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THE PROBLEM  
OF  
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THE PROBLEM  
OF  
THE FOURTH GOSPEL

BY

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of Christ's College, Cambridge; sometime Hulsean Lecturer;  
Author of *The Fourth Gospel and some recent German  
Criticism*, *The Present State of the Synoptic Problem*  
(*Cambridge Biblical Essays*), *The Eschatology  
of Jesus*, etc.

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TO  
THE MASTER AND FELLOWS  
OF  
CHRIST'S COLLEGE

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.....deep feelings had impress'd  
Great objects on his mind, with portraiture  
And colour so distinct, that on his mind  
They lay like substances, and almost seem'd  
To haunt the bodily sense.

WORDSWORTH, *The Excursion*.

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## PREFACE

**I**F I venture the following personal explanation, the reason is simply and solely this: I have been advised clearly to define the relations between the present volume and a little work of mine which, published about a dozen years ago, was entitled *The Fourth Gospel and some recent German Criticism*.

Let me accordingly inform the reader that, when asked for a second edition of a work which—so, at all events, people were good enough to tell me—had served a useful purpose, I was for some time loth to acquiesce in such altogether unexpected but certainly encouraging suggestions. It was, indeed, far from being the case that, because the fates had determined that I should stray into Synoptic fields and the region of Eschatological research, I had therefore ceased to be fascinated by the Johannine literature *en masse*, and in particular by the very noble treatise which bears the name of ‘John’; on the contrary, I had actually betaken myself to what bade fair to be a prolonged and laborious attempt to trace connecting links between the ‘Schmerzenskind der Theologie’ (as Pfeiderer calls the Fourth Gospel) and that great writing of—may I say it?—uncertain provenance which is designated ‘The Epistle to the Ephesians.’ My hesitation was, of course, partly due to natural reluctance even temporarily to forsake a work which was already rising on the stocks; it was, however, mainly grounded in a difficulty which stared me in the face. To put the matter in a nut-shell: I was speedily compelled to realize that, were any action taken in response to the aforesaid kindly suggestions, it would mean that time must be found for the drastic re-writing of a work which I could but turn to with added dissatisfaction and no small measure of dissent. Mere revision was not to be thought of.

Somehow or other time has been found—or rather made; and in the event the present volume arrives at its completion.

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Looking to the circumstances, it had better be accompanied by something like a warning note. To all intents and purposes a new book, it wears but slight, if any, resemblance to its now superseded predecessor, and there is significance in the fact that, if old pages have been utilized, not one of them re-appears intact. To speak quite frankly: the contrast extends from arrangement and amplification to view and standpoint; and, should any one be at pains to institute a comparison, he will scarcely fail to observe that—to quote from the Preface to the earlier volume—I have been only too ‘glad to claim liberty to disagree with myself.’ Nor will he be surprised if, the question being of ‘das Hauptproblem aller Bibel-Kritik,’ the same liberty be claimed in the present instance.

Obviously a change of title was imperative; and my regret on this score is that, as there is no need to inform me, the one ultimately acquiesced in promises far more than the book performs.

There is, perhaps, less ground of apprehension as my eye is caught by an incisive sentence in Professor Percy Gardner’s *Ephesian Gospel*; it runs thus: ‘no one has a right to publish a book about the (Fourth) Gospel who has not in a measure surveyed the mass of literature’ called forth by the intricate and delicate subject. That Dr Gardner’s requirements in the case of others are satisfied by himself is patent; and if so be that my friend—he will allow me so to speak of him—now puts me on my defence, I can make appeal, I fancy, to the ‘heavily documented’ pages now gone to press. They shall bear witness on my behalf;—not only that the works of modern scholars and students have really been ‘in a measure surveyed’ by me, but also that, consequent on much ransacking of libraries, acquaintance has been made or renewed with not a few pioneers of Fourth Gospel criticism. In the case of these last my experience has been similar to that of Friedrich Nippold: the reading or re-reading of their books has, speaking generally, been fraught with both interest and reward.

It may be politic to add that, not exactly content to read books about the Fourth Gospel, I have had that Gospel itself continually at my side.

Large is my debt of gratitude. As might be expected, it



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points first and foremost to Cambridge; but the friends more immediately concerned will readily understand why they are not alluded to by name. Once again it bids me dwell on the literary help, varied and continuous, which I am privileged to receive from my wife. It extends to foreign soil; and it is just here that, altogether refusing to discard the aid of German scholarship, I am painfully alive to the dark reasons which emphatically forbid me to allude as heretofore to Germany as a second home. Yet even so I look ahead; and it is to indulge a hope that, to adapt from *John Inglesant*, old friends and he who cannot banish them from his thoughts may hereafter find themselves 'standing together in a brighter dawn.'

LITTLE CANFIELD RECTORY, ESSEX,  
*Christmas Day, 1917.*

## NOTE

THERE are two points on which, perhaps, a few words ought to be said. To begin with, I have been guided to the decision that, as regards pronouns relative to the divine names, the use of capitals should be dispensed with—except, now and again, when they occur in citations; I adhere, that is, generally to the principle adopted in the English Bible. And next; the question of an Index having been duly considered, it has seemed best to offer as substitute such a detailed Synopsis of Contents as will, I trust, enable readers to find their way about my book.

J.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AV</i>	<i>Authorised Version.</i>
<i>CB</i>	<i>The Century Bible</i> (Eng. text, A.V. and R.V., with notes).
<i>CBE</i>	<i>Essays on some Biblical Questions of the day</i> , by <i>Members of the Univ. of Cambridge</i> (Edited by H. B. Swete, D.D.).
<i>CTE</i>	<i>Essays on some Theological Questions of the day</i> , by <i>Members of the Univ. of Cambridge</i> (Edited by H. B. Swete, D.D.).
<i>DB</i>	<i>Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible.</i>
<i>DCG</i>	<i>Hastings' Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels.</i>
<i>DAC</i>	<i>Hastings' Dictionary of the Apostolic Church.</i>
<i>EB</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia Biblica.</i>
<i>Eint. or Intr.</i>	<i>Einleitung, Introduction.</i>
<i>Exp.</i>	<i>The Expositor</i> (Edited by Sir W. R. Nicoll).
<i>GHD</i>	<i>The Gospels as Historical Documents</i> , by V. H. Stanton, D.D.
<i>HBNT</i>	<i>Handbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> (Tübingen, edited by Lietzmann).
<i>HCNT</i>	<i>Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament</i> (Tübingen, Freiburg and Leipzig).
<i>HE</i>	<i>Eusebius, Histor. Eccles.</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>The Hibbert Journal.</i>
<i>JE</i>	<i>The Jewish Encyclopaedia.</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>The Journal of Theological Studies.</i>
<i>LXX</i>	<i>The Septuagint.</i>
<i>LZ</i>	<i>Literarisches Zentralblatt.</i>
<i>NKZ</i>	<i>Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift.</i>
<i>NTAF</i>	<i>The New Testament in the Apos. Fathers</i> (Oxford Society of Histor. Theology).
<i>RGG</i>	<i>Die Religion in der Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> (Tübingen, edited by Schiele).
<i>RV</i>	<i>Revised Version.</i>
<i>Schw. TZ</i>	<i>Schweiz. Theol. Zeitschrift.</i>
<i>SK</i>	<i>Studien und Kritiken.</i>
<i>SNT</i>	<i>Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments</i> (edited by Joh. Weiss).
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung.</i>
<i>TR</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau.</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Texts and Studies</i> (Cambridge).
<i>TT</i>	<i>Theolog. Tijdschrift</i> (Haarlem).
<i>TU</i>	<i>Texte und Untersuchungen.</i>
<i>ZKG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte.</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche.</i>
<i>ZWT</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie.</i>

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## INTRODUCTORY

‘OUR age is one of religious eclipse<sup>1</sup>.’ Decades have elapsed since the remark was penned, but, in view of enhanced unsettlement and perplexity, it is aptly descriptive of the present situation. Nor are reasons for such ‘eclipse’ far to seek; they point not only to wide-spread restlessness in every department of human life, but, in particular, to discovery in the realm of physical science, to explorations in the comparatively new field of Comparative Religion, last but not least to new aims and methods and results in respect of Biblical Research. It is patent that, in educated circles, the church-going habit, if retained, is often accompanied by a sense of inquietude and loss, and that assent to traditional belief ever and again ceases to be half-hearted and merges in definite negation<sup>2</sup>; as for the less instructed masses, restraint may be put on gibe and scoff, but numbers stand doggedly aloof, not necessarily from religion, but from organized Christian life<sup>3</sup>. Again it might be said with truth: ‘at the present moment two things about the Christian religion must surely be clear to anybody with eyes in his head. One is, that men cannot do without it; the other, that they cannot do with it as it is<sup>4</sup>.’

The latter assertion, no doubt, hits the mark. As for its immediate predecessor, it is still based on solid fact; in that symptoms are numerous which testify to strong desires for ‘dogmatic views and conceptions which, better grounded than the “Katechismusweisheit” of the traditional theology, shall the better harmonize with modern thought<sup>5</sup>.’ Unbelief, aloofness, hostility to ecclesiasticism, there may be;—the signs of the times<sup>6</sup> are such as to

<sup>1</sup> Goldwin Smith, *In Quest of Light*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> A recent little book entitled *An Englishman’s Farewell to his Church* is pathetically significant.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Soltau, *Unsere Evangelien*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Arnold, *God and the Bible*, p. xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Soltau, *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Among them might, perhaps, be reckoned the eager demand for such a book as Mr H. G. Wells’ *God the Invisible King*.

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suggest that 'the great body of mankind will not long live without a faith<sup>1</sup>.'

And let it be remarked that, if unsettlement and dissatisfaction in the sphere of religious thought and action there undoubtedly be, it is nevertheless certain that—with natural variety of manifestation in individual cases—the 'Founder of Christianity' has not ceased to occupy an exalted place in human minds. It is not one man only who forces himself to ask: 'What have I come to think of Christ<sup>2</sup>?' the self-same question is being raised in many quarters, nor is effort spared in anxious search for answers which shall in some sort satisfy the inquirer and end suspense. In no preceding century has attention been so concentrated on Jesus as is the case in the modern world<sup>3</sup>; to him all eyes are directed<sup>4</sup>. 'Amidst the crumbling of old forms and institutions, when that new order is dawning for which one and all hope but which no one may as yet discern, the gaze is riveted on Jesus with an intensity hitherto unknown. That precisely at this juncture he has some word for us and we great need of him is not so much an intellectual perception as a profound consciousness which is overwhelming for the inmost soul<sup>5</sup>.' Or to turn from continental scholarship: 'I have yet to hear one college man among all the thousands I have taught speak but in admiration of him' if the view in the main stops short at the belief that 'He really lived and that He was the profoundest ethical teacher the world had produced,' is the striking testimony but lately borne by a University Professor in the United States<sup>6</sup>. Turning once again to England, it is a distinguished Jew who says: 'Perhaps in the future Christianity and Judaism will be able to shake hands over the Sermon on the Mount and the fundamental elements in the moral and religious doctrine of Jesus<sup>7</sup>.'

<sup>1</sup> Munger, *Freedom of Faith*, p. 6. Cf. Percy Gardner, *The Ephesian Gospel*, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary of a Church-goer*, p. 74. *What think ye of Christ?* is, by the way, the title of a little book from the pen of C. E. Raven which, if inviting sharp criticism, is in many ways suggestive. <sup>3</sup> Westermann, *ZTK*, xv, p. 523.

<sup>4</sup> Seeberg, *NKZ*, xiv, pp. 437 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Wernle, *Quellen des Lebens Jesu*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Holliday, *HJ*, xv, p. 302.

<sup>7</sup> Montefiore, *Synop. Gospels*, i, p. cvii.

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Thus, the wide world over, does the case appear to stand. Then let us remark further that the problems which are to-day exercising the minds of thousands—of whom many, by reason of insufficient knowledge, are in sore need of help and guidance—have long been, and still are, grappled with by specialists in the diverse fields of theological research. If a duty laid in particular on this age be that of fearless and withal reverent investigation into sources, it is fully realized by scholars who, both at home and abroad, are, unquestionably, showing themselves alive to the demand; and, one and all concerned for truth, deep seriousness and transparent honesty of purpose go with them to their work<sup>1</sup>. Rightly conceived of, their unremitting toil is in reality a response to ‘the desire of Christendom’ (nor yet of Christendom alone) ‘for the fullest and most exact knowledge possible of the historic life and ministry of Jesus<sup>2</sup>’; and to them gratitude is due for that ‘now, again, in our own times, the human Christ has come back to us in the fulness of His manhood<sup>3</sup>.’ Truly this is so; yet the reminder is timely that ‘for our knowledge of what... He is to-day, we do not depend on our Scriptures; other evidence, vast and varied, is forthcoming in the *gesta Christi* in the history of the world<sup>4</sup>.’

To make room here for a word or two as to the lines followed by critical students of the Bible literature generally; and on the attitude towards them which non-specialists may reasonably adopt.

It was said in effect at the outset, that ‘in these days we have to reckon with a combination of new studies, with new methods, and new results of study.’ Again to make use of borrowed words: ‘The study of the past has become a science’; and, while in time past the student was ‘content to glean from early records a picturesque or a majestic story,’ more precise now is his aim and more precise are his methods. He is forced to define; he ‘analyses his authorities, compares them, weighs them in the balances of his

<sup>1</sup> Instances of levity and flippancy are rare.

<sup>2</sup> Wendt, *St John's Gospel*, p. 1. See also Gunkel, *Zum religionsgesch. Verständnis des N.T.*, Vorwort.

<sup>3</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius*, p. 208.

<sup>4</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Sermon preached before the University of Cambridge, 8th June, 1913.*

critical judgement'; he discriminates sources, and, taking account of differences, gauges their significance; and essays to estimate whatever historical values they may possess. 'Chronicles become documents which he has to interpret, to reduce to their original elements of fact and romance'; the one only thing which it is his business to discover and present is Truth, and he accordingly works on as convinced that 'in the end there will come a great reward in pure and trustworthy knowledge.' Nor is the case otherwise when, the question no longer pointing to secular literature, the writings which constitute the 'Divine Library' are the field of research; on the contrary, both aim and method are essentially the same. It was inevitable that so it should be in respect of the varied writings of the Old Testament; and as inevitable was it that a time should come when, as it actually has come, inquiry should fasten on the varied contents of the New Testament, in particular on the records of the Life of Jesus. 'Christianity is a historical religion'; as such it distinctly challenges that historical investigation which finds its focal point and centre in Gospel criticism<sup>1</sup>.

Gospel Criticism. It is a fearsome thing for many a devout soul which not seldom labours under the false impression that criticism is but another word for wholesale denial and rejection. By well-meaning if scarcely well-informed upholders of 'the Old Gospel' as against 'the New Theology' it is often blatantly denounced. With curious disregard of claims justly advanced by, or on behalf of, masculine types of intelligence, it is asserted of those engaged in it that they are occasion of stumbling to that 'weaker brother' whose pose, in point of fact, is often highly suggestive of riding rough-shod over others while expecting and demanding consideration for himself<sup>2</sup>. As if Truth itself were endangered by honest

<sup>1</sup> F. H. Chase, *Supernatural Elements*, pp. 4-6; *CTE*, pp. 374 ff. See also Bethune-Baker, *Sermon*. Dr Bethune-Baker's remarks on 'what is called a moderate criticism' should be carefully noted and digested.

<sup>2</sup> 'Experience... tends to show that it is the rams, rather than the lambs, that at right and especially at wrong times, are wont to let the world know that they are being scandalized. It is not the really spiritually poor, but your obstinate and noisy dogmatists who raise a hue and cry when free inquiry demands the right to move within the religious as within all other spheres,' Höfding, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 3.

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and industrious search for Truth, or 'such an invalid as to be able to take the air only in a close carriage<sup>1</sup>!' Not so thought St Paul; hence the 'prove all things<sup>2</sup>' which came from him.

What, then, is the right attitude to adopt? Most surely not one which argues either timorousness or hostility. There is no ground for the one or the other; there being so much to make it evident that, if there be some apparent loss, it is more than compensated by the great gain which has already issued, and is issuing, from scholarly investigation of the Bible literature;—and by no means only in the case of the Old Testament scriptures; 'new light' has been, and is being, shed in abundance on those of the New Testament also. And besides, Gospel Criticism, inevitable as it was, has come to stay; this recognized, the wiser course is not only to allow its reasonableness but to welcome it, to make the most of what it has to teach<sup>3</sup>. As was said some years ago: 'Instead of using the Gospels to foreclose inquiry, we must use the results of inquiry to interpret the Gospels. Let inquiry proceed, the light shall help us, as we reverently welcome and use it,' without necessarily accepting every new hypothesis, but as ever testing 'the hypotheses with a vigorous scrutiny; or, if we cannot test them ourselves, we shall wait till others whom we trust have tested them<sup>4</sup>.' Or, as was said more recently by one in whom the trust desiderated can be safely placed: 'I cannot doubt that the evolution of the conception of the conditions of our Lord's life on earth, which is coming with our fresh study of the Gospels, will enhance the appeal that the living Christ is making to us in these our times—His times. As we realize more fully the extent to which the Son of God "emptied Himself" to enter on a really human life, to

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. v, 21. The Bishop of Ballarat, Dr A. V. Green (*Ephes. Canon. Writings*, pp. 3 ff.), is not slow to urge the point. 'On a quelque peine à se représenter l'état d'esprit de gens qui, d'une part, proclament l'autorité souveraine de la parole du Christ, le salut par Christ seul, et qui, d'autre part, se refusent à toute étude critique des évangiles,' Réville, *Le Quatrième Évangile*, p. ii. The whole passage should be read.

<sup>3</sup> A pioneer of Fourth Gospel criticism, Ballenstedt, has some highly suggestive remarks to the same effect in the opening pages of his *Philo und Johannes* (publ. 1802).

<sup>4</sup> J. Armitage Robinson, *Some Thoughts on Inspiration*, p. 47.

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learn from all the experiences “of joy and woe, and hope and fear,” with no supernatural panoply to blunt the edge of any one of them that each of us may not obtain:—the appeal He makes to us will not be less persuasive and convincing than of old<sup>1</sup>.’

It is in such a mind and temper that the ordinarily instructed reader should approach and acquaint himself with the works of some of the many scholars who have concentrated their attention on a document which bears the time-honoured title of ‘The Gospel According to St John.’

<sup>1</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Sermon; Nestorius*, p. 208.