to substantiate the

1. Yet may the title "the elder" itself not speak against the Presbyter John theory? Who but the Apostle could so simply designate himself *ὁ πρεσβύτερος*?

Presbyter John theory, but they remain conjectures without definite bases of fact. The very divergencies of the Presbyter John theory show how little it is based on solid facts, for there are nearly as many different theories as there are proponents of the Presbyter.

A study of a subject such as this is in some ways saddening. One is almost forced to the conclusion that much higher-critical work is done, not in an honest search for the truth, but rather to secure support for preconceived idiosyncratic theories. There seems to be abnormal suspiciousness towards the prominent and normal evidence, and abnormal credulity towards evidence which is trifling or a bit bizarre. Simpson expresses it thus: "We live in an age of hypercriticism, crazy with suspicion of the past, a day wherein that Red Indian up to date, the Biblical tomahawker, decorates himself with the scalps of time-honored opinions, largely for the sake of the prestige he wins by the feat."² This is not to deny that many scholars, particularly the most learned of them, have the search for truth and the increase of knowledge as their objective, and that even when unbiased they can come to divergent conclusions in regard to a problem, also of the problem which we are considering in this paper.

Therefore I do not claim that the conclusion of this paper is the only one that can be reached on the basis of the evidence, and certainly I must admit that others have written with much more of

2. E. K. Simpson, "The Authorship and Authenticity of the Fourth Gospel," Evangelical Quarterly, X (1938), p. 113.

the evidence before them and with much greater capabilities for judging it, but for what they are worth I present the following as a summary of my conclusions:

There may, or may not, have been a John the Presbyter at Ephesus. Since there were numerous presbyters in the congregation and since John was a common name, there may even have lived several John the Presbyters at Ephesus. But the theory that there was a John the Presbyter as distinct from the Apostle, of great fame and authority, who wrote or edited some or all of the Johannine writings, I believe is false. I hold with Salmon that it is still a disputed matter whether the discovery by Eusebius of a John the Presbyter is a real one, rather inclining toward the opinion that it is false, and that the Elder John of Papias, as well as the Elder of II and III John, is John the Apostle.

The traditional view that all the Johannine literature was written by the Apostle still stands firm. We hold to the belief that in the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Revelation of John we have the inspired writings of a personal follower of the Savior, one of the twelve disciples. Our precious Fourth Gospel was written by the beloved disciple and apostle of the Lord, who had been with Him during the three years of His public ministry, and who therefore writes from personal experience.

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