

**WAS ST. JOHN THE
AUTHOR OF THE
FOURTH GOSPEL?**

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Was st. John the author of the fourth Gospel? by A Layman

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BY
A LAYMAN

FORMERLY FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.



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THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

THE OBJECT of the following pages is to enquire and ascertain, from the internal evidence afforded by the Fourth Gospel, whether that Gospel was written by the Apostle St. John. It is not proposed to discuss the questions which have been raised as to the authenticity of this Gospel, founded upon the supposed want of testimony on the part of contemporary authorities, or of persons living near the time of its first promulgation. On the one hand, it is asserted that the tradition which testifies to its being the work of St. John, can be traced to those whose existence approached very nearly to the time of the Apostle; on the other, that no genuine testimony to the authenticity of

this Gospel is of an earlier date than the year of Christ 180. Thus much, at least, may be maintained as far as regards external evidence—that there is not the same full and satisfactory amount of it in the case of the Fourth Gospel, as in that of the other three.

With regard to internal evidence, before descending to particulars, this general observation is to be made—namely, that the personal character and demeanour of our Saviour, his style and mode of teaching, as represented in the Fourth Gospel, bear a totally different aspect from that in which they appear in the three Synoptic Gospels. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke our Saviour stands before us as the meek and lowly Jesus: ‘meek and lowly in heart,’ as he says of himself (Matt. xi. 29). On suitable occasions, indeed, he asserted his own dignity: he did not hesitate to say of himself, ‘Behold a greater than Solomon is here.’ But he did not, as in the Fourth Gospel, obtrude his pretensions upon his hearers:

so far from it, that he took precautions to prevent the knowledge of his attributes as Messiah being imparted to the Jewish nation, or even to the general mass of his own disciples. When casting out unclean spirits, 'He straitly charged them that they should not make him known' (Mark iii. 12). And when Peter made the notable confession, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' he charged his disciples 'that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ' (Matt. xvi. 20). Now, according to the authority of the Fourth Gospel, our Lord, in an early part of his ministry—namely, to the woman of Samaria—declared himself to be the Messiah (John iv. 26). To her he also said, 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life' (John iv. 14). And to the Jews, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work' (John v. 17). This was understood by the Jews as implying that he made him-

self equal with God. 'What things soever he' (the Father) 'doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise' (John v. 19). 'The Son quickeneth whom he will' (*ibid.* 21). 'All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father' (*ibid.* 23). 'I am the bread of life' (John vi. 35). 'I came down from heaven.' 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven' (*ibid.* 38). 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me' (John vii. 37). 'If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death' (John viii. 51). 'Before Abraham was, I am' (*ibid.* 58). 'I am the door of the sheep' (John x. 7). 'By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved' (*ibid.* 9). 'I am the good shepherd' (*ibid.* 11). 'I and my Father are one' (*ibid.* 30). 'I am the resurrection, and the life' (John xi. 25). There is nothing like these passages in any one of the other Gospels. In no part of them does our Saviour put forward his personal pretensions and attributes. For his teaching, indeed—for the precepts which he sets before his dis-

ciples—he claims a Divine and saving character. ‘He taught as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.’ He does also assert that no man can know the Father except through himself the Son, and he exhorts all that labour and are heavy laden to come unto him, to take his yoke upon them and to learn of him (Matt. xi. 28, 29). And he compares the man who hears his sayings to one who founds his house on a rock, and the man who rejects them to one who builds on the sand. But the tone of all these assertions is very different from that which he is made to adopt in the passages cited from the Fourth Gospel, most of which are put forward—if one may be permitted the expression—in an assuming, a contentious, and an arrogant spirit; the strongest of the passages in the other Gospels (namely, that in Matt. xi.) being tempered, on the contrary, with meekness and humility: ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.’

The style of teaching in the Fourth Gospel

is mostly dogmatical, laying down abstract principles of doctrine, rather than rules of moral conduct for the improvement of the hearers. In the conversation with Nicodemus our Lord is made to say, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,' and 'Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' And through the whole of this discourse, and in all his controversies with the Jews, the tone is the same. Throughout this Gospel there is no teaching by means of parables, and indeed, to the mass of the disciples, there is hardly given any moral instruction at all. It would be difficult to find in it so much as two moral precepts addressed to the multitude at large. In short, the main object of our Saviour's life, as set forth in the three Synoptic Gospels, appears to have been to instruct, exhort, and improve his hearers. The main object of his life, as exhibited in the Fourth Gospel, appears to have been to exalt and glorify himself. Now, can we doubt which of these characters is the real cha-