

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.*

BY THE REV. N. BURWASH, S. T. D.

The one common principle upon which all modern opponents of Christianity are agreed is the absolute and universal supremacy of *naturalism*. Whether the underlying postulates of their philosophy are those of Materialism, or of Pantheistic Spiritualism, or of Positive Agnosticism, they all premise that the supernatural must be excluded by the principles of true science.

Perhaps no writer of modern times has applied this principle more exhaustively, or with a greater show of universal knowledge, than the author of "Supernatural Religion." Of course a work of such a character cannot lay claim to great originality. Its fundamental principle is the old doctrine of Hume, "That which is contrary to experience cannot be true;" and the materials used in illustration or application of this principle are not difficult to trace to their original sources. In the great field of historical criticism, he follows the school of Bauer. Their theory is, that Christianity is the *natural* product of a combination of all the best moral and religious ideas of the age in which it arose. To write the history of the origin of Christianity, in such a way as to seem to embody all the facts in harmony with this theory, was the task undertaken by Bauer. This task, accomplished, would leave nothing *supernatural* in the Christian religion. Of all the facts to be disposed of by Bauer, in harmony with his theory, none was more stubborn than that of the *existence* of St. John's Gospel. According to his view of the natural development of the doctrines of the Christian faith out of the original Judaism of its founder, the Gospel of St. John, which represents a very advanced stage of that development, could not

possibly have been written before the middle or toward the close of the second century. All the critical ingenuity and learning of this school have been exhausted in endeavouring to maintain this position; and from them the author of "Supernatural Religion" has borrowed the materials for this part of his work.

In opposition to this naturalistic view of the origin of the fourth Gospel, Luthardt has pointed out the fact, that, if the fourth Gospel originated in the second century, it is a unique production of that age, differing from, and almost infinitely surpassing, everything else which that age has produced; and that while we are able to assign the authorship of almost all the comparative trash which that century has produced, this one superlative work can be traced to no known author.

When the views of Bauer were presented to English readers by the author of "Supernatural Religion," Professor Lightfoot, now Bishop of Durham, in a series of articles in the *Contemporary Review*, set forth in the most thorough and conscientiously accurate manner, the external historical testimony to the *existence of the fourth Gospel in the first half of the second century*, and to its *acceptance in that age as the work of the Apostle*. In the volume before us we have the same work done for the American Christian public, by the Rev. Dr. Abbott, Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation in the Divinity School of Harvard University. While availing himself of the labours of his predecessors, and giving an admirable summary of the results of their work, Dr. Abbott has added not a little of acute critical research to the investigation of this important subject. This he has done especially in

* *The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel. External Evidences.* By EZRA ABBOTT, D.D., LL.D. Boston: G. H. Ellis.