

delicate question of the fair inferences that are to be deduced from them. On the one hand there is the tendency to sharpen these statements somewhat and see in them more than is actually affirmed ; on the other to explain them away so as to mean as little as possible. Both tendencies are subversive of truth if blindly followed, but as between the two it is by no means easy to hold the balance even. Unfortunately for the calmness of critical judgment dogmatic considerations are almost necessarily involved and have commonly entered into the discussion on both sides even when not acknowledged. Certain interpretations have been urged because they bore on the inspiration and authority of the books in question, or because they favoured certain views as to the supernatural. It is indeed difficult for any one who is sufficiently interested in these subjects to study them at all, to avoid such virtual prejudice in some direction, and quite impossible to avoid the suspicion of it by the opposite party. We shall try nevertheless to see how much is certain here and how much fairly open.

The books which may be regarded as containing such indirect or ambiguous statements as to their authorship, are the Pentateuch, Ecclesiastes and Nehemiah in the Old Testament, and the fourth gospel with the second and third Epistles of John in the New. As the statements are made in various forms, each case must be studied for itself.

The simplest from this point of view is that of the fourth gospel. This work more than once states its authorship to belong to "the disciple whom Jesus loved," but no where gives any name. Some have tried to make out that this is an ambiguous description which might apply with perfect truth to any honoured member of the early Church. But obviously it implies more than that, for he represents himself as one of those present when the risen Jesus manifested himself to his disciples at the sea of Galilee and identifies himself with the disciple who leaned on his breast at supper. If the statement is true the author can be none other than John the Apostle, and the early Church without any hesitation put the name of John at the head of it in the title. If not by John it is a forgery, as surely as if his name had been given. And this is really the issue that has been fought out by criticism. The conflict was long, of the fiercest kind, and was embittered by the large dogmatic interests supposed to be involved. It is hardly too much to say now that this question is set at rest for ever by the triumphant vindication of the Johannine authorship of the book.