

**THE CRITICISM OF
THE
FOURTH GOSPEL**

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The criticism of the Fourth gospel by William Sanday

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WILLIAM SANDAY

**THE CRITICISM OF
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FOURTH GOSPEL**

THE CRITICISM
OF
THE FOURTH GOSPEL

EIGHT LECTURES ON THE MORSE
FOUNDATION, DELIVERED IN THE
UNION SEMINARY, NEW YORK
IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, 1904

BY

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TO
MY AMERICAN FRIENDS

P R E F A C E

THESE lectures were delivered in accordance with the terms of the Morse foundation in the Union Theological Seminary, New York, between October 12 and November 4, 1904; and they were afterwards repeated, with some changes, in Oxford. I have tried to improve their form both while they were being delivered and since. But I have been content to state the case for the most part broadly and constructively, and have not (as I had at one time intended) burdened the pages with notes and detailed discussions.

I am conscious of inadequate treatment throughout, but especially perhaps in Lecture VII. There has been a movement of thought going on ever since the lectures were begun; and, if I am not mistaken, the burning point of the whole controversy has come to rest more and more upon the question discussed in this lecture. But on neither side has the real issue been pressed home with any thoroughness. Critical writers are in the habit of assuming with very little proof that the theology of St. John is simply a development of that of St. Paul, and that the theology of St. Paul was from one end to the other the Apostle's own creation. I cannot think that this is a true representation of the facts; it seems to me to ignore far too much the Mother Church and that which gave its life to the Mother Church. At the

same time I am quite aware that what I have given is rather a sketch for a possible answer to this question, than a really satisfactory discussion of it. There are not wanting signs that a fuller examination of the relations between the teaching of Christ on the one hand and St. Paul and St. John on the other is the next great debate that lies before us. In this debate the question of the genuineness and authenticity of the Fourth Gospel will be but an episode.

It is a matter of regret to me that the subject of these lectures should have been so predominantly controversial. I cannot help feeling the deep cleft which divides me from many of the writers whose views I have discussed—a cleft that extends to matters more fundamental still than the criticism of the Gospel. I find it in some ways a relief to think of the division between us as greater even than it is. Where there is frank and open hostility, the approaches that are made by the one side to the other are more highly valued. And from this point of view there is much in the writings of those of whom I am obliged to think as opponents that greatly appeals to me. As typical of this I may mention the pamphlet by Freiherr von Soden entitled *Die wichtigsten Fragen im Leben Jesu*. I have referred to this pamphlet in a note on p. 129, in terms that are not those of praise; and it true that the critical portion of the pamphlet, especially so far as it deals with the Fourth Gospel, seems to me very defective. I also cannot

disguise from myself that the author explicitly denies what I should most wish that he affirmed (op. cit., p. 92). But, when I have said this, it is only just to add that I have read the concluding sections of his essay with warm respect and admiration. And what is true of this essay is true of much beside.

I console myself by thinking that German criticism with which I have had to break a lance more often than with any other, has a wonderful faculty for correcting itself. Only in the last few years we have had, first the discussions started by Wellhausen about the title Son of Man, and then those set on foot by Wrede in his book *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, and in each case criticism seems to be working its way through to a view that is really right and reasonable. In like manner the extravagant estimate of the apocalyptic element in the Gospels which has been in vogue in recent years seems to be reducing itself to sounder dimensions. In each case there is error; but in each case the error is corrected, and something is learnt and gained by the way. May we not hope that on this question of the Fourth Gospel, and the still more vital matters with which it is bound up, by degrees the tension may be relaxed, and there may be the same experience of permanent gain? Already one may see great potentialities of good in much that as it at present stands may well give cause for concern.

One common form of criticism that may be directed