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OF ST JOHN**

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# FELLOWSHIP IN THE LIFE ETERNAL

AN EXPOSITION OF THE  
EPISTLES OF ST JOHN

BY

GEORGE G. FINDLAY, D.D.

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## PREFACE

THE Exposition here presented was first delivered sixteen years ago to the Headingley students of that time, and is published partly at their request. Chapters of it have appeared, occasionally, in the pages of the *Expositor*, the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, and *Experience*; these have been carefully revised and re-written. The features of the work and the method of treatment will be apparent from the full Table of Contents that is furnished. I have had primarily in view the needs of theological students and preachers; but professional language has been avoided and matters of technical scholarship kept in the background, and I venture to hope that the interpretation may be of service to other readers who are interested in questions of New Testament doctrine and Christian experience. To no age since his own has St John had more to say than to ours; the opening of the twentieth century is, in some ways, wonderfully near to the close of the first.

Amongst previous interpreters of the Epistles of John, my debts—at least, my more immediate debts—are greatest to Lücke, Erich Haupt, Rothe, and Westcott. Lücke excelled in grammatical and logical

acumen; Haupt in analytic power and theological reflexion; Rothe was supreme in spiritual insight and fineness of touch; in Westcott there was a unique combination of all these gifts, though he may have been surpassed in any single one of them. Neither Lücke's nor Rothe's commentaries, unfortunately, have been translated from the German.

GEORGE G. FINDLAY.

HEADINGLEY.



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## INTRODUCTION

### THE TWO LITTLE LETTERS

#### THE SECOND AND THIRD EPISTLES OF ST JOHN

Nature of the two Notes—The Apostle John's Correspondence—Private or Public Letters?—Connexion between 2 and 3 John—Relation of both to 1 John—Causes of their Survival.

“The Elder to the Elect Lady and her children.”—2 JOHN 1.

\* \* \* \* \*

“The Elder to Gaius the beloved.”—3 JOHN 1.

## CHAPTER I

### THE TWO LITTLE LETTERS

THE Second and Third Epistles of John are the shortest books of the Bible. They contain in the Greek less than three hundred words apiece; closely written, each might cover a single sheet of papyrus—to this material the word “paper” (*chartēs*) refers in 2 John 12. Together they barely fill a page out of the eight or nine hundred pages of the English Bible. These brief notes, or dispatches, appear to have been thrown off by the Apostle in the ordinary course of his Church-administration, and may have occupied in their composition but a few moments of his time; in all likelihood, he wrote scores of such letters, bearing upon public or private affairs, during his long presidency over the Christian societies of Asia Minor. By a happy providence, these two have been preserved to us out of so much that has perished with the occasion.

Doubt has been entertained, both in ancient and modern times, as to whether these notes should not be ascribed to another “John the Elder,” of whose existence some traces are found in the earliest Church history, rather than to the Apostle of that name; but their close affinity to the First Epistle of John sustains the general tradition as to their authorship and vindicates them for the beloved Apostle. The writer assumes, as matter of course, a unique personal authority, and that in a Church to which he does not belong by residence, such as no

post-apostolic Father presumed to arrogate; that St John should have styled himself familiarly "the elder" in writing to his friends and children in the faith, is a thing natural enough and consistent with his temperament. Those scholars may be in the right who conjecture that "the Elder John" of tradition is nothing but a *double* of the Apostle John.

It was surely their slight and fugitive character, rather than any misgiving about their origin, which excluded these writings from the New Testament of the Syrian Church and led to their being counted in other quarters amongst the *antilegomena*, or disputed Books of Scripture. They were overshadowed by the First Epistle, beside which they look almost insignificant; and to this fact it is due, as well as to their brevity and the obscurity of their allusions, that the Second and Third Epistles of John were seldom quoted in early times and are comparatively neglected by readers of the Bible.

These are notes snatched from the every-day correspondence of an Apostle. They afford us a glance into the common intercourse that went on between St John and his friends—and enemies (for enemies the Apostle of love certainly had, as the First Epistle shows). They add little or nothing to our knowledge of Johannine doctrine; but they throw a momentary light upon the state of the Churches under St John's jurisdiction toward the close of the first century and the intercommunion linking them together; they indicate some of the questions which agitated the first Christian societies, and the sort of personalities who figured amongst them. These brief documents lend touches of local colour and personal feeling to the First Epistle, which deals with doctrine and experience in a studiously general way. Taken along with the Apocalyptic Letters to the Seven Churches, they help us, in some sort, to imagine the aged Apostle in "his habit as he lived"—the most retired and abstracted of all the great actors of the

New Testament. They serve to illustrate St John's disposition and methods, and reveal something of the nature and extent of his influence. These scanty lines possess, therefore, a peculiar historical and biographical interest; and their right interpretation is a matter of considerable moment.

The First Epistle of John appears without Address, Salutation, or Farewell Greetings, without personal notes or local allusions of any kind. It is wanting in the ordinary features of a letter, and is in literary form a *homily* rather than an Epistle. The two notes attached to it supply, to some extent, this defect. They stand in close relation to the major Epistle; they bring to our notice, in a slight but very significant fashion, persons and incidents belonging to the sphere of St John's ministry about the time when it was written, and cast a vivid illumination upon one spot at least in the wide province over which the venerable Apostle presided and to which his "catholic" Epistle in all probability was addressed. 2 and 3 John therefore furnish, in default of other material, a kind of setting and framework to 1 John. For this reason they are discussed here, by way of *Introduction* rather than sequel.

The Second and Third Epistles of John are not, properly speaking, "private" letters. 3 John bears, indeed, a personal address; but it deals with public matters; and its contents, as the last sentence shows, were intended to reach others besides "Gaius the beloved." From early times it has been debated whether the "elect lady" of 2 John was a community, or an individual sister in the Church; the former view, held by most recent investigators, is much the more probable. The Apostle appeals to the Church in question, with deep solemnity, as to the "chosen lady" of "the Lord" (see Chap. III), even as in the Revelation (21. 2, 9, and 22. 17) he describes the entire Church as "the bride, the Lamb's wife." This style of speech was familiar to the Asian Churches from the great passage

of St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (5. 22-33), which hallowed the love of husband and wife by its analogy to the mystic tie uniting the Lord Christ with His people; the same figure is employed in 2 Corinthians 11. 2, 3, and in John 3. 29. Hence in the body of his letter St John uses the singular and plural (*thou* and *you*) interchangeably, identifying the Church with its members, the "lady" with her "children"; and there is nothing in the contents of the note specific to the circumstances of a private family. The greater formality and fulness of the salutation of 2 John in comparison with 3 John points also to its larger destination, as addressed to the community and not to a single person. St Paul's Epistle to Philemon is the one strictly *private* letter in the New Testament; the difference between that writing and the Second of John every reader can appreciate.

These two should, in fact, be designated "the Pastoral Epistles of John"; they hold amongst his writings a position resembling that of the letters to Timothy and Titus amongst those of St Paul, dealing, though in a slighter way, with questions of Church-order and orthodoxy akin to those which the Apostle of the Gentiles had to regulate at an earlier time in the same district. Nevertheless, and despite the public stamp and purport of the documents, there breathes through both a tenderness of feeling and a personal intimacy which take fit expression in the farewell greeting of 3 John: "*The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name.*" Whether addressed to few or many readers, whether designed for the household of faith or the family circle, these leaflets of the Apostle John are true love-letters,—written as from father to children, from friend to friends.

While these Epistles stand apart from the other writings of St John, a close and curious connexion is traceable between them. In each at the outset "the elder" writes to those (*or to him*) whom he "loves in truth"; in each he speaks of himself as "very much

rejoiced" (a combination of words unique in the New Testament) by what he has "found" (or "heard") as to his correspondents "walking in truth"—an expression of Johannine strain, but confined to these two letters. To Gaius, St John repeats this phrase with emphasis: "Greater joy than this I have not, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (vers. 2, 3), as though Gaius himself belonged to those "children walking in truth" on whom he congratulated the Elect Lady in the previous letter. In both Epistles St John concludes by saying that he "has many things to write" to his friends, which he will not now set down "by paper and ink" (or "ink and pen"), because he "hopes to come to" them ("to see" his dear Gaius "immediately"),—"and mouth to mouth," he says, "we will talk." Now he would be a very stiff, stereotyped writer, who should echo himself thus precisely in two informal letters composed at any distance of time from each other. It is true that St John's theological vocabulary is limited and repetitive; but this is a different matter, and the Epistles are anything but constrained and mechanical. Letters so nearly identical in their setting must have been, one cannot but think, nearly simultaneous in their composition. It was in the course of one and the same visitation that the Apostle John expected to see the "lady" of 2 John and "the beloved Gaius" of 3 John; he writes to both on the eve of his projected tour.

Both letters turn, it must be further observed, on the subject of *hospitality*; they are concerned with the question of the reception of travellers passing from Church to Church and claiming recognition as Christian teachers or missionaries (2 John 7-11, 3 John 5-10). The status of such persons was, as we shall see, a critical question in the Primitive Church. The Elect Lady is sternly warned not to "receive into her house" the bearers of false teaching; and Gaius is highly approved for his entertainment of "brethren," personally "strangers" to him, who "had gone out" on

the service of "the name," by which conduct he has shown himself a "fellow-worker with the truth." At the same time Diotrephes, who has a predominating voice in Gaius' Church, is denounced because "he refuses to receive the brethren"—as, in fact, the Apostle declares, "he refuses us"; more than this, "he hinders those who wish" (like Gaius) to receive the accredited itinerants, "and drives them out of the Church." This state of things, manifestly, was intolerable: the Apostle "hopes to come" to the spot "straightway"; and when he does come, he will reckon with Diotrephes (3 John 10, 14). He "has written a few words to the Church" (so Westcott properly renders the first clause of 3 John 9), along with this confidential note to Gaius; "but" he is doubtful what reception his public missive may have: "he [Diotrephes] receiveth not us"—does not admit our authority. The Epistle to Gaius is designed to supplement that addressed to the Church, and to provide against its possible failure.

*The Second Epistle of John is, we conclude, the very letter referred to in 3 John 9.* The more closely we examine the two, the more germane and twin-like they appear. The caution of 2 John and the commendation of 3 John on the matter of hospitality match and fit into each other; they would be naturally addressed to the same circle—to a Church which was, for some reason or other, disposed to welcome the wrong kind of guests, to entertain heterodox teachers and to shut the door against orthodox and duly accredited visitors. The action of Diotrephes, who instigated the exclusion of the Apostle's friends, is not indeed imputed to heretical leanings on his own part; he is taxed with ambition, and with disloyalty to apostolic rule—"loving to be first" and "in mischievous words prating about us" (3 John 9, 10). Gaius braved this man's displeasure in keeping an open door for St John's emissaries, and had laid the Apostle thereby under great obligation; the service thus rendered to "the truth" was the more



valuable because at this very time, as we learn from the Second Epistle (in agreement with the First), "deceivers and antichrists" were infesting the Asian field, who would not fail to take advantage of the opening afforded by the factious behaviour of Diotrephes.

The Demetrius of 3 John 12 is introduced to Gaius, at the end of the note, apparently as bearing this Letter (possibly *both* letters) with him; the writer tacitly asks on his behalf a continuance of the "well-doing" (vers. 5, 11) by which Gaius had earned his praise and confidence already. St John makes no reference to the letter-carrier in his "few words *to the church*"; but prefers to commend him to private and unofficial hospitality, for fear of exposing Demetrius to the rebuff the Church might give him under the malign influence of Diotrephes. All the more was this likely, if the same Church, or some party in it, was in a mind to admit such enemies of the truth as those described in 2 John 9-11. Demetrius, very probably, was sent on purpose to combat these deniers of the Incarnation, pending the Apostle's appearance on the scene.

Thus read, the two writings become virtually parts of a single document. Like companion stereoscopic pictures, by their combination at the right focus they reproduce the situation and present a living whole. The correspondence of the opening and closing sentences of the two Epistles is not accidental, nor to be accounted for by the author's poverty in epistolary matter; it is due to the fact that he writes the one note directly after the other, in the same vein, in the same mood. 2 John is addressed, in the language of severe admonition combined with the highest appreciation of its Church status, to the body of the endangered Church, which was peculiarly dear to the Apostle; 3 John, in terms of warm encouragement, to a generous-hearted disciple, a beloved and trusted friend of the writer's, belonging to the same Society, but not, as it appears, holding any official charge within it. The two present, in the main, the opposite sides of

the same anxious situation ; together, they prepare the way for the Apostle's approaching visit.

This view of the connexion of the notes—which, by the way, is adopted by critics of such opposite schools as Theodor Zahn and P. W. Schmiedel—helps to explain their survival. Forwarded on the same occasion to the same destination, this couple of papyrus leaves were fastened together and kept as the memorial of a notable crisis in the history of the local Church. They served also as a characteristic memento of the revered Apostle, who had thus interposed effectively at a moment when this Church, which had a traitor in the camp, was in danger of being captured by the Gnostic antichrists, at that time everywhere invading the communities of St John's province in Asia Minor. We may imagine—for we must use our imagination in construing fragments such as these—that the two sheets were attached to the standard copy of John's First (General) Epistle preserved by the Church in question ; and that they passed into circulation from this centre along with the principal Letter. In this way Second and Third John came to be reckoned amongst the seven "catholic" Epistles (James-Jude), because of their association with the "catholic" First of John, although they were themselves of a manifestly local and limited scope.

## HOSPITALITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Importance of the Imperial Roman Roads—Churches echeloned along the Great Highways—W. M. Ramsay upon Travelling at the Christian Era—Hospitality an essential Church Function—Entertainment of Itinerant Ministers—Abuse of Church Hospitality—The Didaché—St John's Solicitude on the subject.

“If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, take him not into your house, and bid him not farewell; for he that bids him farewell, has fellowship with his evil works.”—2 JOHN 10, 11.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Beloved, thou doest a faithful thing in whatsoever thou workest on the brethren,—and strangers withal; who have testified to thy love before the Church. And thou wilt do well in sending them forward in a manner worthy of God; for they have gone forth for the Name’s sake, taking no help from heathen men. We therefore are bound to receive such as these hospitably, that we may show ourselves fellow-workers with the truth.”—3 JOHN 5-8.

## CHAPTER II

### HOSPITALITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

THE Second and Third Epistles of John, we have observed, alike turn on the exercise of hospitality within the Church. To understand the matter and its bearing on Christian life and progress in early times, one must take account of the state of society under the Roman Empire and the means of intercourse between the countries of which it was composed.

In three things the Romans excelled all other peoples—in military discipline, in civil law, and in *road-making*. By these arts they won and built up their world-dominion. The whole south and west of Europe, North Africa, Asia Minor, and the south-west of Continental Asia were linked by a network of highways, skilfully engineered, solidly built, and carefully guarded, which converged to the golden milestone in the Forum of Rome. In no subsequent period, until the invention of the steamship and the railway, has travel been so practicable and so freely practised over so wide an area of the globe, as was the case in the flourishing age of the Empire when Christianity took its rise. The career of the Apostle Paul would have been impossible without the facilities for journeying which the imperial system and the *pax Romana* afforded, and without the conception of a single world-order and world-polity which Rome had stamped upon the mind of the age. The nations round the Mediterranean shores formed at the Christian era one community, where “the field” of

“the world” lay wide open to the sowers of the Gospel seed.<sup>1</sup>

These conditions of life impressed on the organization of the Church from the first a missionary stamp, and gave it the catholic outlook which it has never been able quite to renounce or forget. Each local Church, as the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles show, was set up as a station in the forward march of the body of Christ. At Ephesus, so soon as Macedonia and Greece, along with Asia Minor, had been evangelized, St Paul’s cry was, “I must see *Rome* also!” Announcing his visit to the Roman Christians, he writes, “I hope to see you *by the way*, and by you to be sent forward to *Spain*.” His Churches were ranged along the great roads, like so many Roman colonies of military occupation, “from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum.” They were links in a continuous chain, kept in touch with each other and with the general advance of the Christian cause; they served as the means of transmitting messages and reinforcements all along the line. The Church was instituted as an international propaganda; its foundations were laid out by wise “master-builders,” governed by the idea of the Founder and obedient to His marching orders, “Go into all the world, and preach the good news to the whole creation.” Seeds of the new life were borne by all the currents and tides of the age along the routes of government and commerce, which stretched from Armenia to Britain and from the German Ocean to the African desert, from frontier to frontier of the Empire. The Church-system of the New Testament is based on the two vital principles of local spiritual fellowship and world-evangelism,—principles which were applied with freedom and elasticity to the necessities of the situation and the hour.

Under these circumstances it is obvious that hospi-

<sup>1</sup> See on the whole subject the copious article of W. M. Ramsay in the Extra Volume of Hastings’ *Dictionary of the Bible*—“Roads and Travel (in N.T.).”

tality was no mere luxury, no external and secondary grace of Church life; it formed a conspicuous feature of early Christianity, and played a vital part in its economy. Ancient society generally gave to the relations of guest and host a larger and more sacred place than they occupy amongst ourselves. The comforts of the modern hotel, or even of the village inn, were then unknown. Provision of this kind did not keep pace in the old civilization with the improvement in roads and conveyance, and fell far short of the requirements of the travelling public. Another reason forbade Christians on their journeys to make use of the places of common entertainment: "the ancient inns" (says Sir W. M. Ramsay, in the article above referred to) "were little removed from houses of ill-fame. . . . The profession of inn-keeper was dishonourable, and their infamous character is often noted in Roman laws." This fact alone made organized hospitality imperative amongst Christians; the Church could not expose its members, whether journeying on public or private errands, "to the corrupt and nauseous surroundings of the inns kept by persons of the worst class in existing society."

We can understand, therefore, the stress that is laid on the virtue of hospitality in New Testament ethics, and the fact that *φιλοξενία* (*love of strangers*) ranks with *φιλαδελφία* (*love of brethren*) in Hebrews 13. 1. Devotion to Christ and the Gospel blended with the affections of a humane and Christian heart in the cultivation of this grace; and worldly wealth was valued because it supplied the means for its exercise. A hospitable disposition is marked out in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 3. 2; Tit. 1. 8) amongst the prime qualifications for eldership in the local Churches; in 1 Peter 4. 8-10 "hospitality" is represented as the due manifestation of "fervent love" on the part of those who are "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Very significantly the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5. 3-10 specifies this as the mark, at Ephesus, of "a widow indeed," one

who deserves to be placed on the church-roll for honourable maintenance, that she shall have "shown hospitality to strangers" and "washed the saints' feet." On the other hand, "the messengers of the churches," who were the first claimants on such attentions, are described (2 Cor. 8. 23) as "the glory of Christ," since in their movements His authority and the spread of His kingdom shine forth; those who have Christian strangers at their table are compared with the "entertainers of angels" (Heb. 13. 2).

While inter-Church communication was thus carried on through letter and messenger in Apostolic and Post-apostolic times and missionaries were constantly being forwarded to the front, private Christians and their families (as in the case of Aquila and his wife, and of "the household of Chloë": Acts 18. 2, 18; Rom. 16. 3; 1 Cor. 1. 11) migrated freely in search of employment or to escape persecution. With well-to-do people, in the age of the early Roman Empire, travelling for health or diversion or self-improvement was a fashionable thing; and Christians were affected by corresponding motives. Dr Dobschütz observes, in his interesting work on the *Christian Life in the Primitive Church* (p. 326), that "amongst the Christians of that period [A.D. 50-150] there was developed a keen desire to move about. This was due to their release from former narrow notions of home, and to their striving after fellowship with the scattered companions of their faith." At Rome in particular—a city of continual resort—he thinks that the primitive "bishops" had for their most important office the direction and oversight of hospitality, while the care of the poor was relegated to the "deacons." All this goes to show the gravity of the question agitated in the community to which St John directed his Second and Third Epistles; for the right exercise of hospitality involved the comity and communion of the Churches generally, the maintenance of Apostolic authority and of unity in faith amongst them, and the continued propagation of the Gospel. On



these accounts, and from their bearing on a matter which intimately affected all Churches, the short and semi-private notes preserved in 2 and 3 John fairly deserve the dignified title of "Catholic Epistles."

The reference in 3 John 7 to the travellers whom the Apostle accredits, as going forth "taking nothing of the Gentiles,"<sup>1</sup> is interesting in this connexion. The messengers of the Gospel, it would seem, might in some instances have found entertainment on their way with unconverted Gentile hosts; they are commended for declining such proffers. Liberal men of culture, in the Græco-Roman cities, here and there kept open house for philosophers or religious teachers of repute travelling their way, who chose to make themselves agreeable; toleration and breadth of view were affected in educated circles. By this time the Christian doctrine held a recognized footing in the Roman province of Asia—the Apostle Paul himself had made "friends" in the rank of "the Asiarchs" (Acts 19. 31), the official heads of the provincial Pagan worship; and the profession of faith in Christ, though proscribed by the Government, was not everywhere socially discreditable. Christianity was a phenomenon of the age, and had become an object of curiosity with the students of religion and the philosophical dilettanti, who were tolerably numerous amongst the leisured classes of Asia Minor; so that in some places it may not have been difficult for a distinguished advocate of this remarkable creed to find lodging and entertainment in a fashionable house, by paying the price due for this sort of patronage. One can understand the temptation thus presenting itself to "spoil the Egyp-

<sup>1</sup> The term here used is not, according to the corrected reading (*ἰθνηκῶν* for *ἰθνηῶν* of the T.R.), the common Greek word for *Gentiles*, but that employed in Matthew 5. 47, 6. 7, 18. 17, which signifies *of Gentile state* or *disposition*—i.e. *heathen, Pagan* by religion, rather than *Gentile* by race. The Apostle would not, we presume, forbid his agents to be guests with Gentiles who were friendly to the faith and disposed to conversion; to stay in a household that was decidedly *heathen in character*, was a different matter.

tians" and to make the heathen contribute to the furtherance of the Gospel—especially in a neighbourhood where, for any reason, Christian maintenance was not forthcoming or was grudgingly given.

When Gaius therefore opened his door to St John's representatives, despite the attempt of Diotrephes to boycott the latter, he made it possible for them to visit a Church from which otherwise they would have been excluded, since it was their strict rule to lodge in none but Christian homes. Following this maxim, missionaries entering a new sphere of labour would be supported by funds brought with them and by the labour of their own hands, or by help remitted from the nearest Christian station, as in the case of the Apostle Paul and his companions in Macedonia (see Phil. 4. 15, 16). At Thessalonica, as at Philippi, the missionaries took up their abode with the first whose "heart the Lord opened" to receive the Good News. But this generous "love of the stranger" became a peril to the Churches. Just as the charity of the brotherhood laid it open to imposition and the Apostle Paul was compelled to warn his converts, in one of his earliest letters, against idlers and mischief-makers who preferred to eat the Church's bread "for nought" (2 Thess. 3. 6-12), so their free-handed hospitalities exposed the Christian societies to invasion. "False brethren stole in" for malicious purposes (Gal. 2. 4), bringing with them "commendatory letters" (2 Cor. 3. 1) dishonestly obtained: "false apostles" St Paul calls some of these, "deceitful workers" and plausible as "angels of light" (2 Cor. 11. 13-15). Such intruders—Judæan legalists of the worst type—dogged St Paul's footsteps during great part of his ministry.

The danger incident to the misuse of Christian benevolence toward strangers became aggravated in later times. The ancient Church Manual entitled *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (or briefly the *Didaché*) devotes two out of its sixteen chapters to this subject; it gives striking evidence of the perpetua-

tion of an itinerant ministry in the early Church, and moreover of the jealousy that proved to be needful in dispensing hospitality and in verifying the credentials of visitors pretending to the Christian name. This Directory seems to have been drawn up for the use of Syrian or Palestinian Churches, and possibly before the end of the first century; in that case it was contemporary with the letters under review, though belonging to a distant province. It shows that the right ordering of hospitality was at this time a matter of universal interest, affecting the well-being of the Christian fellowship everywhere. The following are the chief instructions of the *Didaché* bearing on the point:—

(Chaps. xi, xii.) “Whosoever comes, and teaches you the things aforesaid [in the previous chapters], receive him. But if the teacher himself turn aside and teach another doctrine, so as to overthrow these things, refuse to listen to him; but if he teach so as to increase knowledge and fear of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. As concerns the apostles<sup>1</sup> and prophets, act according to the rule prescribed in the Gospel; let every apostle coming to you be received in the Lord. Moreover, he shall not stay just one day, but a second also, if there be need; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet! And when he leaves you, let the apostle take nothing except bread sufficing him till he reaches his next lodging; if he ask for money, he is a false prophet. . . . Whoso saith in the Spirit, “Give me money, or other things,” you shall not listen to him; but if he bid you give for others, who are in want, let no one judge him. But let every one who comes in the name of the Lord be welcomed; afterwards you will get to know him, when you have tried him; for you will have understanding of “right and left.” If the new-comer is on a journey, help him as much as you can; and he shall tarry with you two or three days, if necessary—not more. And if he desires to settle with you, having a trade, let him “work and eat”; but if he has no trade, provide for him as your judgement may suggest, seeing to it that no Christian shall abide with you in idleness. But if he refuses these terms, he is a *Christ-trafficker* [one, that is, who makes a trade of his Christianity, and (as we should say) sponges on the Church]. Beware of such!”

St John was compelled toward the end of his life

<sup>1</sup> The word *apostle* is still used in its wider N.T. sense (compare Acts 14. 4, Rom. 16. 7), of Christian *emissaries* or *missionaries* generally: a mark of early date.

to fence his Churches, under circumstances somewhat similar to those above described. They were being overrun by a swarm of "false prophets" and "antichrists," acting more or less in concert with each other. These were errorists of a new school and type, the forerunners of second-century Gnosticism (see Chap. VI, below). In the second and fourth chapters of the First Epistle he denounces them at length and in definite terms; this whole writing is, as we shall see, a polemic against them. The Apostle warns "the Elect Lady and her children" against them in the Second Epistle: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in flesh<sup>1</sup> (comp. pp. 315-317): this is the deceiver and the antichrist. . . . Every one who goes forward and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, has not God" (vers. 7-9). The Incarnate Godhead of Jesus, he declares, is the test by which the character of the teachers of error will be detected, through the "chrism" (the "anointing") which constitutes true Christians and which they "have from the Holy One" (1 John 2. 26, 27; 4. 1-3). The First Epistle discloses this invasion threatening the entire field of St John's jurisdiction; the two minor Epistles show the "deceivers and antichrists" on the point of gaining entrance into one of the most important communities in this region, through the welcome that might be given to them in ignorance of their real opinions and designs, and under the influence of an ambitious man who has chosen to set himself against the Apostle's authority.

<sup>1</sup> Ἰ.Χ. ἐρχόμενον ἐν σαρκί (Greek present participle)—"who do not confess Jesus Christ as one coming in flesh," *i.e.*, do not confess Him in this sense, in this character; but in 1 John 4. 2, Ἰ.Χ. ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα (Greek perfect)—"which does not confess Jesus Christ as come in flesh," *i.e.*, does not confess the reality of His incarnation, denies the accomplished fact.

## THE ELECT LADY

The Words *ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία*—Theory of Dr Rendel Harris—Vindication of rendering “Lady”—Proof of the Public Destination of 2 John—Ladyship of the Church—The Apostle’s relations to the Church in question—Possibility of identifying the “Elect Lady.”

“The Elder to the Elect Lady and her children, whom I love in truth—and not I alone, but also all those who have known the truth—for the truth’s sake that abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever. There shall be with us grace, mercy, peace from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

I was greatly gladdened that I have found some of thy children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, Lady—not as though writing a new commandment to thee, but that which we had from the beginning—that we love one another ; and this is love, that we walk according to His commandments : this is the commandment, as you heard from the beginning, that in it you should walk. . . . The children of thy Elect Sister salute thee.”  
—2 JOHN 1-6, 13.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ELECT LADY

SOME reasons were given in Chapter I for holding that the Second Epistle of John was addressed to a *church* and not to a private Christian family, under the title of "The Elect Lady and her children." We have proceeded so far upon that supposition, which enabled us to bring 2 and 3 John into close connexion and imparts to their combined contents a solid and definite meaning. The case for the collective destination of 2 John rests on grounds additional to those previously stated; on those further considerations we will now enter. We venture to think not only that the Apostle sent this dispatch to a Christian community of his charge and that the "Elect Lady" of 2 John was a personification and not a person, but that it is possible to point, with some probability, to the very place of destination.

The ἐκλεκτὴ κυρία of St John's Greek has received many interpretations.

1. Each of the terms has been read as a proper noun, qualified by the other: "to Electa the lady" (so Grotius, for instance); or, "to the elect Kyria" (or "Cyria": marginal rendering of the American Revisers, after the ancient Syrian Version). But *Eklekté* occurs nowhere else in Greek, *Kyria* rarely, as a woman's name; and Greek grammar protests strongly against the second rendering above given. 3 John 1 exemplifies the order proper to the Greek words when a qualifying

epithet is attached to a proper name: "to Gaius the beloved." The title "elect" belongs alike to the *kyria* and her "sister" (ver. 13); for it is a designation common to the Christian state. Both are epithets; they describe by their combination the character and status of the party addressed. She is "elect"—that is, "chosen of God"—as much as to say, *Christian*; similarly the body of Christian believers is addressed in 1 Peter 2. 9 as "a chosen race." And she is a "lady"—or even "the lady" (for the Greek noun, wanting the definite article, appears to be used of her by way of eminence and as a recognized title)—in virtue of her rank and dignity.

2. Another turn has been given to the question by that brilliant scholar and fine spiritual thinker, Dr J. Rendel Harris.<sup>1</sup> He maintains that *κυρία* "was a term of endearment, and neither a title of dignity nor a proper name," and thinks that he "has completely exploded the two notions that the letter is addressed either to a church or a prehistoric Countess of Huntingdon." Egyptian exploration has discovered stores of Greek papyrus documents of the centuries preceding and following the Christian era, which throw an unexpected and sometimes startling light upon the language and literary forms of the New Testament writings; amongst these are hundreds of private letters, upon all sorts of business. Dr Rendel Harris cites two of these epistles in illustration of the Second of John, both of which are curiously interesting. The first (dated in the third century, A.D.) is a polite invitation from a gentleman named "Petosiris" to "my lady Serenia" ("my dear Serenia," as the editors of the Oxyrrhyncus papyri translate *κυρία*), "to come up on the 20th to the birthday festival of the god"; Petosiris wants to know whether she will "come by boat or donkey," so that he may send accordingly. Twice in this short note of six

<sup>1</sup> In a paper entitled "The Problem of the Address to the Second Epistle of John," which appeared in the *Expositor* for March, 1901; Series VI, vol. iii, pp. 194-203.



lines the word *κυρία* is repeated parenthetically by Petosiris, just as by John in verse 5 of our Epistle. The repetition may be, in both instances, a symptom of tender urgency, and the Egyptian letter has an air of familiarity; but the tone of entreaty need not detract from the respectfulness proper to the word, any more than when "Madam" or "My lady" is so used in English; one sees no sufficient reason for rendering Petosiris' salutation—much less St John's, which is differently worded—"My dear" instead of "My lady." Tenderness does not exclude courtesy; love enhances the dignity of the beloved and observes a delicate respect.

In the other of Dr Harris' chief examples, a father absent from home and in concern at not hearing from his son, writes to him as "My son, Master (*κύριος*) Dionysitheon," and salutes him at the end of the letter as "Sir son" (*κύριε υἱέ!*)! This touch of playfulness any fond father can understand. The Egyptian paterfamilias quite revels in polite expressions; in the course of his letter he calls his boy "My lord" as well as "Sir," varying *κύριος* with *δεσπότης*, and speaks of his wife as "My mistress (*δεσποίνα*) your mother." There is nothing here to prove any radical change of verbal usage. Nor in the fact that, as Dr J. H. Moulton says,<sup>1</sup> "The title *kyrios* applied to a brother or other near relation, is not uncommon" in the papyri. Formality, affectation, habit—a hundred different humours—dictate the exchange of such titles amongst relatives or intimates, in ancient as in modern letters, without destroying their proper use or bringing them down to the level of mere fondness.

3. The above parallels furnish, in our opinion, no reason for stripping *kyria* in this instance of its dignified significance; we need not doubt that when St John addressed his correspondent (matron, or church) as the "elect lady" he desired to show her, along with his affection, a proper deference and to mark out her

<sup>1</sup> *Expositor*, February, 1903; Series VI, vol. vii, p. 116.

eminence amongst her "elect" sisters. While the appellations κύριος, κυρία (our *lord, lady; sir, madam*), might be and often were employed in familiar intercourse, like the corresponding terms amongst ourselves, at the same time they served to denote the highest social distinction and authority. A woman's guardian is called, in the papyri, her κύριος; a governor or state-official—sometimes the emperor himself—is addressed as κύριε; occasionally κύριος is used even of a god, so that its application to the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and to Jesus Christ in the New, is not without Pagan parallels (see 1 Cor. 8. 5, 6). The highest associations attaching to κυρία must surely have been present to St John's mind in a context like this.

The qualifying adjunct "elect" lifts us into the region of Christian calling and dignity. In such a combination one can hardly suppose that the Apostle indicates by κυρία nothing more than the worldly rank of her to whom he writes; we surrender to Dr Harris' criticism, without any regret, the apostolic Countess of Huntingdon. On the other hand, κυρία does not suggest eminence in personal Christian service. In that case the lady concerned must have been a person of very great note indeed; for the Apostle describes her as beloved "not only" by himself, "but" by "all who have known the truth"—by the Christian Church everywhere. It would be strange, if so, that her name is not given, and that we hear of her from no other quarter. On the strength of 2 John 1, it has been conjectured that *Mary, the mother of Jesus*, was intended—she is the one woman of the New Testament to whom such words in their full sense might apply; but every one sees the anachronism and incongruity of the suggestion. There was more than one church, however, in Asia Minor of which so much could be said without exaggeration.

The closing salutation of verse 13 speaks for the public destination of 2 John. How odd, when one comes to think of it, for "the children" of a private family in Ephesus to send their respects to their aunt

through the Apostle John, and for him to close his solemn Epistle with this trivial message! But a greeting *from church to church* is just in apostolic style, and highly appropriate here (see Rom. 16. 16; 1 Cor. 16. 19, 20; Phil. 4. 21). 1 Peter 5. 13—addressed, amongst others, “to the elect sojourners of the dispersion . . . in Asia”—supplies a near parallel, in the words “she that is elect with you [viz., the sister church] in Balylon, saluteth you.” It is another anomaly, on the domestic theory of 2 John, that while so many persons, of two distinct families, are referred to, the letter is as barren of personal names as 1 John; whereas 3 John, as is natural in a private letter, furnishes three such names.

St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians and the Apocalypse of St John (see p. 5 above) in the strongest terms identify the Church with Christ as His bride and spouse. Now *κυρία* is the feminine of *κύριος*, Christ’s own title of “the Lord.” The correspondence was obvious to the Greek ear and eye; and the conception formed by St Paul and St John of the Church’s mystic union with the Redeemer, and her supremacy in the Divine order of the world, is fitly expressed by ascribing to her a *lady-ship*, understood as matching in some sort His *lord-ship*. The hateful perversion by Rome of the Apostolic doctrine of the Church has made us shrink, to our loss, from thoughts of the grandeur and authority that belong to the Christian communion in the light of such sayings as we have referred to; but they are there none the less, and must be reckoned with. What is true of the Church at large, may be applied in particular; each limb partakes of the sacredness of the body. Hence St Paul declared of the Christian society at Corinth, though in character so far beneath its ideal status, “I espoused you to one husband, to present you a chaste maiden to Christ” (2 Cor. 11. 2).

This mode of personification was by no means strange in early times. Great communities, cities and kingdoms, were habitually represented under the image of a noble

woman; their coins and medals bore the effigy of a crowned female head—like the figure of *Britannia*, for instance, upon our own currency. In Isaiah 62. 4, 5 the restored Zion becomes “Beulah”—“married” to her God: on the other hand, the “virgin daughter of Babylon,” “the lady of kingdoms,” is seen in chapter 47. 1-7 thrust from her “throne” and sitting in the dust; and by way of contrast to Christ’s pure Bride, St John presents, in Revelation 17 and 18, the awful vision of the world’s mistress, that other Madam—viz., the city of Rome and the imperial power—bearing “upon her forehead a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth, . . . drunken with the blood of the saints,” who “says in her heart, I sit a queen!”

In this vein of imagery, by way of reminding the Church addressed of her dignity and the responsibilities it entails, St John accosts her as “the elect lady.” The term which in common speech denoted the mistress of the house, or even the empress sharing the world’s throne, belongs to her whom the Lord Christ has set by His side, concerning whom He said through St John, addressing one of His least worthy Churches, “He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in His throne” (Rev. 3. 21); and to another of the Seven, “He that overcometh . . . to him will I give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron . . . as I also have received of my Father; and I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2. 26-28). Those pictures of the Church triumphant unfold and project into the future the image that is suggested here of the *κυρία*, wedded partner with the *κύριος* in the Father’s house. By substituting this idea for that of St John’s supposed “lady-friend” or of some primitive “Countess of Huntingdon,” we do not lose the tenderness of his expression; but we attribute to the Apostle a larger and sublimer sentiment, in exchange for the slight and common-place.

Reading the Epistle with this conception of its destination in our minds, we find a fuller meaning in its statements and appeals. The Lady Church of the letter is known and loved far and wide; "the truth" of Christianity is lodged with her, along with others (ver. 2; comp. 1 Tim. 3. 15). "Some [not all] of" her "children" the Apostle has met with elsewhere, who have cheered him by their Christian consistency (ver. 4). When he "asks," in tones of personal urgency, that the "love" cherished between himself and this "lady" of Christ may be continued (vers. 5, 6; comp. 1 John 2. 7-14, 22-25),<sup>1</sup> it is because there are "many deceivers" abroad, "who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh"—men who reject with the fact the very idea of the Incarnation (ver. 7); their "teaching" would rob the Church of all that the Apostle had imparted to her ("See that ye lose not the things which *we* wrought," ver. 8, RV; comp. Gal. 4. 11), and of its own "full reward"—would, in fact, take away from the "lady" her Lord Himself (ver. 9). The crucial point of the letter is reached in verses 10, 11, when the Church is warned that the teachers above described must have no entertainment in any Christian house; and is told that whoever receives them, knowing their business, will be counted their accomplice (contrast herewith Matt. 10. 41).

The Apostle fears lest the fellowship of his readers with himself and the rest of the Church should be broken; as it certainly will be, if "the deceiver and the antichrist" obtains a footing in the community and it is thus seduced from its loyalty to Christ. This solicitude, and the urgent language of 2 John 5, 6, we can better understand if 3 John was written to the same

<sup>1</sup> The thought of Christ's "new commandment" of love (see John 13. 34) as the "old commandment" dating from the beginning is very characteristic of St John (see Chap. XI, below); also the identity of "love" and "commandment-keeping" (John 14. 15, 15. 10; 1 John 5. 3). It is worth observing that the combination "Grace, mercy, peace" of this salutation occurs besides only in 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy 1. 1, addressed to *Ephesus*.

quarter; on this assumption (see Chapter I above) it appears that a leading officer of the Church intended at this very time is "prating about" the Apostle "with wicked words" and "is driving out of the Church" those who admit his representatives (3 John 9, 10). What St John has "written with paper and ink" is but a little of all he desires to say to his readers. He "hopes to come" to them soon, under such conditions that their "joy may be fulfilled" (ver. 12). This, of course, depends on the way in which the entreaty and warning of his letter are received (comp. 2 Cor. 2. 1, 2).

4. Granted that the "lady" of St John's cares was a *church*, one can hardly forbear asking, *What church?*

There are indications affording ground for a fair conjecture. In the first place, the Church in question was in this Apostle's province, for he writes both letters to Christians personally known to him and under his authority; it lay within the range of his visitations and of the journeyings of his delegates. This limits us to *the province of Asia and the region of the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse*.

Secondly, the Church we are seeking must have been amongst the most prominent in the region, since it is the object of love on the part of "all who have known the truth" (ver. 1)—language which reminds us of that used by the Apostle Paul concerning the Church of Rome (Rom. 1. 8) and that of Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1. 8).<sup>1</sup> Now, the first three cities on the Apocalyptic list—*Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum*—meet this condition; each of them possessed a world-wide fame, in which the Christian communities planted there could not but participate. Ephesus is excluded by the fact that it was the place of the Apostle's residence; the Ephesian Church, we may presume, was the "elect sister" of

<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria seems to have understood *Rome* (under the name of *Babylon*) as the *Elect Lady*, and this view has been occasionally revived. Dom Chapman argues ingeniously in *The Journal of Theol. Studies* (April and July, 1904), for *Thessalonica* as the destination of 3 John, and *Rome* of 2 John.

verse 13. There is something to be said in favour of *Smyrna*, which stood only second to Ephesus in commercial activity and in importance for Christian travel. The Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp show how large a place Smyrna occupied to the eye of the catholic Church in post-apostolic days. But, on the whole, we must give our vote to *Pergamum*.

Compared with her rivals, Pergamum was at the disadvantage of lying fifteen miles from the coast, and out of the line of the great highways of Asia Minor; from these causes she lost her ascendancy in the second century, and makes no great figure in Christian history. For all that, up to the present time she was, as Pliny the Younger calls her, "the most renowned city of Asia." In dignity she was the queen. Pergamum had been the seat of the powerful Attalid dynasty, from whom Rome took over the rule of Asia Minor; it was still the residence of the Proconsul and the official capital of the province. This city gained new influence from the fact that it reared the first temple to the deity of Augustus (B.C. 29), and thus became the centre in Asia Minor of the Cæsar-worship, which was made the state-religion of the Empire. On this account probably (as Sir W. M. Ramsay has shown) Pergamum is designated by St John as the place "where Satan's throne is"; to these conditions, again, it was due that in Pergamum the blood of the first "martyr" of the province was shed (Rev. 2. 13). Ramsay, whose work on *The Letters to the Seven Churches* marks an epoch for the students of St John, as his book on *St Paul the Traveller* did for the students of St Paul, thus describes Pergamum:—

"No city of the whole of Asia Minor . . . possesses the same imposing and dominating aspect. It is the one city of the land which forced from me the exclamation, *A royal city!* . . . There is something unique and overpowering in its effect, planted as it is on its magnificent hill, standing out boldly in the level plain, and dominating the valley and the mountains on the south" (p. 295).

These conditions, unless imagination deceives us, point out the Church of Pergamum as "the elect lady" of

2 John. While the name *κῤῥία* might on occasion be applied to any Church of Christ, this was the one locality within St John's jurisdiction for which the epithet spontaneously suggested itself, and to which pre-eminently it was appropriate. Ramsay has illustrated, with abundant wealth of detail, St John's lively feeling for local features and traditions; the Letters to the Seven Churches, as he reads them, teem with allusions of this nature. The unique address of his Second Epistle, if our conjecture be sound, is an example of the same aptitude on the Apostle's part. If there was one city above all others in Asia that would be recognized by her neighbours, and would recognize herself through her history and situation, as "the elect lady," beyond question it was Pergamum. The heading of Ramsay's Chapter on Pergamum, *The Royal City, the City of Authority*, is in effect a paraphrase of St John's *κῤῥία*. This grand title at once reflects the dignity attaching to the site and surroundings of the Church of Pergamum, and the majesty which belongs to the Church herself as Christ's elect and the destined partner of His throne.

The censure passed upon the Pergamenes in the Apocalyptic Letter (Rev. 2. 14-16) is in keeping with the apprehension disclosed in this Epistle. *A false toleration* was the bane of that Church; she "holds fast" her Master's "name," and yet harbours disloyal and corrupting teachers, against whom the Lord will "war with the sword of His mouth." If 2 John be later in date than the Apocalypse (and this seems more likely), then the language of verses 10, 11 was grounded on experience of the mistaken charity of the Church of Pergamum; if earlier, the corruption indicated in Revelation 2. 14-16 would show that this warning had been unheeded or forgotten. *The worldly pride* of Pergamum (comp. the observations on "Diotrephes" in Chapter IV) is silently corrected by the entreaty for *love* toward her Apostle and toward her "elect sister" of Ephesus (2 John 5, 6, 13).



## GAIUS, DEMETRIUS, DIOTREPES

3 John full of Personalities—Three Typical Characters of late Apostolic Times—The Gaiuses of the New Testament—Gaius of Pergamum—His Characterization—The name Demetrius—A Travelling Assistant of St John—His Visit to Gaius' Church—The Triple Testimony to him—Diotrephes the Marplot—Significance of his Name—Nature of his Influence—His Insolence toward the Apostle—Indications of the State of the Johannine Churches.

“The Elder to Gaius, the beloved, whom I love in truth. Beloved, in all things I pray that thou mayest be prosperous and in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I have been greatly gladdened as brethren came and testified to thy truth, according as thou walkest in truth. A greater joy (*or* grace) I have not than these tidings, that I may hear of my own children walking in the truth. . . .

“I have written somewhat to the Church ; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us. On this account, if I come, I will call to remembrance the works that he doeth, with wicked words prating of us ; and not contenting himself with this, he neither receives the brethren himself, and those wishful to do so he hinders and drives out of the Church. . . .

“To Demetrius witness has been borne by all, and by the truth itself ; and we bear witness besides, and thou knowest that our witness is true.”  
—3 JOHN 1-4, 9, 10, 12.

## CHAPTER IV

### GAIUS, DEMETRIUS, DIOTREPES

THE Third Epistle of John is as distinctly personal as the Second is general and impersonal in its terms. The three names of *Gaius*, *Diotrephes*, *Demetrius* supply the topics of the letter, dividing its contents into three paragraphs, viz., verses 2-8; 9, 10; 11, 12. The personalities they represent are sharply distinguished and thrown into relief in these brief, pregnant lines: Gaius, a sincere and lovable disciple, with liberal means keeping open heart and open house for Christian travellers, and proving himself a "good steward of God's manifold grace" under circumstances that severely taxed his generosity and tested his fidelity; Diotrephes, the ambitious Church officer, greedy of place and power, plying a clever, unscrupulous tongue, insolent toward authority above him and overbearing to those beneath him; Demetrius, the active, loyal, and justly popular minister and travelling assistant of the Apostle.

These three are typical characters of later Apostolic times. The first appears to have been a private member of the local Church. The second held, under some title or other, an office enabling him to exercise a preponderating influence in the same community. The third comes from the Apostle's side; he belongs to that important body of agents employed in the primitive Church as "prophets," "teachers," or "evangelists," who travelled from place to place, linking together the

scattered Christian societies by their visits of edification and breaking ground for the Gospel in new districts, a body formed in the first instance of what one may call the headquarters' staff and *attachés* of the Apostolic Chiefs. Gaius and Demetrius stand for the sound and staunch constituency of the Johannine Churches, which was found both in the laity and the ministry, amid the settled life of city communities and in the wider interplay of activity and mutual service that went on between limb and limb of the great body of Christ. Diotrepes represents the tares amidst Christ's wheat; he is the prototype of the diseased self-importance, the local jealousies and false independence, that have so often destroyed the peace of Churches, making unity of action and a common discipline amongst them things so difficult to maintain.

1. GAIUS (Latin *Caius*) was a familiar personal name of this period. Originally a Latin *prænomen* (forename, like our *Thomas* or *James*), it spread with Roman influence in the East, being frequently given to slaves and freedmen. In Greek circles it therefore bore a somewhat plebeian stamp; but amongst the Romans it was occasionally used for their distinctive appellation by persons of eminence, as by the emperor Gaius (Caligula) in the first century and the famous lawyer Gaius in the second. Three other Gaiuses are known from the New Testament: *Gaius of Corinth*, whom St Paul baptized with his own hand (I Cor. 1. 14), subsequently his host "and host of the whole church" (which means, we presume, that he entertained Christian travellers from all quarters: Rom. 16. 23) in that city; *Gaius of Derbe*, coupled with Timothy (of Lystra), who attended the Apostle of the Gentiles when he carried the contributions of his Churches for the relief of the Christian poor in Jerusalem (Acts 20. 4); the *Macedonian Gaius*, who along with Aristarchus was seized by the Ephesian mob as Paul's accomplice, is the third of this name belonging to the Pauline circle (Acts 19. 29).

It is against probability to identify St John's Gaius, in another region of the Church and at an interval of forty years, with St Paul's friend at Corinth; the coincidence of name is as little surprising as it would be to find two hospitable Methodist *Smiths* in distant counties of England. There is, however, a fragment of tradition suggesting that the Gaius of 3 John was *the Gaius of Acts 20. 4*: the *Apostolical Constitutions* (vii. 46) relates that Gaius of Derbe was appointed by the Apostle John Bishop of Pergamum. This statement falls in with the view set forth in the last chapter, that 3 John, along with 2 John, was directed to the Church of *Pergamum*; in view of 3 John 10, it suggests the conjecture that Diotrephes was deposed by the Apostle and the worthy Gaius set in his place. The *Apostolical Constitutions*, though not earlier than the fifth century, is a work derived from older sources and contains morsels of genuine history. But the identification is precarious, considering the distance of time involved. Moreover St John speaks of Gaius as one of his "own children" (ver. 4), whereas the Derbean Gaius was a convert of St Paul's. The writer makes no reference to Gaius' age and his earlier services, such as would have been appropriate and almost inevitable in the address of 3 John, had he been associated with the beginnings of Christianity in Asia Minor and the early days of the Gentile mission. We incline to think that the author of the *Constitutions* correctly records the name of Gaius as raised to office by St John's appointment (registers of this kind were long extant), but has by a mistaken guess identified the Pergamene bishop with St Paul's earlier comrade.

Gaius of Pergamum (as we venture to distinguish him) was, like Polycarp the martyr bishop of Smyrna, St John's true child in the faith, and was a man of like simplicity of character. His steady "walk in the truth" has given to the Apostle the "greatest joy" that a Christian teacher can experience (vers. 3-5); and this at a time and in a region in which "many

antichrists" are found, many who have "gone out" from the Apostolic fold into ways of error (1 John 2. 18-27; 2 John 7-11). Gaius is marked as "the beloved" amongst St John's children—"whom I love in truth" (ver. 1): four times in twelve verses is he so addressed. His disposition was amiable, and his Christian character had developed in an altogether admirable way; the writer can only wish that in other respects he were as prosperous as he is in the matters of "the soul" (ver. 2). The emphasis thrown on *health* in this connexion points to something amiss there; beside this, the behaviour of Diotrepes had brought trouble upon Gaius, whose expulsion was even attempted (vers. 9, 10).

Repeatedly<sup>1</sup> Christians had come from Gaius' neighbourhood, either emissaries of the Apostle or private members of the Church travelling or in migration, having all of them something to say in praise of him; to his "love," shown by unstinted hospitality, testimony has been borne "before the Church" of Ephesus (ver. 6), since this kind of service was a matter of public interest and was indispensable to the furtherance of the Gospel (see Chap. II). Gaius' entertainment of strangers was indeed a signal act of faith (ver. 5), and constituted him a "fellow-worker with the truth" (ver. 8); he "will be doing well" in continuing to "send forward in a manner worthy of God" those who pass through his city marked with the stamp and token of Christ's "name" (vers. 5, 7). At the present time, it appears that Gaius was the one man of position in his Church on whom St John could rely—the Apostle doubts whether the companion letter (see Chap. I) addressed to the Church will be received (ver. 9); his was the one door that John's messengers could count on finding open to them when they came that way. But for Gaius, the Christian society in this place might have severed itself from the Apostolic communion, while

<sup>1</sup> The *present* tense in the Greek participles of verse 3 implies repetition: "I was greatly gladdened as brethren came from time to time and testified to thy faith," &c.

it welcomed the Antichristian errorists (granting that 2 John is the letter intended in 3 John 9). An important link would thus be broken in the chain of Churches running through Asia Minor, which formed a vital cord of Christendom.

There is nothing to indicate that Gaius was a man of intellectual mark or popular gifts. He may have been put into office later, as tradition in the *Apostolical Constitutions* signifies; but we know him only as a well-to-do and liberal-handed layman. Warmth of heart, sound judgement and unflinching loyalty—these were his conspicuous qualities; by their exercise he rendered to the kingdom of God a service beyond price, and his name will be held in remembrance “wherever this gospel shall be preached.”

2. By the side of Gaius stands DEMETRIUS, introduced with this letter in his hand by the commendation of verse 12. Demetrius' name is pure Greek—derived from that of *Demeter* (Latin *Ceres*), the goddess-mother of the fields and crops—and was fairly common in all ranks of life. St Paul's opponent at Ephesus, “the silversmith” (Acts 19), is the only other Demetrius in the New Testament; his Ephesian residence and ability for public work are considerations favouring the notion of identity. One would like to think that the idol-maker had become a witness for the true God; but there is no evidence of the fact.

The name “Demas,” of Colossians 4. 14 and 2 Timothy 4. 10, is probably short for “Demetrius.” That deserter of St Paul is found in our Demetrius by a recent writer,<sup>1</sup> who on the strength of this correspondence supposes 3 John to have been addressed to *Thessalonica* with a view to the reinstating of “Demas,” whose reception in the Thessalonian Church was (on this hypothesis) resisted by Diotrophes out of loyalty to the Apostle of

<sup>1</sup> See the articles of Dom Chapman, O.S.B., in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, April and July, 1904, referred to also on p. 30 above.

the Gentiles! But this theory labours under many improbabilities; and we may take it that the Demetrius of 3 John, whether connected with the old shrine-maker of Ephesus or not, belonged to the mission-staff under St John's direction and was employed in the province of Asia. Presumably he was a stranger to Gaius, and had not hitherto visited this particular Church.

Verse 11 leads up to the eulogy upon Demetrius, setting him in contrast with Diotrephes (vers. 9, 10); in the latter Gaius will see "the bad" to be avoided; in the former "the good" to be "imitated." Since in verse 6 Gaius is urged to continue his aid to "foreign brethren" on their travels, it seems that Demetrius is expected to come to him in this capacity, along with companions whom the Apostle is dispatching on farther errands. From the fact that Demetrius is praised as one "attested by the truth," we gather that he is visiting Gaius' Church in order to uphold the true Christian doctrine and practice, which were imperilled by the action of Diotrephes and by the inclination here manifest to entertain heretical teaching (2 John 9-11). Demetrius, if he gains a footing, will enforce the warning conveyed through 2 John, and may check the insolence of Diotrephes, pending the arrival of St John himself (3 John 10).

Three distinct testimonies are adduced to this man's work: "To Demetrius witness hath been given *by all*"—words implying a wide field of service, and an unqualified approval of his work in the Church (comp. 1 Thess. 1. 8): "and *by the truth itself*"—this signifying, in view of verse 4 and of 2 John 1, 2, not his integrity of character, but (objectively) "the truth" of Christianity finding itself reflected in Demetrius' teaching and life, which show him to be "of the truth" (1 John 3. 19) and worthily qualified as its exponent and champion. St John adds his personal certificate, which carries decisive weight with Gaius: "and *we moreover* bear witness (to him), and thou knowest that our witness is true." This triple commendation betrays an undertone



of solicitude. The Apostle had some fear as to how his representative might be received (comp. ver. 9); Gaius must be prepared to give him unhesitating and energetic support.

3. DIOTREPHEs is the marplot of the story, the evil contrast to Gaius and Demetrius. His *name* supplies some clue to his character and attitude.

“Diotrephes” is as rare in Greek as the companion names are common; we find it twice only in secular, and nowhere besides in sacred history. The word was a Homeric and poetic epithet, reserved for persons of royal birth, meaning *Zeus-reared, nursling of Zeus* (the king of the gods); such an appellation would scarcely occur except in noble and ancient families. Diotrephes, we imagine, belonged to the Greek aristocracy of the old royal city. Hence, probably, his “love to be first”; and hence the deference yielded to him by the Pergamene Church, which shared in the sentiments of local patriotism and could ill brook dictation coming from Ephesus. Sir W. M. Ramsay (in his *Letters to the Seven Churches*) has shown how keen a rivalry existed amongst the leading cities of this province; and if, as we have seen reason to believe, Pergamum was the destination of 2 John and the seat of the mutiny against Apostolic order indicated in 3 John 9, 10, the eminence of this city as the historical capital of Asia, and the lively susceptibility of Greek civic communities on points of honour and precedence, help to explain the perplexing situation. Diotrephes, with his high-flown name, appealed to and embodied the hereditary pride and long-established ascendancy of Pergamum, which ever “loved to be first.” While the title *κυρία* (*lady, mistress*) of 2 John 1 renders kindly and courteous deference to Pergamene dignity, that dignity took in the behaviour of Diotrephes toward St John an inordinate and schismatic expression. The Apocalyptic Letter assigns a melancholy eminence to Pergamum, as the place “where Satan’s throne is”! (Rev. 2. 13.)

*Pride of place* was the sin of Diotrophes. Whether he was Bishop of his Church, in the sense in which Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna were a generation later, does not appear. It is questionable whether mon-episcopacy (the rule of a single bishop placed above the elders) existed at this date, though Asia Minor was its earliest seat and tradition assigns its foundation to St John. The dominance of Diotrophes may have been that of personal force and social status, rather than of official right. In any case, the occurrence illustrates the tendency to concentrate power in a single hand, which gave rise to the Episcopate of the second century. It is noticeable that the matters in which Diotrophes offends St John—refusing to admit travelling brethren and attempting<sup>1</sup> to “hinder” and even “excommunicate” those who would entertain them—appear to have been originally a principal charge of the separated bishops, viz. the superintendence of hospitality and of inter-church relations. It is conceivable that Diotrophes was one of the first experiments in Episcopacy; and that, puffed up by his new office, he had rebelled against his father in Christ and refused to take direction from Ephesus.

How Diotrophes could have dared to rail at St John, the one surviving Apostolic “pillar” and the most revered and august figure of Christendom—“prating against us (*or* talking nonsense of us),” the Apostle writes, “with wicked words”—what he could have found to say to St John’s discredit, it is hard to realize. The Apostle’s extreme age may have given rise, in ill-disposed minds, to the reproach of senility; probably St John had never been so strong in administration as St Peter or St Paul. The local churches, it might be urged, had grown to maturity and should no longer be kept in leading-strings. The Apostle, a dear and venerable relic, is stationary at Ephesus; what goes on elsewhere he learns through his agents—intermeddlers

<sup>1</sup> The two last verbs of verse 10 “do not necessarily express more than the purpose and effort” (Westcott) of Diotrophes,—a *conative present*.

like Demetrius, who fill their master's ears with their prejudices and overrule the wiser and more responsible men upon the ground! Such "prating" would be natural enough in the circumstances; it was mischievous in itself, and most provoking to the great Apostle. He intends to "come"; and has no doubt that when he does so, he will be able to expose Diotrephe's misrepresentations and to call him to account.

A double danger arose from the check given to St John's authority in Pergamum and the obstruction put in the way of his delegates. Not only would this Church be cut off from the general fellowship of Christians, but it might afford harbourage to the Antichristian doctrine, that was invading the Johanne fold. Against these two dangers the two minor Epistles are directed.

Gaius and Diotrephe represent the loyal and disloyal sections of the Churches of Western Asia Minor; Demetrius is one of the "messengers of the Churches"—travelling apostles, prophets, or evangelists—who passed from one community to another and linked the Christian societies together. The "many deceivers" of 2 John 7 are the heretical teachers who multiplied around the thriving Churches of this region towards the close of the first century, and were the forerunners of the great Gnostic leaders of the subsequent age; while St John's "children," who give him "joy" by "walking in the truth," but must be warned lest they "lose the things they have wrought" and lest they "become partakers in the evil deeds" of "deceivers and antichrists" (2 John 2, 4, 8, 11; 3 John 4), form the bulk of the Christian constituency under St John's jurisdiction, who are faithful to the Apostolic doctrine and devoted to St John himself as their father in Christ, but are in danger of being misled by the plausibilities of the new doctrine and entangled by the craft and intrigues of its promoters.



## THE APOSTLE JOHN IN HIS LETTERS

St John's Reserve—Companionship with St Peter—Contrast between the Friends—St John's Place in the Primitive Church—The Apostle of Love—The Apostle of Wrath—Combination of the Mystical and Matter-of-fact—St John's Symbolism a product of this Union—Twofold Conflict of the Church : Imperial Persecution, Gnosticizing Error.

**“ I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus.”—REVELATION 1. 9.**

## CHAPTER V

### THE APOSTLE JOHN IN HIS LETTERS

IN his letters, if anywhere, a writer is wont to unbosom himself. Our examination of the Epistles should therefore have brought us nearer to St John's personality. The material they yield for this purpose is indeed somewhat disappointing. A single page of St Paul's is more self-revealing than all that this Apostle has written. There is a veil about him,—a reserve never quite penetrated. We see John standing by Peter's side in the first Christian movements at Jerusalem (Acts 3. 1, &c.; 4. 13, &c.; 8. 14); we find him twenty years later counted as one of the three "pillars" of the mother Church (Gal. 2. 9); but not a word is quoted from his lips, nor a single act of personal initiative ascribed to him. From the prominence thus accorded to St John, with the lack of any notable doing on his part, the inference is that the force of his character was felt and his influence exerted throughout those earlier years in the counsels of the Apostolate and the inner circles of the Church, rather than in the field of its external activities.

St John was, in fact, the complement of St Peter; their friendship was of the kind often contracted between opposite natures, each meeting the defects of the other. Peter was the man of action,—impulsive, demonstrative, ready at a word to plunge into the sea, to draw the sword, to "go to prison and to death" with his Master; John was the man of reflexion,—quiet,

deliberate, saying little, but observing, thinking, meaning much. "All members" of Christ's body "have not the same office"; and St John had other work to do than that of his compeers. The cousin of our Lord (John 19. 25=Matt. 27. 56) and "the disciple whom Jesus loved," his qualities of mind and heart secured for him a foremost place amongst the Twelve; and his type of thought, reflecting so much that others had comparatively missed of what was deepest in the mind of Jesus, impressed itself on his fellow-workers from the outset. The Fourth Gospel, in its completed form the fruit of sixty years' meditation, contains the substance of St John's testimony "concerning the word of life" as he delivered it "from the beginning" (1 John 1. 1-3); and this teaching quietly and gradually permeated the Christian Society, through his converse with its leading minds, and through the manner in which he touched the secret springs of its life. In the writings of St John's last years the Church recognized accordingly "that which was from the beginning," "the message which" its children "had heard from the beginning" (1 John 1. 1, 2. 7, 3. 11, &c.) through the same Apostle.

Where the Pauline and Johannine theologies lean to each other, it may be presumed (though the fact is not commonly recognized) that the primary debt lay on St Paul's side; St John's historical witness largely supplied the data and presuppositions for St Paul's doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling Christ, which St John in turn retouched and cast into their final expression. It was given to this Apostle to pronounce the alpha and omega of mystical Christianity.

During the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles, in which SS Peter and Paul played their glorious part as Christ's protagonists, St John remained in the shade, though by no means inactive or ineffective there. When Peter asked the Master at the last, "Lord, and what shall this man do?—what is to become of John?" along with the affection prompting the inquiry, there was a touch of curiosity about the future of his friend, whose



moods often drove Peter into impatience: <sup>1</sup> what sort of Apostle could this dreamer make? The reply, "If I will that he tarry till I come—?" seems to signify that John must **bide his time**, that he would come late to his own. So the event proved. It was not until after the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70, not till the pioneer work of the Gospel in the Roman Empire was done and the great founders **had passed away**, that the Apostle John reached his zenith and took his place at Ephesus, already an old man, in the centre of the catholic Church, attracting universal reverence and observance. It was by his writings finally—the Gospel and Epistles, the work of the last decade of the century, composed when the author was past eighty years of age (the Apocalypse was probably, in whole or in part, considerably earlier)—that he made his great contribution to the spiritual wealth of the Church and of mankind; of public speech or action on St John's part only slight traces have remained. For these books it is still reserved to gain their complete sway over the Christian mind. To this day John tarries his Lord's coming; he knew how to wait.

Every one thinks of St John as the Apostle of love. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God" (1 John 4. 7), is his characteristic appeal. From John's pen comes the most endeared text of the New Testament: "God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the Only-begotten." The Epistles issued from a heart steeped in the redeeming love of God. When he wrote them, the blessed Apostle had entered deeply into the experience of perfect love; he spoke out of his own consciousness in saying, "Whoso keepeth Christ's word, truly in him the love of God hath been perfected"; and again, "Herein is love made perfect with us . . . because as He is, we too are in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear. . . . We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 2. 5, 4. 17-19). Through long pastoral service, and in the ripeness of

<sup>1</sup> See Milligan-Moulton's *Popular Commentary*, on John 21. 21-23.

protracted age, St John's love to the brethren had grown into a most tender, wise, discriminating fatherly care, which embraced all the flock of Christ but spent itself most upon the Churches of the Asian fold. Never since he died has the Church Universal possessed a living father in God to whom it could look up with the affectionate veneration that gathered round St John's person at the close of the Apostolic age.

The love which attained perfectness in the Apostle John was more than a general emotion, a devotion to the body of Christ at large. He was great in comradeship and friendship. The man that "loveth not his brother *whom he hath seen*" (1 John 4. 20), the Apostle judges incapable of love to the unseen Father. For this reason, amongst others, John was "the disciple whom Jesus loved"; to his tendance the Lord from the cross commended His widowed mother. Peter and John, constantly side by side in the Gospel story, are significantly found together on the Easter morning (John 20. 2-10)—who knows how much St John then did to save his companion from despair? His "love" was, we may be sure, a "bond of peace" in the Apostolic fellowship and through the anxious years of the Church's infancy.

The appeals and reasonings of the First Epistle reveal the close ties of affection binding to the Apostle the members of his wide Asian flock; he sought in the strengthening and purifying of the spirit of love the prophylactic for the Church against intellectual error. The Second Epistle, in its few lines, exhibits the writer's watchful solicitude for each community of his jurisdiction; it conveys a grave and strong warning, with the tact that love imparts: the admonition begins with the entreaty, based on the old commandment, "which we had from the beginning, that we should love one another" (2 John 5; 1 John 2. 7, 8). In the instances of Gaius and Demetrius, the Third Epistle illustrates the warmth of St John's friendships, and the way in which he turned to account the qualities

and gifts of his helpers in Christ's service. One imagines that the Apostle John's success in the direction of Church affairs was due to the strength and multiplicity of his personal attachments and to his influence over individual workers, rather than to any skill in organization and the management of business.

But St John was more than the Apostle of love. His aspect is not always that of the mild and amiable patriarch of the Church, breathing out, "Little children, love one another!" It was a different John from this who would have called down "fire from heaven" upon the Samaritan village that refused his Master hospitality (Luke 9. 51-56), and whom Jesus distinguished as *Boanerges* (not from the loudness of his voice, but from the sudden, lightning-like flame of his spirit), for whom, along with James his brother, their mother asked the two chief places right and left of the Messiah's throne (Matt. 20. 20-28). Under the placid surface of St John's nature there lay a slumbering passion, a brooding ambition, that blazed up on occasion with startling vehemence. Now it is the John Boanerges who reappears in the Apocalypse—strong in contempt and hate no less than in love, whose soul resounded through its whole compass to the "indignation of the wrath" of Almighty God, that thunders against the haters of His Christ and the murderers of His people. Nor in Gospel and Epistles is this Divine anger—love's counterpart in a world of sin—very far to seek. The chapter which tells how "God so loved the world," ends with the fearful words concerning the disobeyer of the Son, "The wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3. 36). The holy wrath of the Apostle flashes out against immoral pretenders to high Christian knowledge, when he exclaims in the First Epistle, "If we say that we have fellowship with God and walk in darkness, we lie"; "If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1. 6, 2. 22, 4. 20). When he likes, the gentle John can be the most peremptory and dogmatic of teachers: "He that knoweth God," he asserts, "heareth

us; he who is not of God, heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (4. 6; see Chap. XIX below).

The story about John and Cerinthus, that when they happened to meet in the public baths at Ephesus, the Apostle fled as if for life, crying, "Away, lest the bath fall in, while Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is there!" though unhistorical, has a point of attachment in St John's known disposition.

We discern the same strong temperament—love with its possibilities of anger, notes of sharp severity breaking through the winning and tender strain of the Apostle's converse—in the two minor Epistles: witness the stern exclusion of Antichristian teachers in 2 John 10, 11, and the denunciation of him who "greeteth" them as "partaker in their evil deeds"; witness the handling of Diotrephes in 3 John 9, 10. With all its breadth and its power of abstract thinking, St John's mind was of a simple order: he paints in black and white; he sees "light and darkness," "love and hate," the kingdom of God and of Satan everywhere in conflict (comp. Chap. XVII). He is with all his soul against the Devil and "his children," because he is for God and Christ. He recognizes no neutral tints, no half-lights; to his mind, the Lord loathes nothing so much as the lukewarmness of Laodicea—"neither cold nor hot" (Rev. 3. 15, 16).

The constitution of the Apostle John presents another striking contrast, in its union of the mystical and the matter-of-fact. Exactitude in detail, truth and vividness of local colour and dramatic force of characterization, are combined in the Fourth Gospel with the profoundest analysis and with transcendent spiritual power. No writer has a firmer grasp of the actual and a truer reverence for fact; the attempts to disprove the historicity of his witness break always upon the rock of the Johannine realism. St John's symbolism, which gets free play in the Apocalypse supplies the link between the positive and the tran-

scendental in his mind. He had both *sight* and *insight*; the world and life—above all, the life of Christ and of the Church—were full of “signs” for him; they were charged at each point with infinite meanings. This inner significance made outward occurrences sacred to St John, and rendered his observation of them all the more keen and precise.<sup>1</sup>

The same traits appear in the two smaller letters. 3 John contains three portraits of Christian character, drawn in the briefest lines but with incisive force; the writer was a sure and penetrating judge of men and circumstances. 2 John indicates the author’s knowledge of a Christian Society at some distance from himself,—its situation and dangers; the playful yet most serious way in which he styles the Church of Pergamum (as we have supposed: see Chap. III) the “elect lady” and the Church of Ephesus her “elect sister,” is in St John’s imaginative vein. This representation illustrates the readiness, manifest throughout the Letters to the Seven Churches, with which the Apostle caught the significance of local and historical position and realized its bearing upon the character and fate of communities.

St John kept a tranquil heart through a long life-time of storm and stress. He had been banished to Patmos, and endured there, as a convict under the Roman Government, “a life of toil and hopeless misery” more dreaded than death;<sup>2</sup> the Apocalypse was the product of this experience. Meanwhile the Gnostic heresy—the most deadly corruption Christianity has ever known—was spreading like some noxious weed through the Asian Churches: 1 and 2 John are both directed against this error; we perceive its early working at Pergamum and Thyatira through the Letters of Revelation 2. In these conflicts the Apostle saw the fulfilment of his Master’s word. “Now,” he writes, “many Antichrists have arisen;

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., John 2. 6, 4. 6, 9. 6, 11. 44, 18. 18, 19. 33–35, 20. 6–8, 21. 11.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. VIII in W. M. Ramsay’s *Letters to the Seven Churches*.

from which we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2. 18), the "last hour" of the Apostolic era—nay, for aught he could tell, of human history itself (see Chap. XIV below). But St John was in no wise disturbed by the omens of the time. Despite appearances, he knows that "the world passeth away and the lust thereof," while "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2. 17, 18); he writes to a Church threatened with schism and perversion from the faith, expressing the love he bears toward it "for the truth's sake, which abideth in us and shall be with us for ever" (2 John 2). John's house of life—Christ's great house, the Church—is founded upon the rock; the storms beat against it in vain. The facts of Christianity are the fixed certainties of time. "That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes and our hands have handled—the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us" (1 John 1. 1, 2)—these realities of God, once planted in the world, will be destroyed by no violence of secular power and dissolved by no subtlety of scepticism. "We know that the Son of God is come"—the event is final and decisive; "for this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3. 8, 5. 20). Jesus Christ knows and has measured all opposing forces, and His mission will be carried through to the end; we "have confidence in Him" (comp. Chap. XXV). This note of perfect Christian assurance sounds in every line St John has written. In "our faith" he sees already the "victory that hath overcome the world" (5. 4).

So the Apostle John passed away, leaving the Church in Asia Minor and the Empire beleaguered by foes and entering on a gigantic struggle. The world assailed her with overwhelming force in the triple form of political oppression, social seduction, and intellectual sophistry. He had prepared, in his Gospel, Epistles, and Revelation, weapons for this

conflict which stood his brethren in good stead, and will do so to the end of time. He died with the calmest assurance of his Master's triumph, with the Hallelujahs of the final coronation of Jesus ringing in his ears. We greet him under the character and aspect in which he chiefly wished to be regarded by after-times: "I John, your brother, and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus."





## SCOPE AND CHARACTER OF THE FIRST EPISTLE

The Letter a Written Homily—Addressed to Settled Christians—St John's Ministry that of Edification—Complement of St Peter's Ministry—Continuation of St Paul's Ministry—Polemical Aim of the Epistle—Connexion of this with its Ethical Strain—Comparison of St John's Teaching with St Paul's—Obligation of the latter to the former—Absence of Epistolary Formulæ—"We" and "I" in the Epistle—An Epistle *General*—Traits of Johannine Authorship—Relation of Epistle to Gospel of John—Analysis of 1 John—Appendix: Tables of Parallels.

“That which we have seen and heard, we report to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us.

\* \* \* \* \*

“These things we write, that our joy may be made full.

\* \* \* \* \*

“My little children, these things I am writing to you, that you may not fall into sin.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Beloved, it is no new commandment that I write to you, but an old commandment . . . the word which you heard. Again, a new commandment I am writing to you, which thing is true in Him and in you.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I write (have written) to you, my little children, because your sins are forgiven. . . . I write (have written) to you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning. I write (have written) to you, young men, because you have overcome the Wicked One.

\* \* \* \* \*

“These things I have written to you concerning them that would lead you astray.

\* \* \* \* \*

“These things I have written to you, that you may know that you have eternal life,—to you that believe on the name of the Son of God.”—  
1 JOHN 1. 3, 4; 2. 1, 7, 8, 12-14, 26; 5. 13.

## CHAPTER VI

### SCOPE AND CHARACTER OF THE FIRST EPISTLE

**T**HIS is a homiletical Epistle, the address of a pastor to his flock who are widely scattered beyond the reach of his voice. The advanced age at which the Apostle John continued to minister from Ephesus to the Churches of Asia, gradually contracted the range of his journeyings; and the time came when he must communicate with his children "by paper and ink," instead of "talking mouth to mouth," as he had loved to do (2 John 12; 3 John 13, 14). Substitute the word "say" for "write" in the passages heading this chapter, and one might imagine the whole discourse delivered in speech to the assembled Church. It is a specimen of Apostolic preaching to believers, a masterpiece in the art of edification.

St John's ministry throughout life, so far as we can gather, was mainly of this nature (see pp. 47-49 above). He addresses himself "to those who believe on the name of the Son of God," in order "that they may know that they have eternal life" (5. 13), and in order to guard them from seductive error (2. 26, 4. 1-6). His purpose is to reassure the Christian flock in a troubled time, and to perfect the life of faith within the Church. He is not laying foundations, but crowning the edifice of Apostolic teaching already laid. The Fourth Gospel has the same intent, in a wider sense: "These things are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through believing ye

may have life in His name" (John 20. 31). The author testifies, appeals, and warns as he does, expressly *because* the recipients of his letter are already instructed and practised Christian believers (2. 12-14).

The references to St John in the Acts of the Apostles (3. 1-11, 4. 13-23, 8. 14, 12. 2) and in Galatians 2. 9, made without any account of things said or done by him, indicate the peculiar regard cherished for this Apostle and the importance attached to his personality and influence (see pp. 47-49). St John was one of the three "reputed to be pillars," although no distinct part, no formal office, is assigned to him in the Apostolic work of the early days, such as belonged to Peter and to James of Jerusalem. In Simon Peter's company John was found on the morning of the Lord's resurrection, after Peter's disgraceful but bitterly repented denial of his Master, acting towards the stricken man a brother's part; "they ran both together," we are told, to the place of burial, "and the other disciple" (probably the younger man) "did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre" (John 20. 3-10). The same two are consorting afterwards in Galilee—Peter deeply interested in his comrade's future—during the Forty Days (John 21). "Peter and John," again, "were going up into the temple" some time after the Pentecost, when they met the lame beggar, who was healed by Peter's word; and they were companions in the consequent trial and imprisonment by the Sanhedrin (Acts 3. 4.). The last occasion which brings them together in the narrative of the Acts (8. 14-25), is the joint visit to Samaria made by them at the request of "the Apostles which were at Jerusalem," to confirm the disciples gathered by the preaching of Philip the evangelist in that city. Here, as before, it is Peter whose words are quoted, and who combats Simon, the magician; John's place was in the background, and his work of the retired, inconspicuous sort. The union of these two leaders, who belonged to the opposite poles in gifts and temperament, is significant for the unity of

the Apostolic company and of the mother Church. St Peter was the prompt, incisive speaker and bold leader; St John the slow, deep thinker; the one as considerate as the other was impetuous, as measured in the movements of his mind as his companion was eager and demonstrative. Both were men of large and warm heart—equal in their reverent love to their Lord and in appreciation for each other.<sup>1</sup> The co-operation of St John with St Peter surely did much to give thoroughness, staidness, and stability to the primitive evangelism. The former supplemented the work of the latter in Jerusalem and the earliest Christendom, as the “pastor and teacher,” in St Paul’s enumeration of the great gifts of the ministry (Eph. 4. 11), follows on the “prophet” and the “evangelist.”<sup>2</sup>

Having been the comrade of St Peter at the beginning of the Apostolic era, St John found himself the successor of St Paul in Ephesus and the province of Asia through its closing period. His office in this field was not to plant but to nourish and build up the Churches there established, and to direct the work of the Gospel in this central region. Through the success of St John’s long-continued labours, following upon those of St Paul, Western Asia Minor became in the second century the most prosperous province of the Church.

But this rich soil was rife with heresy and contention; rank weeds marred its prolific growth. St Paul had foretold to the elders of Ephesus that “after his departure grievous wolves would enter in amongst them,” and that “of their own selves men would arise speaking perverse things, so as to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20. 29, 30)—his Pastoral Epistles mark the beginnings of the apostasy; St John found this pre-

<sup>1</sup> On St John’s idiosyncrasy, see further Chapter V.

<sup>2</sup> Remembering the close friendship of SS Peter and John in their early days, one is surprised to find so few points of contact in their Epistles. In fact, as writers they show more affinity with St Paul than with each other. They wrote each of them at an advanced period of life, after long separation. See the tables of comparison drawn out in the *Appendix* to this chapter.

diction lamentably true.<sup>1</sup> The Letters to the Seven Churches written very probably at an earlier time than our First Epistle, are sternly admonitory. The minor Epistles of this group show that the Apostle's charge was a difficult one (2 John 7-11, 3 John 9, 10; see Chaps. I and III above). "Many false prophets" and "deceivers," "many antichrists, have gone out into the world" from the Churches that he ruled (1 John 2. 18, 19, 4. 1); with pain and anger he writes to his flock "concerning those that seduce you" (2. 26). The First Epistle is severely polemical in certain passages; implicitly, it is so throughout. Through the Gospel of John the same defensive aim may be traced.

The Apostle's vindication is made, however, by positive exhibition of the truth more than by contradiction and counter-argument, by the setting forth in its living power of "the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us." St John confutes by better instruction; he thrusts out error by confronting it with the reality that it denies. Light, he conceives, is its own sufficient evidence; let it be seen in its glory and felt in its quickening power, and the reign of the darkness is ended. The shadows flee at sunrise! The Epistle moves through the contrasts of light and darkness, truth and falsehood, love and hatred, of God and the world, Christ and Antichrist, the Spirit of God and the spirits of error. A right discrimination is what

<sup>1</sup> One might take the words of 1 John 2. 18 and 4. 3—"You have heard that Antichrist is coming"—as an allusion to St Paul's prophecy of 2 Thessalonians 2, delivered about forty years before this time. But this anticipation was widespread in the Apostolic age. The curious thing is that the Apostle's language in the "antichrist" passages bears little or no traces of the eschatology of the Apocalypse; we find in chap. 2. 18-28 and 4. 1-6 but a single parallel to the Book of Revelation given by the Reference Bibles,—the correspondence of 4. 1 ("try the spirits") with Rev. 2. 2; whereas the links of expression between St John and St Paul in these paragraphs, though not numerous, are unmistakable. The Pauline tradition was strong and pervasive in the Churches of Asia; this St Polycarp's Letter, sent from Smyrna to the Philippians, goes to show.

the author is striving to effect all along. He dreads confusion of thought and compromise,—the syncretism between Christianity and theosophy, the mixing of the “old leaven” with the “new lump,” of “the love of the world” with “the love of the Father,” which the Gnostic teachers would have brought about. Let the opposing forces once be clearly seen, and the Apostle’s readers will know on which side to range themselves; for they “have an anointing from the Holy One,” their spiritual instincts are sound and they “know that no lie is of the truth” (2. 20–27).

Blended with the doctrinal polemic of the First Epistle, there is found a dominant strain of *ethical* denunciation. While the former is distinctly in evidence in certain leading passages—2. 18–27, 4. 1–6, 5. 5–8—the latter note is pervasive. The Apostle condemns the moral insensibility and insincerity, the disposition to conform to the world and to lower the standard of Christian purity, and above all the lack of brotherly love that appeared in some quarters amongst Christians. It is sometimes denied that there was any connexion in the writer’s mind between these symptoms and the error of doctrine which he combats. But St John passes from one to the other of these forms of evil, and back again, in such a way as to show that they formed, to his thoughts, part of one and the same conflict with “the world.” He describes both the Dokeric errorists and the antinomian moralists as “those who seduce you” (2. 28, 3. 7, 4. 1; comp. 2 John 9–11). St John relies on the same “anointing” of the Spirit to guard the understanding from false beliefs (2. 27, 4. 6), and to guard the heart from the corruptions of sin (3. 9, 24); it is “faith” in the incarnate Son of God that “conquers the world,” with its lust and hate (2. 14–17, 5. 3–5). The two poles on which the Epistle practically turns, are seen in verse 23 of chapter 3: “that we should believe the name of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as He gave us command.” Throughout the writer’s polemical and his positive

teaching alike, his theology and ethics form a strict unity. The true Christian faith in Jesus Christ, and the true Christian life fashioned after Him, are vitally and eternally one. To sever this connexion would be to cut through the nerve of the Epistle.<sup>1</sup>

The Epistle, doctrinally considered, is a re-assertion, in terms of antithesis to the rising Gnosticism of Asia Minor, of the established truth as to the manifestation of God in Christ, of the main principles and aims of the Christian life. The little children of the patriarch Apostle are bidden to recognize in his present communication "what they have known from the beginning"; all he desires is that the things they "heard from the beginning should abide in them" (2. 7, 13, 24, &c.). The danger comes from those who "go forward, and abide not in the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9-11), from men who propagate, by insidious methods and with corrupting moral effect, radical error respecting the person and mission of Christ, and who commend their retrograde teaching under the name of progress.

The agreement between the two Ephesian Apostles in thought and spirit is profound. We are comparing, it must be remembered, one doctrinal Epistle with many in correlating the writings of St John and St Paul, although the addition of the Gospel of St John, and (with less certainty) of the Apocalypse, goes to redress the balance. The first glance shows that St John's range was limited and his modes of conception and statement comparatively simple; he had none of the fertility of idea and wealth of expression which

<sup>1</sup> In disproof of the connexion between St John's anti-Gnostic and his ethical dehortations, the fact has been urged that Cerinthus, whom tradition identifies as his chief opponent, was an ascetic in morals. But asceticism is perfectly consistent with unbrotherliness, and with a degree of worldly conformity; and moral rigour in some directions may be compensated by licence in others. Moreover the principle of the evil of matter, which lay at the root of Doketism and Gnosticism, breeds at the same time in some natures a false asceticism, and in others antinomian indulgence. Of this double tendency, St Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Timothy and Titus afford evidence.



characterize St Paul. John was intuitive in method (see also p. 52), aphoristic in style, studiously plain and homely in utterance; Paul was dialectical, imaginative, involved and periodic in the structure of his sentences, creative in his theological diction. St John's peculiar spell lies in the intensity of his contemplative gaze, and the massiveness and transparency of his leading ideas. St Paul bears one forward in his great arguments as with the current of a mighty river, that pours now over the open plain, now through a tortuous pass or down a thundering fall; reading St John's Gospel and Epistle, one looks into a pellucid lake, which mirrors sky and mountain from its still depths.

How far the one Apostle was debtor to the other, it is impossible to say; probably the obligation lay upon both sides. The posthumous Apostle of Christ, "born out of due time," may well have learned from "the disciple whom Jesus loved" the Master's intimate teaching related in the Fourth Gospel, concerning the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the union of the heavenly Vine with His branches, which is at the heart of Pauline doctrine. That the two men had met, we know, and that St John had endorsed St Paul's gospel at an early stage (Gal. 2. 9). The communication of St John's knowledge and his personal views was not delayed to the end of the century, when his written narrative appeared (see p. 48)—his gospel, along with Peter's, had been making its way through the Church orally from the outset; and St Paul, with his keen appreciation and sympathetic spirit, is not the man to have been insensitive to the attraction of a nature like St John's or to have neglected the opportunity of gathering what the favoured disciple was able to impart. When the former writes in Galatians 2. 6, "Those of reputation" at Jerusalem "added nothing unto me," he does not intimate, as some have inferred, that he learned nothing of the tradition of Jesus from the first-hand witnesses and profited in no respect by intercourse with the three honoured leaders whom he

names—to have assumed such independence would have been a senseless pride. What he does intend to say is that the chiefs of the Jerusalem Church gave him no new commission, no higher authority than he had before; “they added nothing to” his powers as Christ’s messenger to the Gentiles and the steward of “the gospel of the uncircumcision” (see vers. 7, 8).

On the other hand, the Apostle John, surviving Paul and becoming heir to his great work amongst the Churches in Asia, was bound to reckon with his predecessor’s doctrine, and this Epistle (like the Apocalypse) is in conscious accord with Paulinism. On several leading points, it might seem that St John has given another form, at once concentrated and simplified, to the theology of St Paul.<sup>1</sup> The Pauline “justification” and “sanctification” reappear in the “forgiving of sins” and “cleansing from all unrighteousness” of 1 John 1. 7 and 9; “faith, hope, and love,” with the last for the greatest, become the “perfect love” which “casts out fear” (4. 18), and the glorious hymn on charity of 1 Cor. 13 is crowned by the sentence of 1 John 4. 16, “God is love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him”; the simple declaration of 1 John 3. 6, “He that abideth in Him (Christ) sinneth not,” contains the answer to the prayer of 1 Thessalonians 5. 23, that “the God of peace would sanctify” Christian men “to full perfection,” that their “spirit, soul, and body in blameless integrity may be preserved” until the Lord’s coming. In other places, as partly in the passages above cited, the later writer deepens the idea or principle expressed by the earlier, as when the “mediator” of 1 Timothy 2. 5 becomes the “advocate” of 1 John or the Pauline “adoption” (Rom. 8. 15, Eph. 1. 5), is represented as a being “begotten of God”; those who receive “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ” (Eph. 1. 17, 18) are described as having “an

<sup>1</sup> St John’s Soteriology in form and dialect lies nearer, on the whole, to that of *Hebrews* than of the Pauline Epistles; see the comparisons in the *Appendix* to this chapter.

unction (*chrism*) from the Holy One" which "abideth in" them, so that they "know" the truth and the lie, and "have no need that any one should teach" them (1 John 2. 27); and St Paul's extended proofs of his Apostolic authority are reduced by St John, on his own behalf, to the brief assertion, "We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us" (4. 6).

In both Apostles there is the same awful sense of the guilt and universality of *sin*, distinguished in Paul by a conspicuous vein of personal experience and psychological analysis, in John by the realization of the magnitude of sin as a world-mischief and its mysterious origin in powers of evil outside of humanity (1 John 2. 2, 16; 3. 8; 4. 14; 5. 17-19). Both therefore treat the fact of *atonement* through "the blood of Jesus, God's Son," as fundamental to Christian thought and life (see 1 John 1. 7, 9); the word "propitiation" used in this connexion (*ἱλαστήριον*, Rom. 3. 5; *ἱλασμός*, 1 John 2. 2; 4. 10; comp. also Hebrews 2. 17), is common property. For the Apostle Paul it was necessary to show how Christ's atoning sacrifice stood to "the law" of Moses, and how it bore upon the case of Jew and Gentile respectively; St John has only to assert that the propitiation availing for penitent and believing Christians, is valid "for the whole world" (2. 2). It is remarkable that while Paul insists almost solely upon *faith* as the subjective condition of justification, John lays stress upon the *confession* of sin, since he had to deal with antinomian evasions of the guilt of sin, where the former was confronted with a legal, self-justifying righteousness of works; instead of "faith" we read in 1 John 2. 23, and 4. 3, of "confessing Jesus" as "Son of God"—assenting to His claims (comp. Rom. 10. 9, 10). St John points oftener to the ethical pattern afforded by Christ's earthly course (2. 1, 6; 3. 3, 5-8; 4. 17), and employs the name of "Jesus" much more frequently—a thing to be expected of the Lord's companion of old days. He appears to think less than St Paul about the *parousia* and the last judgement and the future glory of the

redeemed (but see pp. 233-235), in his strong consciousness of "eternal life" as the believer's present possession (see 2. 28; 3. 3; 4. 17, on the one hand: on the other, 1. 2; 2. 17; 3. 15; 4. 15; 5. 13, 20). The elder Apostle distressingly felt the imperfection and burden of the present state; the younger dwells on the realities subsisting beneath it—the satisfying knowledge of God, the "perfecting of the love of God" in faithful men, and their unchanging fellowship with Christ—till temporal conditions are forgotten; for him, the world is already "overcome," and "we have passed from death into life" (1 John 1. 3; 3. 14; 5. 4, 5). "According to St John's view, the world exists indeed, but more as a semblance than a reality" (Westcott).

But these are differences of emphasis and tone, due partly to temperament, partly to situation and hortatory purpose; no real discrepancy or dogmatic dissent is implied in them. The fall of Jerusalem, and with this, the disappearance of national Judaism and of the Judaistic controversies of the first generation have placed a gulf between the writings of Paul and those of John; in the Apocalypse alone the earlier situation has left its traces. By this time a new theological world, another phase of the kingdom of God has appeared. In the substance of revealed truth these two master thinkers of the New Testament were at one—in their apprehension of God as "the Father" (whose "grace" shines more in Paul, His "love" in John), of Jesus Christ as the perfect man and head of humanity, eternally one with God (called more often "the Son of God" by John, "the Lord" by Paul), of the Holy Spirit as the Witnesser of God, the gift of the Father through Christ, the Divine inhabitant of the soul and the Church, and the inspirer of all good in man's regenerate nature. By both the Christian life is realized as essentially a life of faith on the Son of God, which effects an inward union with the Redeemer and consequent fellowship with God, possession by His Spirit, and occupation in the service of His love. Their

mysticism is the same; and their universalism is the same, for both conceive the sacrifice of the cross and the message of the Gospel as designed for the whole world—only that for St John the distinction between Jew and Gentile has sunk below the horizon.

The Epistle has no epistolary formulæ, either at the beginning (comp. *Hebrews*) or at the end (comp. *James*); writer and readers are well acquainted—they are his “little children” (2. 1, 12, 18, &c.), his “beloved” (2. 7; 3. 21; 4. 1, 7)—he will waste no word on the introduction of himself to them. His attitude is that of an aged father in Christ speaking to his sons—once only does he address the readers as “brethren” (3. 13); some are older, some younger amongst them, but all are as “children” in relation to himself (2. 12–14). It never occurs to him to give himself any title in the First Epistle (in the Second and Third, he is just “the Elder;”) or to vindicate or insist upon his authority; this he assumes as matter of course, to be questioned by no one. Yet the author nowhere implies that he was founder of the Churches concerned, or the first bearer to them of the Gospel; he writes of “that which ye had from the beginning,” “the word which ye heard” (2. 7, 18, 24; comp. 2 John 6); we could imagine him “testifying,” as St Peter did (1 Pet. 5. 12) to Christians of Asia Minor who had received the Gospel chiefly through Pauline ministrations, “that this is the true grace of God,” in which they must “stand fast.” The faith of these communities is of no recent date—the letter continually entreats them to “abide” in that which they “had heard from the beginning.” The errors combated are such as belonged to a developed Christianity (see pp. 318, 319); they have sprung up in settled Churches and are perversions of the established truths of the Apostolic confession (1 John 2. 18, 19; 4. 1; 2 John 7–9).

Notwithstanding the omission of names and personal references, the First Epistle is properly a *letter*. For it runs in the first person singular throughout

(2. 1, 7, 12-14, 26 ; 5. 13; once "I say," instead of "I write" or "have written," in 5. 16). When therefore in verse 4 of the preface St John has it, "these things *we* write (*γράφουμεν ἡμεῖς*), that our joy may be made full" <sup>1</sup> he is surely thinking of his companions in the testimony of Jesus, the body of the original "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word," not a few of whom had by this time, with their own hand or by the pen of others, put their witness upon record and perpetuated the spoken by the written testimony (see p. 73). When he says, moreover, "we report to *you* also, that *you* also may have fellowship with us," it is because a multitude of others have by this date heard the good-news and share its blessings with the first believers, so that it is spreading into all the world (2. 2, 4. 14; comp. Rom. 1. 15, Col. 1. 6). In the triple "we know" (*οἶδαμεν*) of chap. 5. 18-20, the Apostle speaks for his readers along with himself, indeed for the whole Church of God.

Personal references are wanting upon both sides—with respect to the receivers as much as to the sender of the letter; no allusions are made to local circumstances or events, to specific doings or needs or requests of the readers. In this vagueness of horizon 1 John resembles the Epistle of James, or of Paul to the Ephesians. The editorial title, "*Catholic* Epistle of John," is therefore to some extent justified; the letter is "general" in the sense that it was not directed to any one particular Church. It is in striking contrast with the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (Rev. 2. 3.): there each community wears a distinct physiog-

<sup>1</sup> The "unto you" of the T.R. in this place is certainly spurious; and "*your* joy" is, almost certainly, a textual corruption of "*our* joy" (R.V.). The satisfaction of those responsible for giving the message of Christ to the world would only be complete when provision had been made in *writing* for its safe transmission, for the full and exact knowledge of it on the part of those distant in place or time from the primary witnesses; comp. Luke 1. 4; 2 Peter 1. 15; Revelation 22. 18, 19; 2 Timothy 2. 2. Then the Apostle and his few remaining coevals will die content!

nomy, and praise or blame is meted out with strict discrimination; here everything is general and comprehensive, addressed to classes of men and features and qualities of character. The dangers indicated, the admonitions given, are such as concerned Christians everywhere, surrounded by the "world" (2. 14-16) and exposed to the attractions of idolatry (5. 21); or such as arose from the heresies infesting all Churches in Western Asia Minor at the end of the first century; see 1 John 2. 18-27; 4. 1-6; 2 John 7-11; Chapters X, XIV, XIX).<sup>1</sup>

For the rest, St John expatiates on the things that lay nearest to his heart, the simplest and deepest realities of the Christian life—faith in the incarnate Son of God, cleansing from sin by His blood, union with Him in His Spirit, the brotherly love in which character is perfected after His example, the purifying hope of life eternal. The historical and the transcendental Christ are unified in the writer's mind, without effort or speculative difficulty. St John remembers how "He walked" in the spotless beauty of His human life (2. 6; 3. 3, 5; 4. 17), while he recognizes Jesus as "the Son of God," "the Only-begotten," and declares that in Him we have, "manifested to us, the eternal life which was with the Father," the "Advocate with the Father," whose "blood" makes "propitiation for the whole world" (1. 2, 3, 7; 2. 2; 4. 9, 10, 14). He exhibits the naïve faith of the first disciples in combination with the theological reflexion brought about by contact with Greek thought and conflict with oriental theosophy under the inspiration of the Spirit of Christ whom He promised to guide them into all the truth. The experience of the youthful companion of Jesus has grown in John, without any breach of continuity, into that of the veteran Church leader, the deeply versed pastor and theologian.

Everything in this Epistle accords with the witness

<sup>1</sup> Haupt, with some other interpreters, makes this abstractness a ground for supposing the Epistle written at Patmos, where the writer was out of touch with his people.

of tradition, that it was a circular letter and pastoral charge addressed by St John the Apostle and Evangelist to the wide circuit of Western Asian Churches over which he presided in the last period of his life, and that it was composed between the years 90 and 100 of our Lord. The forms of Gnostic and Docketic error to which in various passages the writer refers, originated, as many indications go to show, in the Churches of this province, and had become rife at the close of the first century, while St John still "tarried" in the flesh.<sup>1</sup>

The Epistle rests upon the Gospel history; it presupposes the knowledge of Jesus Christ which was the common property of the Church, as this was affected by the specific Johannine tradition and point of view (see particularly 1. 1, 2, 5; 2. 1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 24; 3. 1, 3, 5, 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, 23, 24; 4. 4, 5, 9-14, 21; 5. 6-12, 14, 18, 20). Some have thought the Epistle written on purpose to accompany St John's Gospel, in order to serve as a commendation and application thereof.<sup>2</sup> The two are associated by so many identical or kindred expressions and turns of thought; their atmosphere and horizon are so much the same, that hardly any one doubts them to have been the product of the same mind,—indeed of the same state and stage of mind in the one author. The Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle of John were separated by no great interval of time, and designed for similar constituencies. But in addressing his "little children" and dwelling upon what they know so well of Christ and "the truth," the Apostle is referring, we may be sure, to no written book; he recalls the teaching received from his lips and printed ineffaceably upon their hearts. To this familiar witness of the old Apostle—a witness which he

<sup>1</sup> The opening *Discourses* of Archbishop Alexander's Commentary on *The Epistles of St John* (Expositor's Bible) give a fine historical setting to this Epistle. Sir W. M. Ramsay's work on *The Letters to the Seven Churches* has, more recently, thrown a flood of light over the field of the Apostle's later ministry.

<sup>2</sup> The "we write" (emphatic ἡμεῖς) of verse 4 shows that St John is not thinking of his own (written) Gospel in particular; comp. p. 89.



embodied about this time in his written Gospel for those whom his spoken word might not reach—the opening sentences of the letter relate; at the same time they include in their reference (“*we write*”) the testimony of fellow-witnesses, who by voice and book had spread in other regions the knowledge of Jesus. The preface to the Epistle is in effect a summary of the Gospel according to John, which had been for sixty years an oral Gospel and was at last put into written shape—a correspondence that is obvious when one compares 1 John 1. 1–4 with John 1. 1–18, and 20. 30, 31, the opening and closing words of the Evangelist. The revelation of God in His Son Jesus Christ—a revelation taking place within the sphere of sight and sense—is the matter which the writer has to communicate. That manifestation, made in the first place to a circle of beholders of whom he was one, brings an eternal life for men, a life of fellowship with God and Christ, the possessors of which desire to make all men sharers with themselves therein. This is the basis of the Epistle (1. 1–3)—a basis at once historical and transcendental—and it is the resumption of the Gospel. “The Gospel gives the historic revelation; the Epistle shows the revelation as it has been apprehended in the life of the Society and of the believer” (Westcott). On the whole, it seems probable that the Epistle was the earlier work of the two.

The First Epistle is so much of an epistle, so un-studied and spontaneous in movement, that it lends itself ill to formal analysis. In this want of structure it is in signal contrast to the Apocalypse and the Gospel of St John. Up to verse 27 of the second chapter a fairly close connexion may be traced.

I. The preface (1. 1–4) announces that the writer purposes, by declaring more fully what he knows of “the eternal life” in Christ, to bring those to whom he writes into a more complete “fellowship” with God. He lays down therefore, first, the ground of this fellowship in the nature of God, the obstacle to it lying in personal sin,

and the way in which sin is dealt with and removed (1. 5-2. 2). He goes on to state the condition upon which union with God is maintained—viz. obedience to His word after the fashion of Jesus, above all to the great commandment of brotherly love (2. 3-11). He congratulates his readers, old and young, upon their past fidelity (2. 12-14); while he warns them against friendship with the world (2. 15-17), and bids them especially beware of teaching that would destroy their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and in consequence would rob them of communion both with the Son and with the Father (2. 18-27). Here the letter might suitably have terminated, with the exhortation "Abide in Him"; it appears already to have fulfilled the purpose announced at the beginning.

II. A new train of thought is started in 2. 28, arising out of the fundamental idea of fellowship in the eternal life (1. 1-4), which can be traced, though with uncertain connexion here and there, as far as chapter 5. 5. As *fellowship* supplied the key-note of the first section, so *sonship*—the filial and brotherly character of Christian believers, maintained in face of the world's hatred—is the conception which binds together the paragraphs of this extended central section. In chap. 1. 5-2. 27 we contemplate "the eternal life manifested" as affording the ground of union between God and men; in chap. 2. 28-5. 5 we look upon it as manifested in the sons of God confronting an evil and hostile world.

The second movement starts at the climax of the first: at Christ's "coming" His people will shine forth as the manifest "children of God"—which they are in fact already, but hiddenly and in preparation for their full estate (2. 28-3. 3). Sin is therefore alien to them,—nay, impossible in the light of their Divine birth and proper character (3. 4-9); sinners, haters of their brethren, are "children of the Devil" and brothers of Cain; the world's hatred of the Church springs from the ancient seed of death; Jesus, not Cain, is the first-born of the new stock (3. 10-16). Christian love must be shown in

true deeds, not empty words (3. 17, 18); such deeds give the heart an assurance of God's favour wanting otherwise; they confirm our faith in Christ by proving our possession of His Spirit (3. 19-24). With this Spirit of truth the spirits inspiring the false prophets abroad in the world are at war; their test lies in the confession of Jesus as the Son of God; the Church has overcome them by the power of God within it; the Apostolic word condemns them (4. 1-6). *Love*, after all, is the seal of truth, and the mark of sonship from God—the love displayed in the redeeming mission of the Son of God, which binds us to love our brethren (4. 7-11): in the love of Christ the invisible God is seen, and the love of Christian souls is the impartation of God's nature to them (4. 12-16); its perfecting brings deliverance from all fear, enabling the Christian man to live, like his Master, a life of simple truth and loyalty (4. 17-21). Thus faith in Jesus the Son of God makes sons of God, who love God's children along with Himself, who keep God's commands and conquer the world (5. 1-5). The second division of the Epistle closes, like the first, on the note of *victory* (comp. John 16. 33, Rev. 19.-22.).

The two divisions are parallel rather than consecutive; the same thoughts recur in both: the incompatibility of sin with a Christian profession (1. 6-10; 3. 5-9); commandment-keeping the proof of love (2. 3-5; 5. 3, 4); Jesus the pattern of the new life (2. 6; 3. 3, 16); brotherly love the fruit of knowledge of God (2. 9-11; 3. 14; 4. 7-21); the enmity of the world toward God (2. 15, 16; 3. 13); the seducers of the Church, and the test of their teaching in the confession of the Godhead of Jesus (2. 18-27; 4. 1-6). The office of the Holy Spirit, and the nature and extent of Christian sanctity, are topics conspicuous in the second division, where the sonship of believers is set forth, while the forgiveness of sin and the keeping of God's commands figure chiefly in the two first chapters, which dwell on the theme of fellowship with God.

The rest of the Epistle has quite a supplementary

character. Chapter 5. 6-12 places a kind of *seal*<sup>1</sup> on the letter as it draws to a close, by adducing "the Spirit" as "the witnesser"—first, in association with "the water and blood," to the truth of God's message concerning His Son, which the Apostle has now delivered (vers. 6-9; comp. 1. 2: "We have seen and do bear witness"), then as an internal testimony lodged in the believer's soul (vers. 10-13).

The paragraph upon Prayer and the Sin unto Death (vers. 14-17) stands detached, and seems to be an after-thought, which might naturally have occurred in the passage about confidence toward God and availing prayer, in chap. 3. 21, 22. We may call this *the postscript* to the Epistle. It leads up to the concluding section.

Verses 18-21, with their threefold emphatic "We know," are *a summary* of the writer's message and testimony, verses 18, 19 covering the ground of its second chief division (chap. 2. 28-5. 5: *concerning sonship*), and verses 20, 21, of its first division (chap. 1. 5-2. 27: *concerning fellowship*).

The disposition we have made of the contents of the Epistle agrees in outline with that adopted by Haupt in his Commentary.<sup>2</sup> The third of his divisions (*concerning witness*) is so short, and holds a position so much subordinate in comparison with the other two, that one prefers to reduce Haupt's threefold to a twofold principle of analysis, and to regard the paragraphs following verse 5 of chap. 5 as supplementing the main purport of the letter. The closing paragraphs (vers. 13-20) furnish a kind of Epilogue, as chap. 1. 1-4 was the Prologue. And the last sentence, "Little

<sup>1</sup> The thought of "witnessing" is a seal stamped on all St John's writings—the Apocalypse along with the rest (see Rev. 1. 2, 9; 6. 9; 12. 11, 17; 19. 10; 22. 16, 20).

<sup>2</sup> *The First Epistle of St John: a contribution to Biblical Theology*. By Erich Haupt; translated (T. and T. Clark), 1879. See pp. 348-357, "The Chain of Thought." This exposition remains indispensable; it is the most complete and thorough elucidation of the Epistle that we know, but suffers from its prolixity.

children, keep yourselves from the idols," takes the place of the Farewell in an ordinary letter.

In the printing of the text we attempt to represent the Hebraistic parallelism which breaks through St John's sentences, and gives to his Greek prose style its peculiar cast. This is most strongly marked in the First Epistle.

## APPENDIX.

The comparison of parallel passages in the Epistles of *Peter* and John throws into relief the detachment of the Johannine writings. The Book of Revelation, despite its singularities, has much more in common with the Gospel and Epistles—and this in fundamental ideas and idiosyncrasies of mind—than with any other writing of the New Testament. The following parallels are worth observing:—

1 Peter 1. 18-20	= 1 John 1. 7;	2 Peter 1. 4	= 1 John 3. 2;
„ 2. 22	= „ 3. 5;	„ 2. 1	= „ 4. 1;
„ 4. 2, 2 Peter		„ 3. 3	= „ 2. 18 (?)
„ 2. 18	= „ 2. 16;		
„ 5. 1	= 2 & 3 John		
	1 (?);		

But the above are slight and incidental correspondences. There are more definite signs of communion of thought between *St James* and *St John* in their Epistles:—

Compare James 1. 12	with 1 John 2. 25;
„ „ 1. 17	„ „ 1. 5;
„ „ 2. 15, 16	„ „ 3. 17, 18;
„ „ 3. 2	„ „ 1. 8;
„ „ 4. 4	„ „ 2. 15.

*St John's* Epistles and *Hebrews*, in view of their common theological complexion, supply fewer parallels than one might expect:—

Heb. 1. 3 (purification of sins), 10. 2, 22	= 1 John 1. 7;
„ 2. 1-3	= 2 John 8;
„ 2. 9 (for every man)	= 1 John 2. 2, 4. 14;
„ 2. 14	= „ 3. 8;
„ 2. 17, 18	= „ 2. 1, 4. 10;
„ 3. 6 ( <i>boldness, hope</i> )	= „ 2. 28, 3. 3, 4. 17;
„ 4. 12, 13	= „ 3. 19, 20;
„ 4. 14 ( <i>Jesus, the Son of God</i> )	= „ 1. 7, 5. 5;

Heb. 4. 15	= 1 John 2. 1, 3. 5 ;
„ 6. 6, 10. 26, 27	= „ 5. 16 ;
„ 7. 25, 26, 9. 12, 14, 24, 25	= „ 2. 1, 2 ;
„ 9. 26	= „ 3. 5, 8 ;
„ 9. 28, 12. 14	= „ 2. 28, 3. 2 ;
„ 10. 36, 11. 25, 26 .	= „ 2. 16, 17 ;
„ 11. 4	= „ 3. 12 ;
„ 13. 1	= „ 2. 10, 4. 20, 21 ;
„ 13. 1	= 3 John 5-8.

The list for the Epistles of John and the *Apocalypse* is very different :—

Compare 1 John 1. 1, 2. 13, 14	with Rev. 1. 8, 3. 14, 13. 8, 21. 6, 22. 13 ;
„ „ 1. 2, 5, 5. 7-11	„ „ 1. 2, 9, 6. 9, 12. 17, 19. 10, 22. 16 ;
„ „ 1. 3, 4, 3 John 8	„ „ 1. 9-11, 22. 9 ;
„ „ 1. 6, 8, 10, 2. 4, 22, 4. 20	„ „ 2. 2, 9, 3. 9 ;
„ „ 1. 7, 9, 3. 5, 4. 10, 5. 6	„ „ 1. 5, 5. 9, 7. 14 ;
„ „ 2. 1, 20, 3. 3, 5	„ „ 3. 7 ;
„ „ 2. 2, 4. 14	„ „ 5. 9, 7. 9, 10 ;
„ „ 2. 3-5, 5. 3	„ „ 12. 17, 14. 12 ;
„ „ 2. 6, 3. 3, 4. 17	„ „ 3. 4, 14. 4, 5 ;
„ „ 2. 8, 17	„ „ 21. 1, 5 ;
„ „ 2. 10	„ „ 2. 14 ;
„ „ 2. 13, 14, 4. 4, 5. 4	„ „ 2. 7, 11, &c., 12. 11, 15. 2, 21. 7 ;
„ „ 2. 15	„ „ 18. 4 ;
„ „ 2. 16	„ „ 18. 14 (and context) ;
„ „ 2. 17	„ „ 18. 2, 3, &c. ;
„ „ 2. 18	„ „ 1. 3, 22. 10 ;
„ „ 2. 20, 27	„ „ 1. 6, 5. 10, 20. 6 ;
„ „ 2. 20	„ „ 3. 18 (ἐγχεῖσαι κ.τ.λ.) ;
„ „ 2. 26 (περὶ τ. πλανώντων), 3. 7, 2 John 7, 9	„ „ 2. 20, 18. 23, 19. 20 ;
„ „ 2. 28, 3. 2, 21	„ „ 3. 4, 5, 6. 15-17, 22. 4 ;
„ „ 3. 1	„ „ 3. 12, 21. 7 ;
„ „ 3. 3	„ „ 14. 4, 22. 14 ;
„ „ 3. 7, 10	„ „ 22. 11 ;
„ „ 3. 10	„ „ 2. 9, 3. 9 ;
„ „ 3. 13	„ „ 6. 10, 17. 6, &c. ;
„ „ 3. 15, 4. 18, 20	„ „ 21. 8, 22. 15 ;
„ „ 3. 16	„ „ 12. 11 ;
„ „ 4. 1, 3, 6	„ „ 2. 2, 16. 13, 14, 19, 20, 20. 10 ;
„ „ 4. 16	„ „ 7. 15, 21. 3 ;
„ „ 5. 6	„ „ 19. 13 ;

Compare 1 John 5. 8	with Rev. 11. 3;
"      "   5. 13, 20	"      "   2. 7, 13, 3. 5, 21. 6, 27, 22. 14, &c. ;
"      "   5. 18	"      "   3. 10;
"      "   5. 20	"      "   3. 7, 6. 10, 19. 11;
"      "   5. 21	"      "   2. 14, 20;
"      2 John 3	"      "   1. 4;
"      "   8	"      "   2. 2-5, 25-27, 3. 3, 11.





DIVISION I  
FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD  
THE MANIFESTED LIFE

Construction of the Passage—The Eternal Life unveiled—Gnostic Dualism of Nature and Spirit—"In the beginning" and "From the beginning" — Actuality of the Manifestation — Competence of the Witnesses—Fellowship of Men in the Testimony—Fellowship with God through the Testimony.

“That which was from the beginning.  
That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes,  
That which we beheld, and our hands handled :  
Concerning the word of life.

And the life was manifested, and we have seen it ;  
And we testify, and report to you, the eternal life,  
Which was with the Father, and was manifested to us.

That which we have seen and heard, we report to you also,  
That you also may have fellowship with us ;  
Yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus  
Christ.

And these things we write, that our joy may be fulfilled.”  
1 JOHN 1. 1-4.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MANIFESTED LIFE

WE adopt the revised translation of the above verses, preferring however, in verse 1, the marginal “*word of life*” without the capital. For it is on *life*<sup>1</sup> rather than *word* that the stress of the sentence lies (“for the life was manifested,” St John continues); and Word must have stood alone to be recognized as a personal title, or could at most be qualified as it is in the Apocalypse (19. 13): “His name is called The Word of God.” St John’s “word of life” resembles the “word of life” that St Paul bids the Philippians “hold fast” (2. 16), “the words of life eternal” which St Peter declared his Master had (John 6. 68), and “all the words of this life” which the Apostles were bidden to “speak in the temple to the people” (Acts 5. 20). It is synonymous with “the Gospel,” the message of the new life which those bear witness to and report who have first “heard” it and proved its life-giving power. “Concerning the word of life” stands in apposition to the four preceding relative clauses (“that which we have heard . . . our hands handled”) and states their general subject-matter and import; while the first clause, “That which was from the beginning,” stands alone in sublime completeness. The verse should be read by itself as a title to the writing, a statement of the great matter of the writer’s

<sup>1</sup> Comp. *bread of life*; *light of life*; *way, truth and life*, &c., in the Fourth Gospel.

thoughts, of that on which his relations with his readers rest.

By construing the first verse thus (see the text as printed above), we dispense with the brackets enclosing the second verse in the English Version. Parentheses and involved constructions are not much in St John's way. The common punctuation treats the second verse as an eddy in the current, an idea that strikes the writer incidentally and by the way, whereas it belongs to the mid-stream of his thought. It constitutes, in fact, the centre of the passage. While verse 3 links itself with verse 1 by repeating its second line, it does so with a difference, with a scope beyond the intent of the former sentence. St John reiterates "what we have seen and heard" not by way of resuming the thread of an interrupted sentence, but striking once more the key-note, on which he plays a further descant. We observe here, at the outset, the peculiar manner of our author. His thought progresses by a kind of spiral movement, returning continually upon itself, but in each revolution advancing to a new point and giving a larger outlook to the idea that it seeks to unfold.

"Declare" in verses 2 and 3 should rather be "report" (*ἀπαγγέλλομεν*). The original verb signifies the carrying of tidings or messages from the authentic source: we are the bearers to you of the word we received from Him (comp. ver. 5; also 1 Cor. 14. 25, 1 Thess. 1. 9, for *ἀπαγγέλλω*). When St John writes in verse 2 "we bear witness and report," in the former expression (as Haupt acutely says) the emphasis lies on the communication of *truth*, in the latter on the *communication* of truth.

Readers of the Greek will note the expressive transition from the perfect to the aorist tense and back again, that takes place in verses 1-3. In the words "that which we *have heard* and *have seen* with our eyes," St John asserts the abiding reality of the audible and visible manifestation of the eternal life in Christ. This revelation is now a fixed possession, the past

realized in the present; to its immovable certainty the Apostle reverts once again in verses 2 and 3. The sudden change of tense in the middle of verse 1, which is missed by our authorized rendering, transports us to the historical scene. We stand with the first disciples before the incarnate Son of God, gazing with wonder on His face and reaching out our hands to touch His form, as St John writes, "that which *we beheld and our hands handled.*" This turn of phrase is a fine trait of genuineness; it is the movement of personal remembrance working within and behind historical reflexion. The same witness speaks here who wrote the words of John 20. 19, 20: "Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you! And when He had thus said, He showed unto them His hands and His side." In this wondrous human person, through its flesh and blood reality, the Apostle affirms in the name of all the eye-witnesses: "The life that was with the Father was manifested to us." While *ἑασάμεθα* (*we beheld*) signifies an intent, contemplative gaze, *ἔψηλάφησαν* (occurring in the New Testament only in Luke 24. 39, Acts 17. 27, and Heb. 12. 18, beside this passage) denotes not the bare *handling*, but the expressive use of the hands that *tests by handling*.

So much for the verbal elucidation of the passage. Let us look now at its substantial content.

1. St John had witnessed, as he believed, the supreme manifestation of God. The secret of the universe stood unveiled before his eyes, the everlasting fact and truth of things, "that which *was from the beginning.*" Here he touched the spring of being, the principle that animates creation from star to farthest star, from the archangel to the worm in the sod: "the life was manifested, the life eternal which existed with the Father, was manifested" to us. If "the life" of this passage is identical with that of the prologue to the Gospel, it has all this breadth of meaning; it receives a limitless extension when it is defined as "that which was from the beginning"; it is "the life" that "was in" the

Eternal Word, and "was the light of men" from the dawn of human consciousness.

The source of spiritual life to men is that which was, in the first instance, the source of natural life to all creatures. Here lies the foundation-stone of the Johannine theology. It assumes the solidarity of being, the unity of the seen and unseen. It rules out from the beginning all dualistic and Doketic conceptions of the world. Gnostic metaphysics guarded "the eternal life—the Christ or Son of God—from entanglement in the finite, by supposing that the Divine element descends upon Jesus at His baptism and parted from Him on so cross; St John affirms, as matter of historical fact, the identity, in the strongest and clearest terms possible, of the two—the fact that "the eternal *manifested,*" that it took visible, palpable form of flesh and blood in Jesus the Son of God (comp. ver. 7) *flesh* life of life, he tells us, the essential offspring of the Deity, became incarnate that it might hold fellowship with men; it was slain, that its blood might cleanse them from iniquity.

The sublime prelude of St John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word," is not repeated here; it is presumed. *In the beginning* gives the starting-point of the revelation, *from the beginning* carries us along its process. Throughout the creation and course of the natural universe, through the calling and history of ancient Israel, the word wrought and spoke "from the beginning," shaping itself into a message of life for men; and the incarnate revelation was its goal. It is the fourth verse rather than the first of the Gospel, which supplies the text for the Epistle: "that which hath come to be, in Him was life; and the life was the light of men." A stream flowing underground, with the roots of a thousand plants drinking of its strength and with verdure and beauty marking out its hidden course, the electric current running silent, unsuspected, through dark and winding channels till it reaches the carbon-points where it bursts into splendour—these are images

of the disclosure of God in Christ, as St John views it in relation to anterior dispensations. This was "the mystery," as St Paul conceived it, "hidden from times eternal"—God's secret lying deep at the heart of time, lodged and wrapped up in the world from its foundation, till it "was manifested" in the Only-begotten. Such was *the life* coming from the Father that appeared to the eyes of the witnesses of Jesus, the one life and love pervading all things, the source and ground of finite being.

2. In the second place, observe the energy with which the apostle asserts *the actuality* of the revelation of the life of God in Jesus Christ. Thrice in three verses he reiterates "we have seen" it, twice "we have heard," and twice repeats "the life was manifested."

The stupendous fact has always had its doubters and deniers. In any age of the world and under any system of thought, such a revelation as that made by Jesus Christ was sure to be met with incredulity. It is equally opposed to the superstitions and to the scepticisms natural to the human mind. The mind that is not surprised and sometimes staggered by the claims of Christ and the doctrines of Christianity, that has not felt the shock they give to our ordinary experience and native convictions, has not awakened to their real import. The doubt which, like that of Thomas at the resurrection, arises from a sense of the overwhelming magnitude, the tremendous significance of the facts asserted, is worthier than the facile and unthinking faith that admits enormous theological propositions without a strain and treats the profoundest mysteries as a commonplace.

St John ~~feels that~~ the things he declares demand the strongest evidence. He has not believed them lightly, and he does not expect others to believe them lightly. This passage goes to show that the Apostles were aware of the importance of historical truth; they were conscientious and jealously observant in this regard. Their faith was calm, rational and sagacious. They were

perfectly certain of the things they attested, and believed only upon commanding and irresistible evidence—evidence that covered the full extent of the case, evidence natural and supernatural, sensible and moral, scriptural and experimental, and practically demonstrative. But the facts they built upon are primarily of the spiritual order, so that without a corresponding spiritual sense and faculty they are never absolutely convincing. Already in St John's old age the solvents of philosophical analysis were being applied to the Gospel history and doctrine. The Godhead incarnate, the manifestation of the infinite in the finite, of the eternal in the temporal—this was impossible and self-contradictory; we know beforehand, the wise of the world said, that such things cannot be. And so criticism set itself to work upon the story, in the interests of a false philosophy. The incarnation, the miracles, the resurrection, the ascension—what are they but a beautiful poetic dream, a pictorial representation of spiritual truth, from which we must extract for ourselves a higher creed, leaving behind the supernatural as so much mere wrappage and imaginative dress! This rationalism loudly asserts to-day; and this the Gnosticism of the later apostolic age was already, in its peculiar method and dialect, beginning to make out.

The Apostle John confronts the Gnostic metaphysicians of his time, and the Agnostic materialists of ours, with his impressive declaration. Behind him lies the whole weight of the character, intelligence and disciplined experience of the witnesses of Jesus. Of what use was it for men at a distance to argue that this thing and that thing could not be? "I tell you," says the great Apostle, "we have seen it with our eyes, we have heard Him with our very ears; we have touched and tested and handled these things at every point, and we know that they are so." As he puts it, at the end of his letter, "we *know* that the Son of God is come; and He hath given us *an understanding*, that we may know Him that is true." The men who have founded Christianity and written the New Testament, were no fools.



They knew what they were talking about. No dreamer, no fanatic, no deceiver since the world began, ever wrote like the author of this Epistle. Every physical sense, every critical faculty of a sound and manly understanding, every honest conviction of the heart, every most searching and fiery test that can try the spirit of man, combine to assure us that the Apostles of Jesus Christ have told us the truth as they knew it about Him, and that things were even as they said and no otherwise. Ay, and God has borne witness to those faithful men through the ages since and put the seal to their testimony, or we should not be reading about these things to-day.

3. In the third place, there is founded upon the facts attested by the Apostles, and derived from the eternal life revealed in Christ, *a divine fellowship for men*. To promote this end St John writes: "that you also may have fellowship with us." To communicate these truths, to see this fellowship established amongst men, is the Apostle's delight, the business and delight of all those who share his faith and serve his Master: "these things we write, that *our joy* may be fulfilled." <sup>1</sup>

We have a great secret in common—we and the Apostles. The Father told it to Jesus, Jesus to them, they to us, and we to others. Those who have seen and heard such things, cannot keep the knowledge to themselves. These truths belong not to us only, but to "the whole world" (2. 2); they concern every man who has sins to confess and death to meet, who has work to do for his Maker in this world and a pathway to find through its darkness and perils.

The Apostle John is writing to Greeks, to men far removed from him in native sympathy and instinct; but he has long since forgotten all that, and the difference between Jew and Greek never appears to cross his mind in writing this letter. The only difference he knows is between those who "are of God" and those who "are of the world." In St John's teaching the idea of the

<sup>1</sup> On this reading see note, p. 70.

Church catholic as a spiritual brotherhood is perfected. He heads the procession of the confessors of Jesus, which marches unbroken through the centuries, gathering into its swelling ranks all that earth holds of purest and greatest. In that glorious array we rejoice to find a place; in our turn we sing its songs and repeat its witness,—“that our joy may be fulfilled.”

But “our fellowship” is not with them alone—with prophets, apostles, martyrs, saints of God. St John’s communion with his Lord was not such as that one holds with the great minds of the past, or that we cherish with our beloved dead—a fellowship of common thought, of memory and of hope. If the facts the Apostles attest are true, they are just as true for us as for them. If the life manifested in the Lord Jesus was eternal, then it is living and real to-day. As it “was from the beginning,” it will be to the end. Jesus Christ had brought His disciples into fellowship with the living God. He had shown them the Father; He had made them individually children of God, with Himself for Elder Brother. He had passed away from their sight, to be with them eternally in His Spirit. In this way He had really *come* to them, and the Father with Him, when He seemed to be going (John 14. 18–23: R.V.). They felt themselves to be in direct communion and communication every day with the Almighty Father in heaven, and with His Son Jesus Christ whom they had known and loved on earth. To this fellowship they invite and summon all mankind.

The manifestation of God in Christ makes fellowship with God feasible, in a new sense and in a deeper way. Does not the very distinction revealed in the Godhead make such communion conceivable, as it scarcely could be otherwise, and capable of realization? The children in the house understand *father and mother* better than they could do either of them alone; they learn to know each through the other. “Our communion,” writes St John, “is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ,”—with each distinctly, with each in and through

and for the other. We have fellowship with Christ in the Father. He has explained the Father (John 1. 18), and talked to us about Him ; and we enter into His views. We share Christ's thoughts about God. We begin to think and feel, in our poor finite, struggling way, about the Almighty Father as He did in His grand and perfect and everlasting way. "My Father, and your Father!" He condescends to say. Believing this assurance, we have fellowship with Jesus Christ, God's Son. God is to us, and life is to us, in some degree, what they were and are to our adorable Redeemer.

On the other hand, we have fellowship with God in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is God's ; but He is ours as well ! God has told us what He thinks about His Son, and wishes us to think with Him (see chap. 5. 9). Showing Him to the world, He says : "This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I am ever well pleased." And we agree to that : we are well pleased with Him too ! We solemnly accept "the testimony of God concerning His Son." So we are at one with God in respect to Christ. All harmony and peace centre there. So far as we know and can understand, there is nothing that occupies the mind of God so deeply and touches so vitally all His relations with mankind, as the kingdom and honour of His Son Jesus Christ ; there is nothing that pleases Him so much as our attachment to Christ. "The Father himself loveth you," said Jesus to His disciples, "because you have loved me, and believed that I came out from God" (John 16. 27). In Him God is reconciling the world to Himself. Upon faith in Him our individual destiny turns, and the fate of society and nations. Only when we think aright of Jesus Christ, are we in unison with God. Only when we think aright of Him and are rightly disposed toward Him, can we have fellowship with each other ; only on this condition can we work together with God for the world's redemption (see chap. 5. 4, 5, and Chap. XXII).

*Life, manifestation, fellowship*—three words resume the teaching of the first paragraph of the Epistle.



## FELLOWSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF GOD

The Gospel a Message about God, proposing Fellowship with God—  
The Old Gods and the New God—The God of Philosophy—The  
Incubus of Idolatry—God as pure Light—Light a Socializing Power  
—One Light for all Intelligence—Blindness to God the mother of  
Strife—Cleansing through the Blood of Jesus—Three Ways of oppos-  
ing the Light of God.

“And this is the message which we have heard from Him, and announce to you :

That God is light, and darkness in Him there is none.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in the darkness,  
We lie, and do not the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light,  
We have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son  
cleanseth us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin,

We deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us :

If we confess our sins,

He is faithful and just, that He may forgive us our sins and cleanse us  
from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned,

We make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

1 JOHN 1. 5-10.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FELLOWSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF GOD

**R**ELIGION, as the Apostle John conceived it, consists of two things: true knowledge of God, and fellowship with God and with each other in that knowledge. To fellowship with God in His Son Jesus Christ, the writer has summoned his readers (vers. 3, 4). For such communion the facts of the Gospel have laid the foundation. To establish and perfect His communion with men is the end of all the disclosures which the Father has made of Himself to us "from the beginning"; to realize this communion is "eternal life."

St John's Gospel, therefore, is, above all things, *a message about God*—to wit, "that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

When the Apostle says that this was the message which he had "heard from Him" (from Christ), it does not appear that the Lord Jesus had at any time uttered these precise words and given them as a "message." St John was not accustomed to rehearse the sayings of Jesus Christ in a formal and mechanical way. But everything that he had heard from his Master, everything that he had learnt of Him, everything that Jesus Christ Himself was, seemed to him to be crying out: "God is light, God is light; and in that light there is fellowship for men."

Let us put ourselves in the position of those who heard Christ's message from John's lips, the converted

idolaters of the Asian cities. His readers, most of them, were reared in heathenism. They had been taught in their youth to worship Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14. 12), Artemis of the Ephesians (Acts 19. 34), Bacchus of the Philadelphians, Aphrodité of the Smyrnæans, and we know not how many besides—gods stained, in the belief of their worshippers, with foul human vices, gods so evil in some of their characteristics that St Paul justly said concerning them: “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God.” They had gods that could cheat and lie, gods licentious and unchaste, gods spiteful and malignant towards men, quarrelsome and abusive towards each other. They had been accustomed to think of the Godhead as a mixed nature, like their own, only on a larger scale—good and evil, kind and cruel, pure and wanton, made of darkness and of light. Now, to hear of a God who is *all* truth, *all* righteousness and goodness, in whom there is no trickery or wantonness, no smallest spice of malice or delight in evil, *no darkness at all*—a God to be absolutely trusted and honoured—this was to the heathen of the Apostle’s mission an amazing revelation.

Their philosophers, indeed, conceived of the Divine nature as exalted above human desire and infirmity. But the philosophic conceptions of Plato or Plutarch were too speculative and ideal to affect the common mind; they were powerless to move the heart, to possess the imagination and will. These enlightened men scarcely attempted to overthrow the idols of the populace; and their teaching offered a feeble and slight resistance to the tide of moral corruption. False religions can be destroyed only by the real. The concrete and actual is displaced by the more actual, never by abstractions. It was faith in a living and true God, in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme fact of the universe, the enthroned Almighty and All-holy Will bent upon blessing and saving men, that struck down the idols, that trans-



formed society and reversed the stream of history; not belief in "the Divine" as the highest category of thought, as the Substance behind phenomena, the unknown and unknowable depositary of the collective powers of nature. Such ideas, at the best, shed but a cold, glimmering light on the path of daily toil and suffering; they proved themselves nerveless and pithless, all too faint to encounter the shock of passion and to master the turbulence of flesh and blood. Not in the name of Pythagoras or Plato did the Greek find salvation.

Since the providence of God has laid upon the English people so much responsibility for the heathen world, we should attempt to realize what heathenism means and is. We must understand the incubus that it lays upon mankind, the frightful mischief and misery of soul entailed by vile notions about God. To have untruth, cruelty, wrong imputed to the government of the universe, involved and imbedded in the Divine nature itself, to have the Fountain-head of being contaminated—what evil can there be so poisonous to society, so pregnant with all other evils, as this one? To own a treacherous friend, a thankless child, is wounding and maddening enough—but to have *a wicked god!* Nothing has ever given such relief to the human mind as the announcement of the simple truth of this verse. To see the sky washed clean of those foul shapes, to have the haunting idols, with their wanton spells and unbounded powers for evil—those veritable "demons"—banished from the imagination and replaced by the pure image of God incarnated in Christ, and to know that the Lord of the worlds seen and unseen is the Father of men, and is absolute rectitude and wisdom and love, this was to pass out of darkness into marvellous light!

Such was the impression that our religion made then, and makes now upon minds prepared to receive it amongst the heathen. God appeared in a character new and unconceived before, and realistic in the highest degree. Man's nature was invested with a glory, his

destiny lighted up with a splendour of hope, that was overwhelming in its first effects. The Pagan world had become to multitudes like a prison-vault, stifling and filled with shapes of terror. But the door opens, the shutters fall, the sunshine and sweet breath of heaven stream in, and the prisoner's heart breaks for very joy! Hence the exultant note of the New Testament, the keen and eager sense of salvation that fills its pages. It is the joy of daybreak after fearful night, of health after deadly sickness, of freedom after bondage. Such is the gladness you may send, or yourself carry, to yon Pagan sitting afar off in darkness and the shadow of death. A like gladness comes to ourselves when, behind the shows and forms of religion, we gain a sight of what the great, good God really is. Then the day-spring from on high visits us; "for God who said, Light shall shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts."

1. So far our course in the reading of this passage is clear. But when we pass from the negative to the positive, from the consideration of what God *is not* to ask ourselves what He *is*, as viewed under the symbol of "light," we are lost in the immensity of the Apostle's thought. This is one of those infinite words of the Bible, which have a meaning always beyond us, however far we track them.

The declaration, *God is light*, stands by the side of other pregnant sayings: *God is love*, *God is spirit*, and (in the Epistle to the Hebrews) *God is fire*. That "God is love" is a second definition found in this Epistle (4. 8). Of the two this is the more comprehensive, as it is the fundamental assertion. Love is one thing; light is the blending of many things in one. God is love; but love is not everything in God (comp. Chap. XX). Light, as we are now learning better than before, is a subtle and complex element, full of delicate, beautiful, and far-reaching mysteries. In the Divine light there is an infinite sum of perfections, each with its own separate glory and

wonderfulness, and all centring in the consummate harmony, the ineffable radiance and splendour of the Deity.

We might say, with Westcott, that "Physically light embodies the idea of splendour, glory; intellectually, of truth; morally, of holiness." Combining these aspects of the truth, we arrive at the interpretation that God is light as He shines upon us in the beauty of His holiness, His manifested righteousness and love. Light signifies purity, truth, goodness; as darkness signifies foulness, falsehood, malice. There was plenty of these latter in the heathen gods; there is none of them in ours. He is all love, all rectitude, all goodness and truth, and nothing in the least degree contrary thereto.

And these qualities do not so much belong to God, or distinguish Him and constitute His nature; they are constituted by His nature; they emanate from Him. Their existence in moral beings, and our power to conceive of them and to recognize them, "come down" from Him, "the Father of lights" (James 1. 17).

Nor does the Apostle's message simply declare that there are these luminous qualities in God, but that they are manifested to us. God is not only shining yonder, amongst the infinitudes, in His "light unapproachable"—in the burning depths of an insufferable glory; He has flung His heavens open, and shed Himself upon us. This metaphor speaks of the God revealed in Christ, of Immanuel, God with us! "*I am come,*" said Jesus, "*a light into the world.*" His coming was "*the message.*" In the Incarnation ten thousand voices spoke; as, when the rays of dawn strike upon the sleeper's window, they say, "*Day is come, the sun is here!*" God whose glory is above the heavens, is shining here amongst us, upon the dullest and poorest earthly lot—shooting the glances of His love and pity into the eyes of our heart. "*He gives the light of the knowledge of His glory, in the face of Jesus Christ*"

(2 Cor. 4. 6). There is nothing quiescent, nothing grudging, self-confined, exclusive about light. It is penetrating and diffusive, self-communicating yet self-asserting, streaming through the worlds—the all-piercing, all-informing, all-quickening and gladdening element of the universe. Such is God manifest to mankind in Jesus Christ.

2. Now it is evident that the knowledge of God in this character, wherever it extends, creates *fellowship*.

Light is a social power. It is the prime condition of communion, knitting together as by the play of some swift weaver's shuttle the vast commonwealth of worlds and setting all creatures of sense and reason at intercourse. With the daylight the forest awakes to song, and the city to speech and traffic. As the household in winter evenings draw round the cheerful lamp and the ruddy firelight; as the man of genial nature, rich in moral and intellectual light, forms about him a circle of kindred minds won by his influence and learning to recognize and prize each other, so the Lord Jesus Christ is the social centre of humanity. He is the only possible ground of a race-fellowship amongst us,—the Divine Firstborn and Elder Brother of the peoples. Christ is the love and wisdom of God in human personality, and therefore "the light of the world."

This connexion of thought is self-evident, so that in verse 6 the Apostle can pass without explanation from the idea of light to that of fellowship. For what communion can there be "in the darkness"? Is not sin the disruption of all society, human and divine? When God said, "Let there be light," He said, Let there be fellowship, friendship—a commonwealth of thought and joy amongst all creatures. Along the path of light eye runs to meet eye, heart leaps to kindred heart.

It is a thought full of awe and full of joy, that in the light of God we share with God Himself,—“if we walk in the light, as He is in the light.” God is

light, and God is *in the light*. He sees and acts in no other light than that of His own being; in the same light men may see and act. God creates around Him a light-sphere, wherein all holy souls dwell and "walk" with Him. Each planet subsists and moves in the same light as the sun from whom light proceeds, holding fellowship with the lord of day and with its brother planets, in a universe formed by the solar effluence. Even so in the spiritual realm. There is one sun in the sky; there is one God in the universe,—one centre of rational and moral life for all creatures, one source of love and truth from everlasting to everlasting; He "filleteth all in all, and worketh all in all." The light that pours in fiery tide from the heart of the sun, and that gleams on the cottage window and sparkles in the beads of dew, and glances on the mountain peak, and on the globe of Neptune at the far edge of the planetary world, is one light, bringing with it one life and law. The sun is in that light: so is the dancing mote, and the fluttering insect, and the laughing child, and the whirling, rushing globe. God is in the light: so is my believing soul and yours, so the spirits of Abraham and Isaac and all the just made perfect; so the bright squadrons of the angels and the tenants of the farthest outpost stars; so the vast body of the universal Church. There is one reason, one love, one righteousness for all intelligences—one Name to be hallowed, one Will to be done, "as in heaven so on earth," one Father-hand that holds the stars in their courses and holds thy soul in life. "With thee," says the Psalmist to his God, "is the fountain of life; in thy light we see light."

It is this light of God that alone makes possible a true and enduring fellowship amongst men. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we keep fellowship with one another" *i.e.* with our fellows also walking in the light (comp. 2. 9-11; 3. 10-12, 23, 24; 4. 7-13). It often appears that religious interests divide

men, while secular interests and material pursuits unite them. Christ once said that He had come to "bring a sword" and to "set men at variance" (Matt. 10. 34-36). How many blood-stained pages of history confirm this presentiment. But this is a transitional state of things. After all, no community has ever held together or can subsist in perpetuity without the religious bond. Fraternity means a common paternity. God is a partner, tacit or acknowledged, to every sound agreement amongst men. The use of the sacrifice and sacrament in compacts and of the oath in public declarations, notwithstanding their abuse, witnesses to this truth. The Eternal God is the rock and refuge of human society. The material and moral laws forming the framework of the house of life are "the everlasting arms underneath" and around us, which nurse and carry us, and fence us in with all our quarrels like birds in the nest, while they hold us to the heart of God.

It is therefore through ignorance of God that men and nations fight each other; in the dark we stumble against our fellows, and rage at them. In the light of Christ's true fellowship we gain the larger human views, the warmer heart, that make hatred and strife impossible. Quarrels in the Church, due to causes that are often petty and ignoble in the extreme, are pursued with a peculiar rancour, just because those engaged in them are fighting against the God of peace and resist a secret condemnation. In such contention the bitterness of a heart not right with God finds vent and discharges upon others its spleen, the suppressed indignation due to the evil in itself. Envy, contempt, backbiting have their root in unbelief; irreverence towards God breeds disregard for men. So far as we see and feel what God is, we shall grow humble and tender towards our kind.

Under these conditions, as we gather from the last clause of verse 7, it comes to pass that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ wins its full and decisive power over our evil nature: "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us

from *all sin*." Through continued fellowship with God and men, the cross of Christ gains increasing mastery within us. On the one hand, fellowship in the Divine light brings a deepening sense of sin, demanding a renewed confession and an ampler pardon; the old repentance and faith are convicted of shallowness, in the clearer knowledge of God. At the same time, we find that the atonement is not the means only, it is the end of our righteousness in Christ; it supplies the ideal of our service to God and man (comp. 3. 16, and Eph. 4. 32-5. 2), while it is the instrument by which we are recovered for that service. The cross of Jesus is the alpha and omega of salvation. We do not pass by it, as we enter the way of life; we have to lift it up and bear it with us to the end. "The blood of Jesus" is sprinkled on the conscience to rest there; it melts the heart, and melts into the heart. His death-blood, if we may so say, becomes the life-blood of our spirits. It sinks into the nature, wounding and healing, burning its way to the quick of our being, to the dark springs of evil, until it reaches and "slays the dire root and seed of sin." The sacrifice of Christ is the principle of our sanctification, equally with our justification.

Accordingly, in verse 9 we find the "cleansing from sin" of verse 7 (comp. p. 67), opening out into its two elements of *forgiveness* and *moral renewal*. Both turn upon one condition (the subjective condition, as the atonement is the objective ground of salvation), viz. the acknowledgment—the continued acknowledgment ( $\delta\mu\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma\omega\mu\epsilon\nu$ : present tense)—of personal sin, which is nothing else than the soul's yielding to the light of God's holy presence: "If we confess [go on to confess] our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In this confession penitence and faith meet. With St John we are "cleansed from *all sin*," when with St Paul we are "*conformed* to the death" of Christ and "know the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3. 10). This thorough cleansing, the immaculate perfection of the believer

crucified with His Lord, is the crown of a life of walking in the light.

The above is not a process carried on in isolation, by the solitary fellowship of the soul with God: "We have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us." There is a deep meaning in that "and." Christian fellowship and Christian perfection are things concomitant. Our social and individual salvation must be wrought out together. The goal is one to be sought for the Church, not the mere self—for *us*, not simply for *me*.

3. It is possible, however, to resist the light of the knowledge of God in Christ and to refuse the fellowship which it offers to us. And this resistance takes place in two ways: in the way of *hypocrisy* (ver. 6), or in the way of *impenitence* (vers. 8 and 10). These fatal methods of dealing with religious light are marked out by three parallel sentences, each beginning with the formula, "If we say," as stating things which we may *say*, but which can never be. They constitute a triple falsehood, committed in the sheltering of sin. In these various modes, "we lie and do not the truth," or "we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us," or (worst of all) "we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

Light is a kindly, but often an acutely painful thing. There are conditions of mind in which every ray of Divine truth is pointed with fire and excites a fierce resentment. The "arrows of the Almighty" burn and rankle in the rebellious spirit. The light searches us out, and shows us up. "If I had not come and spoken unto them," said Jesus of the Jewish Pharisees and priests, "they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin" (John 15. 22). With Him light came into the world, and men preferred darkness. The preference is their condemnation. St John had seen this preference take a cowardly form in Judas, and a defiant form in the Jewish rulers.

(1) We may oppose the light of God *treacherously*, by pretending to accept it while nevertheless we hold



fast our sins: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness"—like the thief who bare the bag and who stole out at night from the supper-table of Bethany and the spectacle of Mary's "waste" of love, to say to the priests, "What will ye give me, and I will betray Him unto you?"

The hypocrite is one who has been in the company of Jesus and has seen the light, who knows the truth and knows his own sin,—knows at least enough to be aware of his double-dealing. And while practising his sin, he professes fellowship with God! The holy Apostle does not stand on ceremony with this sort of man, or palter with the deceitfulness of the human heart; he gives him the lie direct: "If we say this," he cries out, "*we lie, and do not the truth.*" In such words one sees the flash of St John's swift lightning; one perceives why the Master called him and his brother James *Boanerges*, sons of thunder—the thunder not of brazen lungs but of a passionate heart. But the Apostle will not separate himself even from such a one as this. He had known a traitor amongst the Twelve. He puts his supposition in the first person plural; he speaks as if such a state were possible to any of us,—possible to himself! At the table of the Last Supper he had said with the rest, when the treason was announced, "Lord, is it I?" Which of us can claim to have been always true to the truth of Christ? It is easy to "say" this or that; but how hard to "*do the truth,*" to put our best convictions into act and practice! Yet there is an infinite chasm between Judas and John, between the studied deceit of the canting professor of religion and the self-accusings of the scrupulous believer, whose loyalty finds flaws in his best service.

He who professes communion with God while he lives in sin—the dishonest man, the unchaste man, the malicious and spiteful man—what does his profession mean? He virtually declares that God is like himself! He drags the All-holy One down to the level of Pagan deities; he brings to the Christian shrine the worship

due to Belial or Mammon. He sees God through the reek of his own burning lusts. Such an one might have fellowship with Zeus or Hermes, or Artemis of the Ephesians; but not with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,—no more than the bat or the night-owl holds fellowship with the mid-day sun! It needs clean hands and a pure heart to dwell in God's holy hill. If we walk in darkness, then we *are* in darkness.

(2) There is a more open and radical mode of opposition to the accusing light of God,—by flat denial of one's sin, by taking the attitude of a bold impenitence. This denial appears in two distinct forms: as a general *denial of sin in principle*, or as a particular and matter-of-fact *denial of one's actual sins*. Such is the distinction that seems to lie in the carefully chosen expressions of verses 8 and 10: "If we say that we have no sin," and "If we say that we have not sinned."

St John had to do with a moribund Pagan world, in which, as in heathen life to-day, the moral sense was decayed and conscience reduced to the lowest terms. Hence in converted men and believers in Christ the sense of sin, that "most awful and imperious creation of Christianity," could only be formed by degrees. Men might and did deny the reality of sin; by all kinds of sophistries and evasions they deceived themselves respecting its import and criminality. Not a few persons, it may be supposed, had espoused Christianity for intellectual or sentimental reasons, with very superficial convictions upon this head. Allowing the distinction of moral good and evil, they were slow to confess *sin*: they refused to admit an inherent depravity involving them in corruption and guilt. Their misdoings were mistakes, frailties, venial errors,—anything but "sin." That is an ugly word, and needless besides,—a bugbear, an invention of the priests! St John hastens to denounce these notions; they are self-delusion, the folly of men who extinguish the light that is in them, the ignorance of a shallow reason without

the inward substance of truth (ver. 8). The denial of sin so familiar in naturalistic modern thought—the resentment so often met with against the word itself—is a revival, in some cases conscious and intentional, of Pagan sentiment, an express revolt against the authority of Jesus Christ.

This error has deep roots, and has sometimes a strange recrudescence at an advanced stage of the Christian life. The man of “sinless perfection,” who imagines he has nothing left to confess, nothing that needs forgiveness, verily “deceives himself”; rarely does he deceive his neighbour on this point,—never his God. “The truth is not in him”: his moral convictions, his knowledge of the holiness of God, have not pierced to the heart of his iniquity. There is a superficial sanctification, serving thinly to cover a stubborn crust of impenitence, under which a world of pride and self-will lie hidden. As Rothe says: “In fellowship with Christ our eye becomes ever keener and keener for sin, especially for *our* sin. It is precisely the mature Christian who calls himself a great sinner.”

(3) The other form of impenitence stigmatized by the Apostle, is the most extreme and shameless: “If we say that we have not sinned”; and its consequence the most shocking: “We make Him a liar!”

One may deny sin in general and fence a good deal upon questions of principle and ethical theory, who yet when the word of God comes to him as a personal message and his memory and conscience are challenged by it, will admit practically that he has sinned and is in the sight of God a condemned man. David had, doubtless, argued with himself and deceived his own heart not a little in regard to his great transgression; but the prophet’s home-thrust, “Thou art the man,” broke down his guard; “and David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD.” To contradict a general truth is one thing; to confront the personal fact is another.

But when a sinner, with his transgressions staring him in the face and revealed in the accusing light of God's word, declares that he "has not sinned," what can be done for him, or said to him? The Apostle has only one resource with such a man: "God says that you have sinned, that you have broken the law of your being and incurred the penalty of exile from His presence, and brought on yourself moral ruin and misery. You say that you have done nothing of the kind. If you are right, *God is wrong*; if you are true, then *God is false*. You make *Him a liar!*" That is St John's final protest.

Every one who refuses to bow down at the sight of the majesty of God in Christ and to make confession before that white, soul-searching splendour of holiness and love, before the final disclosure of human guilt and the Divine righteousness made in the spilt blood of Jesus, is doing this. He gives the lie to his Maker and Judge. Impenitence in men who have really known the Gospel, is the most callous insensibility, the most daring insolence, we can conceive.

## THE ADVOCATE AND THE PROPITIATION

Aim of the Gospel the Abolition of Sin—Perversion of the Doctrine of gratuitous Pardon—Ground of the Apostle's Joy in his Children—Case of a Sinning Brother—Implication of the Society—Resort to the Advocate—Discrepancy in St John's Teaching—The title Paraclete—Advocate and High Priest—Character and Competency of the Advocate—Disposition of the Judge—The Advocate has "somewhat to offer"—The term Propitiation—Heathen and Jewish Propitiations—The Scandal of the Cross to Modern Thought—The Cost of the Propitiation to its Offerer—Law operative in redeeming Grace—The Advocate in the Sinner's place—Universal Scope of the Propitiation.

“ My little children, I write these things to you that you may not sin.  
And if any one should sin,  
We have an Advocate with <sup>1</sup> the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous ;  
And He is, Himself, the propitiation for our sins,  
Not however for ours only, but also for the whole world ! ”

1 JOHN 2. 1, 2.

<sup>1</sup> Πρὸς τὸν πατέρα=almost “ *addressing* the Father.” Of the four Greek prepositions covered by the English *with* of personal intercourse, *σύν* signifies *conjunction*, *μετά* *accompaniment*, *παρά* *presence with* (as in John 17. 5), *πρὸς* *converse with* (comp. John 1. 1). *Πρὸς* is *adversus* rather than *apud* (Vulgate), and with the accusative signifies either the direction of motion, or the relation between two objects [or *attitude* of one person to another]. We may fittingly call the preposition here *πρὸς* *pictorial*” (Alexander, in *Expositor's Bible*). The expression is ethical, not local.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ADVOCATE AND THE PROPITIATION

WE are brought at the beginning of the second chapter to the position that what the Gospel aims at is *the abolition of sin* (comp. Chaps. XVI and XXV). Every word St John writes, all that he has learned from his Master and that he has to teach to others, tends and bends to this one point. Not the "forgiving of sins" alone, but the "cleansing" of man's life "from all unrighteousness" (I. 9) to this the fidelity and the righteousness of God are pledged in the new covenant founded upon the death of Christ. St John, as well as St Paul, had to combat the antinomianism which fastens itself in so many insidious forms upon the doctrine of Justifying Grace, upon the proffer of a gratuitous remission of sins. Hence the fatherly solicitude with which he states the object of his Epistle: "My little children,<sup>1</sup> I am writing these things to you, to the end that you may not sin." The danger, which is explicitly stated in verse 7 of the next chapter, is already in the Apostle's mind: "Little children, let no one deceive you. The man that *doeth righteousness* is righteous, even as He [*i.e.* Christ] is righteous." Imputed righteousness that does not translate itself into actual righteousness, justification which bears no "fruit unto

<sup>1</sup> This is the first time that the characteristic compellation (*τεκνία*), recurring six times later on, appears. In this single instance (as the genuine text stands) is *τεκνία* qualified by the appropriative *μου*.

sanctification," a forgiveness that fails to make a man thereafter clean from sin, is a wretched delusion; it is pictured in rough fashion by the proverb of 2 Peter 2. 22: "the sow" that "washed herself, to roll in the mire!" The message of the Apostle will miss its mark, if it does not make its receivers "light in the Lord" and reproduce in them the image of Jesus Christ amongst men (comp. vers. 4, 28, 29; 3. 3, 10, 16, 24; 4. 7, 11-14, 20; 5. 18).

In the preface St John stated his purpose in a different way: "These things we write to you, that our joy may be made full." He was writing, like others, out of an irrepressible delight in the truths he had learned, with the longing that his fellow-men may share them. But this first, instinctive aim implies the second, which is deliberate and reflective. He is not the man to take pen in hand simply to relieve his personal feelings and for the sake of self-expression: the knowledge that fills the world with radiance for himself, shines for all men; so far as may be, it shall radiate through him. But it must shine unto salvation. Where men remain impenitent and unsanctified under the Divine light, when they deny their sins outright or shelter them behind a profession of faith, they are worse men and not better for their knowledge; in such cases the preacher's delight in his message becomes sorrow and shame. "Greater joy," he writes elsewhere, "I have not than this, that I hear of my children walking in truth" (3 John 4). The joy that rises in St John's soul as, in putting pen to paper, he calls up the image of his children, will be "made complete" and the old man's cup of salvation filled to the brim, if the purpose of his letter be answered in those who read, if they realize the Christian character, if sin be wiped out and done with for ever in them.

The Apostle's little children cannot say "that they have not sinned," nor "that they have no sin" (1. 8, 10);



but they understand that now, since they are forgiven and cleansed by the blood of God's Son, they must not and need not sin. "If," however, this unmeet contingency should occur, "if any should sin"—any of those who have tasted forgiveness and come into God's life—if such a man after all this should commit sin, are we to despair of him and count him as cut off from the brotherhood and for ever lost to God? No! the Apostle cries: "*We have an Advocate before the Father*—one whose intercession avails in this emergency (comp. 5. 16, 17): let us put the case into His hands."

Since the hypothesis, "if any one sin,"<sup>1</sup> is contrasted with the purpose of the letter, "that you may not sin," it is evident that this supposition concerns the readers; the possibility contemplated is that of some sin committed by a Christian man—an act contradictory of his calling—a paradox in point of principle, but such as must practically be reckoned with (comp. Chap. XVI). When in passing from the consequent of the hypothetical sentence and showing how this sad eventuality must be met, the writer replaces the indefinite "any one" (τις) by the communicative "we" (where we should expect "*he has an Advocate*"), he does not thereby identify the pronouns, as though hinting that the "any one" might prove to be himself for example, or that *any* reader might be found in the offender's plight; he is thinking of the community as concerned in the personal lapse from grace and as seeking a remedy. "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12. 26); "if any man" amongst us "sins," all are distressed; the comfort is that the Head of the Church feels our trouble—that "we have an Advocate with the Father," who will intervene in the case. It

<sup>1</sup> Any other Greek writer but St John would have used δέ instead of καί in the εἰν clause. The prevalence of the conjunction καί, the preference of the simple copulative to the adversative and illative connexion of sentences is a marked syntactical feature of his style, giving it a Hebraistic cast (comp. p. 77). The occurrence of δέ in the last clause of verse 2 is the more significant because of the rarity of this particle with St John.

is not, abstractly, "*There is an advocate*"; with a thankful sense of our common possession in the Paraclete, the Apostle writes, "*We have an advocate*," as when the writer to the Hebrews (8. 1) concludes, in his climactic style, "Such a High Priest we have."

This turn of expression illustrates the oneness of believers in Christ, and implies that sympathetic involvement of the society in the moral failure of the individual which St Paul enforced in writing to the Galatians: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in any trespass, you that are spiritual restore such an one in a spirit of meekness, looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (6. 1). Remembering St Peter's fall and recovery, and the anticipatory prayer of Jesus for the offender's restoration, St John might well express his hope in these terms. The consolation was needed. Amongst the infant Churches gathered out of heathenism and surrounded by it, while the passions and habits of Gentile life ran strongly in the blood of the first converts, relapses were to be expected; the utmost tenderness and firmness were necessary in dealing with them.

The Apostle John admits that a truly cleansed and saved man may lapse into sin; and yet he writes later on, in chap. 3. 6, 9: "Every one who abides in Him [in Christ] does not sin; every one that sinneth hath not seen Him, neither knoweth Him. . . . Every one who is begotten of God, doth not commit sin, because His seed is in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been begotten of God." These contrary implications cannot be quite logically adjusted to each other. Sin in Christian believers has something monstrous about it. The contradiction is relieved, however, by observing that the verbs of chap. 3. 6-9 relating to sin run in the *present* tense of the Greek, which denotes a continued or even habitual action (ὁ ἀμαρτάνων κ.τ.λ.), whereas we have in our text (ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη) a subjunctive *aorist*, which imports a single occurrence and may include no more than the barest act of sin, once committed and

repented of, such as was the memorable fall of Peter. Indeed, when Jesus Christ appears in the next clause as *advocate*, this presupposes the culprit's confession and petition for mercy; the Paraclete is invoked for one in admitted need and peril. Christ is no Advocate for the persistent wrong-doer, but for the sinner who renounces his offence and bemoans his fall. On the penitent's behalf He is ready to interpose; He makes haste to send the message, "Go, tell His disciples—and *Peter*—He goeth before you into Galilee" (Mark 16. 7). The condition of 1. 9, "If we confess," is indispensable for the advocacy of the righteous Intercessor, as it is for the forgiveness of the righteous Judge.

1. In this connexion our Lord Jesus Christ comes to receive a great title, which is given to Him *ipso nomine* only in this single passage of the New Testament. Virtually He assumed it when at the Last Supper He introduced the Holy Spirit to the disciples as "*another Paraclete*" (John 14. 16). The Spirit of truth was sent "from the Father" to be the pleader of Christ's cause against the world and amongst men, and to be in this capacity the inspirer of His witnesses, not dwelling visibly with them as Jesus did, but veritably *in* them.

The term *παράκλητος*—with its equivalent in the Latin *advocatus*—belonged to the sphere of civil life, and was familiar in the usage of ancient courts. It passed early as a loan-word into Jewish (Aramaic) use, and is found repeatedly in the Targums and the Talmud; it was probably current in Palestinian dialect. So in the Targum upon Job 33. 23, פִּרְקָלִיטָא is antithetical to אַרְבִּינְיָא (ὁ κατήγορος or ὁ κατήγορ, *the accuser*; see Acts 23. 30, &c., Rev. 12. 10): "there appeareth one angel as *defender* amidst a thousand *accusers*." Philo employs the word as in common vogue in the Hellenistic Jewish vocabulary; he describes the Levitical high priest in language strikingly parallel to this verse of St John: "It was necessary for him who is dedicated to the Father of the world to employ as advocate one

who is altogether perfect in virtue, to wit, a son of God, in order to secure both amnesty of sins and a supply of most abundant blessings.”<sup>1</sup> The “Paraclete” was a figure recognized by our Lord’s disciples, when He assigned this rôle to the Holy Spirit as His representative and the Church’s defender in face of the accusing world; its fitness is manifest when the like part is ascribed to the Lord Himself, intervening in the Father’s presence as spokesman for His offending brethren. Our Lord’s disciples had known Him in the days of His flesh as their “Advocate before the Father”: the prayer reported in the 17th chapter of John’s Gospel was one of many such pleadings; when on the cross Jesus prayed for His executioners, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do!” His intercession was virtually extended to “the whole world.”

What He had been upon earth, they knew Him still to be—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day, “who maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8. 34). St John’s “Paraclete” is synonymous, therefore, with the “High Priest after the order of Melchizedek,” who forms the chief subject of the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>2</sup> All that is set forth in that lofty argument respecting the character and functions of “the great Priest who hath passed through the heavens,” who hath “entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained an eternal redemption,” may be carried over to the account of the Advocate here in view.

This rarer title, however, brings the Mediator nearer to us. The High Priest is an exalted person, clothed with solitary and solemn dignity, “holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens,”—and all this is true of our Paraclete; but under the latter designation He is pictured as approach-

<sup>1</sup> Ἀναγκαῖον γὰρ ἦν τὸν ἱερωμένον τῷ τοῦ κόσμου πατρὶ παρακλήτῳ χρῆσθαι τελειοτάτῃ τὴν ἀρετὴν υἱῷ, πρὸς τε ἀμνησίαν ἁμαρτημάτων καὶ χορηγίαν ἀφθονωτάτων ἀγαθῶν (*De Vita Moysis*, 673 c).

<sup>2</sup> With Philo Judæus, the high priest is the *παράκλητος* of Israel before God; comp. Heb. 5. 1, &c.

able, intimate, entering into and associating Himself with the case of the accused. While the High Priest in his public duty, and acting upon his own initiative, offers sacrifice and makes intercession for the people's sins, the Advocate listens to each sinner's confession and meets the specific accusations under which he labours. The relationship of advocate and client constituted a settled personal tie involving acquaintanceship, and often kinship, between the parties. The *παράκλητος* of the old jurisprudence, in the best times of antiquity, was no hired pleader connected with his client for the occasion by his brief and his fee; he was his patron and standing counsel, the head of the order or the clan to which both belonged, bound by the claims of honour and family association to stand by his humble dependent and to see him through when his legal standing was imperilled; he was his client's natural protector and the appointed captain of his salvation. Such a Paraclete "we have"—"a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God"; but more than this, an interested, brotherly Pleader, who makes our suit personally His own. There is this difference further, that while the Priest is concerned only to interpose with his offering for sin, the Advocate takes into his account the entire situation and needs of his clansman. Any grave necessity or liability to which the client is exposed, constitutes a claim upon him for counsel and aid.

There are two personal conditions determining the success of the Advocate in the pleading supposed. (1) There must be *character and competency in the Paraclete*. He is described as "Jesus Christ the righteous." His name, with the record lying behind it, guarantees the worth of the person and His standing with the Father; it is a pledge of kindness, skill, authority, of human affinity and Divine prerogative, of power and merit and suitability. If Jesus Christ speaks for us—being all that the Gospel reports of Him, all that St John and his readers knew Him to be—we may

trust and not be afraid. A gracious hand is stretched out, a mighty voice uplifted on behalf of sinning, suffering men. He is wise no less than pitiful; He has not embarked on a lost cause, nor undertaken an impracticable task. But the peculiar ground of confidence present to the Apostle's mind lies in the epithet *δικαιος*: our Advocate for the brother whose sin we deplore, is "Jesus Christ *the righteous!*" This assures us not merely of the rectitude of our Mediator, but of His status and effective right as the sinless to plead for the sinful. We may rely upon the righteousness of His action in the matter in hand, and the soundness of the plea He advances. He is master of the law, knowing and fulfilling all its conditions; His character and antecedents warrant us in assuming that He will urge no argument, He will take up no position in representing our case, which justice does not approve while compassion prompts it. What the Apostle Paul said of God, that in the forgiveness of the Gospel He is "*just Himself* and the justifier of him that is of faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3. 26), is true *mutatis mutandis* of the sinner's Advocate: He is righteous Himself, and righteously pleads the cause of transgressors.

This quality in the Paraclete makes safe and sure the remission of sins. Pardon is not extracted by some overpowering appeal to pity, nor enforced by regard for the person of the Pleader; it is grounded upon strict right. The case is won by a Paraclete who could not lower Himself to advocate an unjust suit; while the Judge, though Father, is of such integrity that He will only forgive when and so far as He can be "faithful and righteous" (1. 9) in doing so. This is a vital point in St John's doctrine of Redemption. The realization of it gives a security, and a moral grandeur and power, to the salvation of the Gospel, which are wanting when this is presented in a one-sided, sentimental way—as though redeeming love acted in disregard of God's declared law and of the order of the universe.

(2) The other encouraging condition of Jesus Christ's

advocacy is afforded by *the name of Him to whom it is addressed*. The Paraclete appeals on our behalf to "the Father." *The Father* cannot be implacable, hard to persuade, or ready to raise occasions against us and to press the law to our disfavour. Where the judge is absolutely just and can come only to one conclusion, much still depends for the form of his decision, and the mode of execution that may be prescribed, on the kindness or otherwise of his disposition. When St John declares that "we have a righteous Advocate *before the Father*," the case is not that of love pleading with justice—so the Gospel has often been distorted; *justice pleads with love* for our release!

Here lies a key to the Apostle Paul's rich doctrine of Justification by grace through faith,—in the fact that God is one, is Himself, and His *whole* self, in each act of His administration towards mankind. He is not divided into Judge *and* Father—righteousness and mercy, law and love—acting now in one quality or office and now in another. He would not be just in His attitude and dealings with guilty men, not just either to them or to Himself, if He did not remember His paternal character, if the considerations attaching to fatherhood and filiation did not enter into His estimate and supply the factors upon which His judgements of condemnation or acquittal, favour or penalty, are based. The two "forensic" Epistles of Paul, those in which he argues out his doctrine of Justification in legal and dialectical terms, are prefaced by the wish of "Grace and peace from God our Father" (Rom. 1. 7) and by the assurance of deliverance from an evil world "according to the will of God our Father" (Gal. 1. 4). St Paul had surely not forgotten these ascriptions nor divested God of His essential Fatherhood, when he laid down his great thesis that "the *righteousness* of God is revealed" in the Gospel, "of faith, for faith" (Rom. 1. 17). That is an artificial theology which divorces the juridical and paternal relationships in the Godhead, which makes the Divine Fatherhood less fundamental to the doctrine of

the Epistles than it is to the message of Jesus in the Gospels. For St John at any rate, this text is sufficient to forbid the assumption of any such schism in the God-head or discrepancy in Apostolic teaching. The advocacy that Christ exercises, the "propitiation" He presents, are offered to "the Father." The nature of the expiation, and the matter of the Advocate's defence, are such as the Father justly requires, such as will satisfy Him when He meets His guilty and sin-confessing children, such that on the ground thus afforded, and in answer to the pleas advanced and reasons given, He may righteously forgive.

2. The competence of the Advocate being established, and the favourable conditions evident under which He appears, it is necessary to examine the ground on which He presents Himself before the Father-judge.

Pardon is not to be obtained for the guilty on the bare asking, nor because of the interest and personal merit of the suitor. Otherwise it had been enough to say, "We have an Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous; let Him only speak, and our suit is won!" The complementary sentence, "He is the propitiation for our sins," would then have been surplusage. Men who hold light and easy notions about sin may be ready to suppose this, but neither Christ nor His Apostles so imagined. The general institutions of religion and the deeper instincts of conscience have dictated the axiom that the priest approaching God on behalf of the guilty *must have somewhat to offer* (Heb. 8. 3); the analogies of human justice, at its best, vindicate this principle. The Pleader is simply "out of court," unless there is forthcoming a propitiation,—some satisfaction to the outraged character of God or (to put the same thing in another way) to the violated law of the universe, and some guarantee thereby afforded on the sinner's part that the offence shall cease. The Paraclete must bring the propitiation with Him, or His pleading is null and void. God the Father is "faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, if we confess"—



there is the only condition required upon our part; but this suffices in virtue of the covenant sealed by the sacrifice of Calvary and on the ground of the expiation made by "the blood of Jesus" (1. 7, 9). The pre-condition of Jesus Christ's successful advocacy it depended altogether on Himself to supply. There was no ground in humanity, outside of Him, upon which the Advocate could base a sufficient plea. The old ritual propitiations were unavailing, as the writer to the Hebrews pathetically shows; these offerings did but express the need for some real sin-offering; they appealed for and foreshadowed its accomplishment. "*He* is the propitiation"—He and none else, none less.

The word *ἱλασμός* [Hebrew מִכַּסֵּה (כִּפָּר), *cover*] is one about the meaning of which there should not be much dispute.<sup>1</sup> This precise term is employed but twice in the New Testament, here and in chap. 4. 10, where it has the same application to the person of the Redeemer: God "loved us, and sent His Son a propitiation for our sins." It is a term purely religious (as the verb *ἱλάσκομαι*, on which it rests, is principally), used in classical Greek of the sacrifices or prayers which are the means of *appeasing*, or *making propitious* [*ἱλεως*, *ἱλάσκομαι*], the offended gods. In the Greek Old Testament *ἱλάσκομαι* or *ἐξιλάσκομαι*, and their derivatives, come into play, chiefly and distinctively, as the equivalents of the verb כִּפָּר, with its group of dependent nouns. It is fairly certain that this Hebrew word has not departed far from its radical meaning, *to cover*. The root-idea of propitiation as expressed in the Jewish ritual was that of *covering* sin from the eyes of God, of interposing between His wrath and the offensive object, so that His punitive anger should be averted and turned to favour.

But there is this far-reaching difference between

<sup>1</sup> See the art. *Propitiation*, by S. R. Driver, in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*. *ἱλασμός* signifies etymologically the *act* or *process* of propitiating; then, like some other nouns in *-μός*, the *means* or *agency* effecting propitiation.

the conception of Atonement presented in revelation and that prevailing in Gentile religions, that while men elsewhere are driven under the pressure of their guilt to invent appeasements for their gods, Jehovah Himself prescribes to Israel the propitiations which He deems fitting and just. Mercy was no less patent than justice in the forms of sacrifice instituted by the Mosaic covenant; if the God of Israel required to be placated, He was eminently placable, making overtures to transgressors and paving the way for their access to His sanctuary. While "propitiation" connotes anger in God, a just displeasure against sin carrying with it penal consequences—and this implication cannot be eliminated by any fair dealing with the word—Biblical Greek carefully avoids making *God* the object of *ἰλάσκεσθαι*, *ἰλασμός*, or the like,—the obvious construction in the terminology of natural religion. The Holy One of Israel is not *made* gracious by the satisfaction offered Him: in His very anger He *is* gracious; the appeasement He gives order for and invites from His sinning people, proves His pity for them.

The appointment of the Son of God under the new covenant as Priest and Mediator for the race, and the provision which constitutes Him the sacrificial lamb of God, develop this unique element of Old Testament expiation in the most astonishing way. The idea of propitiation, which assumed gloomy and revolting forms in the ethnic cults, is touched with a glorious light of Divine grace and condescension. It is amply expounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "At the consummation of the ages" One "hath been manifested," who comes "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself"—a Being far above the angels and whose throne is for ever, yet "in all things made like to His brethren, that He might prove Himself a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things pertaining to God." Thus the Son of God qualifies "to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2. 17); and the sacrifice of the Cross is seen to be the goal of earlier revelation.

St Paul coincided with St John and the writer to the Hebrews in this interpretation of the death of Jesus. He uses in his classical passage on the Atonement (Rom. 3. 23–26) the term *ἱλαστήριον*, where St John has *ἱλασμός*: “Whom God set forth, in His blood, a propitiatory (victim) through faith.”<sup>1</sup>

The heathen notion, natural to man’s guilty conscience, of the hostility of the gods who seek to avenge themselves on evil men and plan their ruin, is dispelled by this disclosure. Wrath against sin there is in the Godhead—the antipathy of the absolute Holiness to the false and impure, which burns everlastingly to consume its opposite. Propitiation cannot be forgone; God cannot deny Himself, nor the Fountain of law make terms with “lawlessness” (3. 4). But in wrath He remembers mercy toward His offspring. Beneath the fire of God’s anger glows the fire of His love. If He requires a moral expiation, He shall provide it. If sin must be branded with a condemnation that otherwise would crush the sinner, there is the Son of His love who will submit Himself to that sentence as man amongst men, and bear its weight, who will die the death which transgression entails; and the Father “did not spare His own Son,” when He confronted this liability and humbled Himself unto the death of the cross, but “gave Him up for us all” (Rom. 8. 32).

There is a paradox for human language, a depth of the Godhead beyond our sounding, in the double aspect

<sup>1</sup> *ἱλαστήριον* is the more concrete expression, construed as accusative masculine (see Sanday and Headlam’s Note *ad loc.*)—“a propitiatory person,” “in a propitiatory character”; *ἱλασμός* the more abstract—“a (means of) propitiation,” one in whom propitiation is realized. The distinction between *ἱλασμός* and its synonyms is well stated by Dr Driver in the article above referred to: “The death of Christ is represented in the New Testament under three main aspects, as a *λύτρον*, *ransoming* from the power of sin and spiritual death; as a *καταλλαγή*, setting ‘at one,’ or *reconciling* God and man, and bringing to an end the alienation between them; and as a *ἱλασμός*, a *propitiation* breaking down the barrier which sin interposes between God and man, and enabling God again to enter into fellowship with him.”

of the *ἰλασμός*, in the unity of the Divine wrath and love, the coincidence of mercy and penalty, judicial infliction and fatherly restoration, that meet in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Modern thought stumbles and struggles hard against this offence—its peculiar *σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ* and cross in the Cross; but no stumbling at it will displace it. With whatever subtlety such words as “propitiation” and “reconciliation” are explained away, they remain in the lexicon of the New Testament, to assert the stern element of sin-avenging justice in the character of God. The death of Jesus Christ attests for ever the fearful consequences which the sin of our race, under the operation of Divine law, has brought upon those involved in it.

The Apostle’s language recalls the scene of the Israelite “day of Atonement” (*יום הכיפורים*, *ἡμέρα ἑξίλασμοῦ*), the “day of affliction” for the sins of Israel. We see the high priest, after he has first filled the shrine with the smoke of incense, bearing the blood of the bullock slain for himself and his family to present it in the Most Holy Place (such sacrifice for *Himself*, the writer to the Hebrews explains in chap. 7. 26–28, our High Priest had no need to make), then killing the goat which represented the guilty people in the sight of Jehovah, and carrying its blood in turn before the Presence. This blood of the sin-offering he sprinkled once on the golden lid of the ark which held the law (designated for this reason the “mercy-seat,” *כַּפֹּרֶת*, *ἰλαστήριον*; see Heb. 9. 5), and seven times in the vacant space before it (Lev. 16; 23. 28–32), which “blood of sprinkling” was called emblematically the *כַּפֹּרֶת*, the *covering* of the people’s sins from before the face of God. This was the culminating office of the high-priestly service; its occasion was the one day of the year in which Aaron entered the Holy of holies—alone, and “not without blood”—to “make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” The renewal of the favour of God toward Israel, the maintenance of His covenant of grace with His people and of its status of adoption and privilege, were made conditional

upon this yearly propitiation. The lesser, current sin-offerings and sacrifices, negotiated through other priests, were auxiliary and supplementary thereto; they realized for individuals and for minor occasions what was wrought in the solemn and collective expiation offered by the High Priest once in each year. "The blood of Jesus, God's Son," of which the Apostle spoke in such arresting words in chap. 1. 7, is the substance, "for the whole world," of the true *ιασμός*, which the blood of the animal victim slain by Aaron on the day of Atonement represented typically for the nation of Israel. This blood "cleanseth from all sin," while that served as "a remembrance made of sins year by year" (Heb. 10. 1-3).

St John's "propitiation" is synonymous with St Paul's "atonement" or "reconciliation" (*καταλλαγή*, Rom. 5. 1-11, &c.); both terms are associated with the Hebrew *כִּפּוּר* and its congeners and equivalents. But while the Pauline expression signifies the *restoring of peace* between estranged and contending parties, the Johannine imports the *restoring of favour* toward the condemned and banished; with St Paul rebels, with St John culprits are forgiven. The one Apostle sees those who were in the enemy's camp brought over and received on amnesty into the service against which formerly they had borne arms—"translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love" (Col. 1. 13), like himself who was "before a blasphemer and persecutor" of his Lord, but "had obtained mercy"; the other Apostle looks on a company of the once sin-stained and leprous, who were driven from the sanctuary with the "dogs" that "are without," but "have washed their robes and made them white in the Lamb's blood," and now "have the right to come to the tree of life, and enter in by the gates into the city" (Rev. 22. 14, 15).

But how great the cost at which this right was won by the Advocate! Here was the task and labour of His mission—to "take away the sin of the world." Other

aid our heavenly Friend could render to men with comparative ease. Hunger and disease, madness, even death, as the record tells, Jesus had power to remedy by a stroke of His authority. But a lifting of the eyes to heaven, a sentence of blessing,—and five loaves become food for five thousand men; a mere rebuke,—and wind and waves lie down hushed at His feet and the storm is gone; a command from the holy lips of Jesus,—and the demons quit their tormented prey, the convulsed frame and frenzied brain are restored to sanity; a single word, “Lazarus, come forth!”—and the sheeted dead issues from the tomb, and gropes his way back a living, breathing man. These things were no such great achievement for our Paraclete, seeing He was the Lord of nature from eternity, one with the world’s Creator. But when it came to the putting away of sin, this was a different matter. Power is of no avail in moral affairs, in what touches conscience and character; nor is goodwill of any efficacy, without a just and wise direction of its impulses. Here lay the Redeemer’s problem, the *quæstio vexata* of the ages—how to set guilty and evil men right with God! Let those who make light of sin, who deem human transgression a venial thing and suppose that our heavenly Father, being gracious and sovereign, might well condone, out of mere prerogative and by way of compassion and magnanimity, the offences of His creatures,—let those who so regard the Divine government and turn the grace of God into a soft indulgence, consider what befell our Advocate in dealing for sinners with the eternal Righteousness.

The laws of physical nature, which express one side of the Divine character and embody great principles of its working, are not gentle in their treatment of misdoers, nor in their treatment of those affected by the misdoing of others. Mechanics, chemistry, physiology, biology proclaim the fact that “the way of transgressors is hard”—hard for themselves, and for all connected with them. Throughout the regions of

natural law, sloping upward toward the moral, "every transgression and disobedience receiveth a just recompense of reward," and "the mills of God" grind, swiftly or slowly, retribution with the most exact and infallible certainty of sequence. No defiance, no negligence, is overlooked or fails of its amercement. In these vast provinces of God's kingdom, lawlessness is searched out and visited with a sleepless and exemplary chastisement. When one enters into the spiritual sphere of existence, the forces of love and remedial grace come into play; but they do not neutralize nor supersede the principle of retribution pervading the government of God; lower laws may be subordinated, they are not over-ridden or set at nought when we pass into the higher and more complex conditions of life. From the fall of a stone, flung heedlessly, which maims a child, or the flight of an arrow pointed by hatred at an enemy's breast, up to the sufferings of the Redeemer under the load of a world's sin, there is one God, one law, one element of righteousness and truth, that "worketh all things in all."

When our Advocate stepped forth to shield transgressors, when Jesus Christ "came into the world to save sinners," He engaged Himself to a work of inconceivable pain and difficulty. There was a "chastisement of our peace" to be laid upon Him, without which God could not be truly reconciled to the world, nor the world to God. Neither the Divine nature nor the human conscience would allow this obligation to be evaded. The Paraclete, if He is really to stand by us and go through with our case, though He be the eternal Son of God, cannot get away from this necessity; no favour, no prerogative exempts Him from the consequences, when He has once become the surety for sinners. He must *pay the price* of our redemption. God the Father will not spare the Son of His love the shame and suffering thus incurred—cannot spare Him, in His utter love and pity, since the law that yokes these consequences to transgression and determines

such effects from such causes, is integral with His own being. In the consent of the Son to endure the cross to which men's sin brought Him, the Father sees the image of His own righteousness and mercy; He recognizes there the oneness of love and justice inherent in His holiness, which constitutes the offering of Calvary the "perfect sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." In virtue of the complete accord between the act of Jesus in yielding Himself to the cross and the laws of moral being that proceed from the nature of God, this sacrifice became (to use St Paul's strong expression) "an odour of sweet smell" (Eph. 5. 2), a veritable propitiation in the estimate of God.

Having espoused our cause, the righteous Advocate goes to all lengths with it. He holds back from no exertion, no cost that the case demands. His honour, His blood are at His brethren's service; "the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10. 11). He "emptied Himself" in descending to a bondman's place; lower still, "He humbled Himself even to the death of the cross,"—to the nethermost of ignominy and anguish (Phil. 2. 7, 8). What the sacrifice cost Him, what it cost to God who "spared not His own Son," is a reckoning infinitely beyond our moral calculus. The scene of Gethsemane allows a moment's glance into the mystery of Divine grief over human sin. There the Redeemer wrestles with His task, now pressing in its appalling weight on His human consciousness. He shrank back in such horror that, if we read the story aright, the blood forced itself from His tortured veins. "Father," He cries, "if it be possible, let this cup pass!" Thrice the petition is addressed to the All-righteous and All-merciful, by the Son of His good pleasure. Was the Father deaf to the cry of those quivering lips? Had there been any other way, had it been possible upon less exacting terms to undo man's transgression, would not that way have been discovered? No; it was not possible with God to pass over sin without atonement, to accept the plea of our Advocate without propitiation rendered.



The Priest must become Himself the victim, for His intercession to prevail. No goats or calves of the stall shall He lay upon the altar. He must "by the sacrifice of *Himself* put away sin" and "enter in the right of *His own blood* once for all into the Holy Place, obtaining eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9. 12, 26): "HIMSELF is the propitiation for our sins"—*αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν*. The Advocate throws His life into the plea; He speaks by His blood. He steps, as one should say, from the pleaders' bench into the dock to cover the prisoner's person with His own. He puts His unspotted holiness and the wealth of His being at the service and in the place of the criminal, meeting in his stead the brunt of condemnation, so that by sharing his penalty, in such form as is possible and fitting to innocence, He may save him from its fatal issue and recover him for goodness and for God.

Such a propitiation can be of no mere local validity, of no limited interest and operation. The grandeur of the person rendering it, the moral glory and essential humanity of the sacrifice, bespeak for it a universal scope. A "propitiation," St John writes, "not for our sins only, but indeed *touching the whole world*." The Church's Paraclete is the world's Redeemer. Jesus Christ the righteous is the champion and vindicator of our race. His sin-offering, presented by the Son of man for man, avails without limit; it covers in its merits and significance all the families of mankind and the ages of time; He has "obtained an eternal" and a world-embracing "redemption"; even as "there is one God"—so, St Paul argues (1 Tim. 2. 5-7)—"there is one Mediator between God and men, Himself man, viz. Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." The universal expiation of sin has been made, one that countervails and counteracts sin in its deepest and broadest working—not as a specific Jewish liability, but as the attribute of the race. So this Paraclete stands forth as the friend and healer of His kind everywhere, the Sin-bearer of humanity. He wears on his

official breastplate not the names of the twelve tribes of Israel any longer, but of every tribe and kindred. In His perpetual intercession Jesus Christ bears the weight of the world's cares and sins before the Father of men. His earthly experience, in life and death, has made Him competent to be "a priest for ever" and "for the whole world."

The words that first directed the Apostle John to his Master were those spoken in his hearing by the Baptist on the Jordan banks—startling words, which looked beyond the Jewish horizon and showed a faith outleaping the bounds of the speaker's ancestry and rearing and a knowledge of things revealed otherwise than by flesh and blood: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away *the sin of the world!*" (John 1. 29). That patient Lamb of God, who submitted Himself for the Baptist's ordination, had filled the Apostle's life with His presence. He had displayed many an unlooked-for attribute of power, and received many a name of honour from His disciples' lips since that day. But this is still His distinctive glory; the act on which the kingship of Jesus Christ for ever rests, is that by His righteous sacrifice of love He has "taken away the sin of the world." The eternal song of angels and of men is that to which St John listened in the isle of Patmos: "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain, to receive the power and riches and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"

## THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Elements of Fellowship with God—Connexion of Ideas in chap. 2. 1-6—  
Danger of providing for Sin in Believers—Loyalty the Test and Guard  
of Forgiveness—What is *keeping* of Commands?—What the *Commands*  
to be kept?—Good Conscience of Commandment-keeper—Falseness of  
Knowledge of God without Obedience—Knowledge translated into Love  
—Love the Soul of Loyalty—“Perfecting” of God’s Love—“The Com-  
mandments” and “the Word” of God—Communion passing into Union  
with God—Mutual Indwelling—Jesus the Example of Life in God—The  
Features of His Image.

“ And in this we know that we have come to know Him :

If we keep His commandments.

He who saith, I have come to know Him, and keepeth not  
His commandments,

Is a liar, and in him the truth is not ;

But whosoever is keeping His word,

Verily in him the love of God hath been perfected.

In this we know that we are in Him :

He who saith that he abideth in Him,

Is bound, even as *He* walked, so to walk also himself.”

1 JOHN 2. 3-6.

## CHAPTER X

### THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

THE fellowship with God, which St John conceives as the purpose of the Christian revelation, now resolves itself into *knowledge* (ver. 3) of and *love to God* (ver. 5), with *commandment-keeping* for its test (vers. 3-5), and a fixed *abiding in God* for its result (vers. 5, 6), while *the walk of Jesus* supplies its pattern and standard (ver. 6).

The goal of fellowship with God has been in view throughout and already preoccupies the mind of the reader. So that when at this point the writer speaks of "having known Him," of "keeping His commands" or "His word," of "being in Him," "abiding in Him," there should be no doubt that "God," or "the Father," is meant by the pronoun,<sup>1</sup> although "Jesus Christ" (vers. 1, 2) is the nearest grammatical antecedent, and is therefore by some interpreters assumed under the *αὐτόν κ.τ.λ.* of vers. 3-6. But the predicates *παράκλητος* and *ιασμός*, given to Christ in the foregoing verses, assigned to Him a relatively subordinate, mediating position; "the Father," before whom the Advocate pleads and to whom "the propitiation" is offered remains the commanding presence of the context. Hence when, at the close of this paragraph, "Jesus Christ the righteous" has to be referred to again (in

<sup>1</sup> In the parallel passage, chap. 5. 2, 3, *αἱ ἐντολαὶ αὐτοῦ* are *God's* commands; so *ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ* in 1. 10 = *ὁ λόγος τ. θεοῦ* of 2. 14 — never *τ. χριστοῦ*, or the like, in this Epistle.

ver. 6), a distinct pronoun is employed; He is brought in as ἐκεῖνος, *ille, that (other) one*; comp. 3. 3, 5, 7, 4. 17.<sup>1</sup>

Fellowship with God is the true end of man's existence (1. 3). This comes through "the life" that "was manifested" in Jesus, God's Son (1. 2), but manifested in conflict with its opposite as "light" confronting and revealing "darkness" (1. 5 ff.). *Sin* is "the darkness," even as "God is light"; sin is the death of man's life of fellowship with God. This cause has severed mankind from God everywhere. Verse 2 of the second chapter completed the circle of thought which set out from verse 5 of the first, since it brings "the whole world" under the scope of that "propitiation" rendered by Jesus Christ, our righteous Advocate, which removes the bar put by man's sin against his communion with God, which restores the Divine light to a world estranged from God and ignorant of Him.

With the former circle of ideas rounded off (1. 5-2. 2), St John's mind according to its manner takes a wider circuit concentric with the first (2. 3-17), setting out again from the original point. In the first movement of this new flight the primary conception of the Epistle is taken up again, with a change of accent and expression, viz. that of the opposition of light and darkness raised by the Gospel message. Verses 3-5 in this chapter are parallel to verses 6 and 7 of chapter 1; but the second representation, both on its positive and negative sides, is more explicit and matter-of-fact than the first: "fellowship" opens out into "knowledge" and "love"; "walking in the light" is translated into "keeping God's commands"; of the man who in the former instance "lies" and "does not the truth," it is now said that "he is a liar and the truth is not in him" —his false act has grown into a fixed state. In the "walk" of Jesus Christ (ver. 6), the ideal of "walking

<sup>1</sup> English idiom, with only *He* to employ for *αὐτός* and *ἐκεῖνος* alike, lends itself to an ambiguity which embarrasses the interpretation of 1 John repeatedly.

in the light" (1. 7) is realized in historical fact and seen in its loftiness and beauty.

The general connexion of thought is unmistakable. Verses 3-6 do not continue the strain of verses 1, 2, which carried on the thought of chap. 1 to the climax reached in *περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου*; the "and" of verse 3 looks beyond the foregoing context to the fundamental saying of 1. 5, "that God is light," of which the writer has now to make a practical and searching application. The links of association in St John's writings are curiously crossed and interlaced. The more simple his language and obvious the grammatical relation of his sentences, so much the more difficult to trace in its finer movements is the interplay of his thought.

One has to bear in mind that there are *two* parties to a letter; an epistle is a dialogue. We have to put ourselves in the place of writer and readers alternately, and to imagine at each step of the argument or appeal what the latter would think or say, while we listen to what the former is saying; we must endeavour to read their rejoinders, and possible misunderstandings, between the lines and to see how the writer anticipates and deals with them as he proceeds. From the side of this other party to the letter, a line of connexion is apparent between verses 1, 2, and 3-6, which is wrought in with the main and substantial association binding the latter paragraph to chap. 1. 5. The Apostle has admitted the possibility of a lapse from grace in one or other of his "little children"; he has shown that for this lamentable case relief is afforded by the intercession of Christ (vers. 1, 2). But this is a provision of which the antinomianism of the human heart may take base advantage. The tempted Christian, on hearing what St John has just written, might say to himself: "There is hope for the backslider; then I am not lost if I backslide! God is a merciful Father; Christ died to expiate all sin, and is my Intercessor. If under the storm and press of evil I should yield, His hand will be stretched out to save me. I may stumble, but I shall

not utterly fall." How natural, and how perilous, such a reflexion would be. It was the like inference that St Paul had earlier to combat amongst the first Gentile disciples (Rom. 6. 1): "Let us continue in sin, that grace may abound"; God delights in forgiveness, since the propitiation for sin has been offered by Jesus Christ—a *little more to forgive* can make no difference to Him! This danger attaching to the gospel of free pardon for sinners—a liability especially great in the case of half-trained converts from heathenism—led the Church to surround with so much terror, and to prevent by the strongest fence of discipline, the contingency of relapse after baptism. The possibility of such abuse of his message of sin-cleansing through the blood of Jesus was doubtless present to St John's mind.

For this reason his doctrine of obedience and practical holiness follows, with keen insistence, upon that of the remission of sin. As St Paul makes sanctification the concomitant of justification and works of love the proof of a saving faith, so with St John commandment-keeping is the test of knowledge of a sin-pardoning God. A penitent backslider, like Peter, will be forgiven; but Peter was not a *calculating* backslider. He did not argue to himself, "Jesus is infinitely kind; God is an indulgent Father, who will not be implacable toward a weak man so fearfully tried; I may risk the sin!"—and then rap out the denial and the shameful oath. Such an offence would have been immeasurably worse than that committed, and quite unlikely to be followed by a speedy, sincere repentance. Deliberate transgression, on the part of one who presumes on God's mercy and discounts the guilt of sin by the value of the Atonement, is an act that shows the man to be ignorant of God and to have no true will to keep His commands. There is more hope of a reckless, prodigal transgressor than of him.

1. Here then is the sign that sin is forgiven and cleansed away: here the manifestation of a changed heart dwelling in fellowship with God. *The keeping of*



*His commandments is the test and pledge of an abiding knowledge of the Father.* "This is the love of God," the Apostle virtually writes in verse 5 (as in chap. 5. 3), "that we keep His commandments," and in verse 3, "This is the knowledge of God, that we keep His commandments" (comp., for St Paul, 1 Cor. 7. 19; Rom. 2. 13; 8. 4). A sentimental love and a theoretic knowledge are equally vain, because they are both without obedience, like the "faith without works" which St James rejected as "barren" and "dead in itself" (2. 14-26). The equation of *knowledge, love, and commandment-keeping* is completed when we add to the two propositions just quoted a third, which is found in chap. 4. 7, "Every one that loveth . . . knoweth God."

The "keeping" that is meant is the habit and rule of the man's life. This is indicated by the (continuous) *present* tense in the forms of *τηρέω* that are used (comp. 3. 24, 5. 3, 18) in distinction from the Greek *aorist* ("if any one fall into sin") of verse 1 above, which suggested a single and, it might be, incidental wrong-doing. For example, confession of Christ was the bent of St Peter's whole life, to which the denial in Caiaphas' hall was the lamentable exception. Moreover, "*keeping* God's commandments" is not simply doing what they prescribe, as men will obey perforce rules with which they have no conformity of will; it signifies observant care, as of one keeping a safe path or a cherished trust. So Christ "*kept* His Father's commandments, abiding in His love," and "*kept* in the Father's name His own which were in the world" (John 15. 10, 17. 12); so the Apostle Paul would have the Ephesians (4. 3) "*keep* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Such heedful observance pays honour to the command, holding it sacred for its own sake and for the Giver's, and "esteeming all His precepts concerning all things to be right." A rational fellowship with God includes harmony with His law; for this is no string of arbitrary enactments, but the expression of God's

own nature, as that bears on human conduct and looks to see itself imaged in the character of men. It is impossible for the man who really *knows* God—His awful holiness, His all-encompassing and all-searching presence, His infinite bounty and tender fatherliness—to behave as a commandment-breaker. “How can I do this great wickedness, and *sin against God?*” the tempted man exclaims, who has set the Lord always before him. Knowing God, men cannot at the same time practise sin, any more than with open eyes in the daylight a seeing man can stumble as if in darkness.

If it be asked what were the commandments of God whose keeping the Apostle expects from his disciples, they must be found in the moral law of Israel, as that was expounded by Jesus Christ and reduced to its spiritual principles. The majority of the readers were converts from Paganism of the first or second generation, who had made acquaintance with Divine law through the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The Apostles used the Ten Commandments as the basis of ethical instruction to catechumens and to children (see Rom. 13. 9, Eph. 6. 2, &c.). So the Church has wisely done ever since. But the Commandments of Moses were comprehended and glorified in the two precepts of Jesus (comp. Rom. 13. 8–10), on which, as He declared, “hang all the law and the prophets”; for in love to God and man they find their centre and vital spring.

Such settled, steadfast obedience to God’s rule in human life is evidence to the obedient man that he has gained a knowledge of God, and has tasted of eternal life: “Hereby (to use the language of chap. 3. 19), we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before God”; and so it stands in this passage: “Hereby *we know* that we know Him.” The same evidence St Paul stated in his own way, when he wrote, “If by the Spirit you are mortifying the deeds of the body, you shall live; for as many as are

led by the Spirit of God, these are God's sons" (Rom. 8. 13, 14). The Christian obedience of love is a token to the world—to "all men" (John 13. 34, 35)—of a true discipleship; but it is proof to the disciple himself first of all, and he has full right to the comfort afforded by this witness of the Spirit of Christ in him. "Hereby we know," says St John in another place (3. 24), "that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us." The Lord Jesus alone possessed this assurance without defect or interruption; He could say, "I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love"; "I do always the things that please Him."

The reader of the Greek will note the play upon the verb *γινώσκω* in verse 3, which has no exact parallel in the New Testament<sup>1</sup>: *γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν*. The continuous, or inceptive, *present* in the governing verb (recurring in verse 5) is followed in the dependent sentence—so again in the fourth verse—by the *perfect* tense signifying a knowledge won and abiding (*cognovimus*, Vulgate)—"a result of the past realized in the present" (Westcott: see his note *ad loc.*, and comp. vers. 13, 14, 3. 6, 16; 2 John 1; John 8. 55, 14. 9, 17. 7, for this emphatic tense-form). The Authorized Version, in rendering the sentence "We do know that we know Him," almost reverses the relation of the two tenses, while the Revised Version leaves the difference unmarked and distinguishable only by the stress of the voice to be placed upon the second *know*. St John's meaning is, "We perceive (we are finding out and getting to know) that we have known God,—that we exist in God" (ver. 5). There is a growing discernment by the Christian believer of his own estate and of the Divine knowledge imparted to him through Christ, a sounding of the depths of God within himself and a "knowing of the things given us by God in His grace" (1 Cor. 2. 12), which brings to him, as his faith

<sup>1</sup> A doubling of *οἶδα* occurs in John 16. 30 ("Now we know that thou knowest all things"); but in this sentence there is no variation of tense, and the repetition has no special significance.

ripens, a profound thankfulness and security. In this peace of God, whose tranquillity the Apostle knows, he would have his readers at rest and satisfied.

Doubtless St John, in prescribing the above test for professors of the knowledge of God, had in view the Gnostics of his day, the men of the "knowledge falsely-named" (1 Tim. 6. 20), who when he wrote had become numerous and formidable (comp. pp. 61-64). These teachers resolved the knowledge of God into metaphysical ideas; they made communion with God a matter of abstract contemplation and methodized symbolic observances, to which moral principles and the authority of revealed truth were made subordinate in their systems. They claimed on the ground of their speculative insight, and the "mysteries" reserved for their initiates, to be exclusive possessors of "the truth." They vaunted themselves the enlightened and emancipated, raised by their superior knowledge above the simple Christian who walks by faith and knows not "the deeps" (Rev. 2. 24) of Divine wisdom. With such pretenders confronting him and seducing his flock—the "antichrists" and "false prophets" whom he bans in verse 18 and chap. 4. 1—the Apostle sets up this mark—the same that his Lord prescribed for the detection of their like, "By their fruits ye shall know them": "He that says, I know God, and keeps not His commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." A low morale, due to the subtlety that confounds moral distinctions or the cleverness that trifles with them, is the nemesis of intellectual pride.

"*In him* the truth is not"—in the man claiming acquaintance with God while he lives as a violator of His law. "The truth" lies remote from those who "profess that they know God, but by their deeds deny Him" (Tit. 1. 16). Truth consorts with men of lowly heart, such as make no boast of their knowledge but in love to God "keep His word" (ver. 5). Of two sorts of men the Apostle declares that "the truth (of Christ, of the Gospel) is not in" them—the Pharisaic

moralist who declines all confession of sin (1. 8, 9), and the immoral religionist who would make communion with God compatible with sin. These hypocrites the Apostle of love denounces in language recalling that, quoted by himself, which our Lord used of "the devil": "In the truth he standeth not, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh the lie, he speaketh out of his own; for he is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8. 44). So near does this self-conceit lie to the source and beginning of all falsehood; so fatally does a religious profession without the ruling sense of right and duty undermine the innermost truth of a man's being.

2. Passing from verse 4 to verse 5, we find knowledge transformed by a sudden turn into *love*. Since the latter verse is the formal antithesis of its predecessor, and the clause "but whoso keepeth His word" takes up again the former protasis "he that keepeth His commands," one expects the parallel apodosis to run "in him is the *knowledge* of God." But the writer is not content with this logical continuation of the sentence; for "knowledge" he substitutes "*love* of God," and the bare "is" (ἔστιν) he replaces by the richer predicate "hath been perfected" (τετελείωται). From this it appears that while commandment-keeping is the test of a genuine knowledge of God, *love is its characteristic mode*. The man who truly knows God, does not make much of his knowledge; he is not in the habit of saying, like the Gnostic, "I have found out God," "I know all mysteries and all knowledge," "I have fathomed the depths of Deity"; he shows his love to God by steadfast obedience to command, and in this obedience love has its full sway and reaches its mark.

In this quiet exchange of ἀγάπη for γνῶσις St John assumes all that St Paul has so powerfully argued in 1 Corinthians 8 and 13, concerning the emptiness of a loveless knowledge. Knowledge must be steeped in love, the science of Divine things transfused with

charity, or it loses its own virtue of truth; it becomes purblind and colour-blind, it stumbles and misguides others. While St Paul habitually contrasts the two powers, and in writing to the Corinthians, who were affecters of philosophy, appears to belittle knowledge in magnifying love, St John rises above this opposition; he exalts knowledge by making it one with love, and in fact uses the rival terms as interchangeable. He can conceive no knowledge of God without apprehension of His love (see 3. 1, 4. 7-16), and no love toward God to compare with that awakened by the knowledge of His love revealed in Jesus His Son. To say that one *knows* God (such a God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ) and that one *loves* God, is in effect one and the same thing; and the man who says the former without demonstrating the latter by obedience, betrays his own falsehood.

That *love to God* means keeping His commands, goes almost without saying. For, indeed, the first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." All other commands depend on this, and presume in man this disposition of love to his Maker and Lawgiver. Love to God is the sum of religion, as the love of God is its source. This affection can, therefore, admit of no divided and partial sway—it demands "all the heart, and all the mind, and all the soul, and all the strength"; it cannot acquiesce in any arrested development, in any crooked or stunted growth of our moral nature. It makes for *perfection*; and it works to this end along the lines of commandment-keeping. "Whosoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has been perfected;" it is brought to its ripe growth and due accomplishment in character and life. "Truly"—verily and veritably—this is so with him who is faithful to God's word; while the disloyal man "is a liar" when he pretends to seek perfection, or professes communion with the God whom he does not serve in love.

St John's bold word, "is perfected," must not be evaded nor softened down. Here, and in chap. 4. 12

("His love is in us, made perfect"), he enunciates a doctrine of "perfect love," of full sanctification—a devotion to God that is complete as it covers the man's whole nature and brings him to the realization of his proper ends as a man, a love that is regnant in the soul and suppresses every alien motive and desire. The statement, it should be observed, is hypothetical; it is one of principle, and stands clear of all defeats of experience and defects in the individual. The point of the Apostle's assertion is not that love to God "*has been* perfected" in this or that Christian saint—though in himself and in others like him this condition was, to all intents and purposes, attained; but that wherever "God's word" is verily "kept"—is apprehended, cherished, and held fast in its living import—there, and there only, "*the love of God is perfected.*" No more perfect love to God can be imagined, none that reaches a higher range and a richer development than that which comes of the keeping of God's word, than that which is fed on Scripture and finds there its root and nourishment.<sup>1</sup>

Obedience is the school of love's perfecting. For love's sake we obey rule, and by obeying learn to love better. Love reaches no height of perfectness in any family without commands to keep and tasks to do; where all is ease and indulgence, selfishness grows rank. There is a kind of strictness fatal to love; but there is another kind, which is its guardian and nurse. The most

<sup>1</sup> St John's perfecting of love by obedience has an instructive parallel in St James' perfecting of faith by works: ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη, 2. 22. The verb τελειόω in these instances has much the same force as when it is said, ἡ γραφή ἐτελειώθη (John 19. 28; more commonly, ἐπληρώθη, πεπλήρωται), in a case where some word of Scripture comes to its furthest realization and attains the *ne plus ultra* of its significance. Τελειόω has a further connotation, pointed out by Westcott, in this passage: "Both τελειοῦν and ἐπιτελεῖν are used of Christian action (Phil. 3. 12, Gal. 3. 3). But in τελειοῦν there is the idea of a continuous growth, a vital development, an advance to maturity (τελειότης, Heb. 5. 14, 6. 1). In ἐπιτελεῖν the notion is rather that of attaining a definite end (τέλος): contrast James 2. 22 (ἐτελειώθη) with 2 Cor. 7. 1, ἐπιτελοῦντες ἀγιοσύνην, and Acts 20. 24 (τελειῶσαι τὸν δρόμον) with 2 Tim. 4. 7, τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα."

orderly households are, in general, the most affectionate, while the ill-governed teem with bickering and spite.

Very significantly, the "keeping of God's commandments" (of verses 3 and 4) has now become the "keeping of *His word*." The former are concentrated, and yet broadened out, in the latter. The ἐντολαί are a part of the Divine λόγος, of that whole utterance in which God has declared Himself to men. It is because they come as "*God's word*," the expression of His gracious will, and in the shape of His *word* articulate through human lips, that the commandments are effective and executive; under this form they come to possess the soul, they seat themselves by a resident and congenial power within the nature of the child of God. Six times in this Epistle the phrase "keeping His commandments" is repeated; only in this instance do we read of "keeping His word."

In John's Gospel, and on the lips of Jesus, the latter expression predominates; He speaks habitually of "the word," or message, that He brings from God; the term "commandment(s)" our Lord uses only in His final charge (John 13. 34; 14. 15, 21; 15. 10), in giving specific, new injunctions to His disciples. In the intercessory prayer of the Saviour (John 17. 6 ff.), commending His disciples to the Father's protection, He describes them as those who "have kept thy word" and in consequence "have now come to know that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are from thee." For the saving knowledge of the things of God conveyed by Christ is contingent on, and of a piece with, the cherishing and practising of God's word.

We have assumed that "the love of God" (ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ) signifies the love that the keeper of His word has for God—not contrariwise, the love which God has for him. The drift of the context carries us to this reading of the phrase; the same relationship of the noun to its genitive appears in chap. 2. 15, and 5. 3; John 14. 15, 31 illustrate from the words of Jesus the inevitable



sequence by which the Christian keeping of commands follows upon love toward the Commandment-giver. In chap. 4. 9 of the Epistle the context points just as decisively the other way; there "the love of God" is that which God manifested in the sending of His Son to save us; with St Paul too the adjunct "of God" (or "of Christ") qualifying "love" is always a *subjective genitive*. Nothing is gained by forcing the latter sense upon this passage; nor in 4. 12 ("His love"), where the same ambiguity arises, and is decided by the same considerations. The middle course adopted by Haupt and Westcott, who try to balance the subjective and objective constructions against each other, does not commend itself in either text. To paraphrase "the love of God" as "Divine love, love such as God feels"—not distinctly either that felt *by* God or *toward* God—is to introduce a vague and confused, as well as exceptional rendering of a familiar phrase, and to drop the link of transition from the *knowledge* ("I have known Him," ver. 4), to the *love* of God (ver. 5), in which the force of the argument lies.<sup>1</sup> The "perfecting" of our love to God by "love to one another," described in chap. 4. 11-14, is tantamount to its "perfecting" by the "keeping of God's word"; for the message which St John has received and constantly repeats, culminates in this, "Beloved, let us love one another" (see Chaps. XI and XX).

3. In both the above passages of the Epistle (2. 5, 6, and 4. 11-14), to the love of God which fulfils itself in the keeping of His word, a great and immediate reward is assigned: *abiding in God is the result of the true knowledge of Him*,—of the knowledge, that is, which is one with love and approves itself by obedience to command. "In this we know that we *are in Him*" (ver. 5b)—namely, in the consciousness that

<sup>1</sup> On this and other points of grammatical interpretation Lücke, whose *Commentar über die Briefe des Evangelisten Johannes* is too little known, shows a firmer grasp and a clearer judgement than either of the two great exegetes just mentioned.

we lovingly "keep His word" and "know Him" in very deed (vers. 3, 5a); by the like token, it is said in chap. 4. 13, that "we know that we *abide in Him*." This constitutes the "communion" of man with God at which the whole Gospel aims (1. 3, 5). Nay, it is more than communion, it is *union*. This Divine *κοινωνία* is not the intercourse of two separate personalities external to each other, but of the finite knowledge and love with the infinite, that is at once immanent to it and transcendent, the fellowship of the seeing eye with the light that fills the universe, of the spark of kindled being with the eternal Source, of the floating atom with the limitless sea and sum of life, which is pervaded and enfolded by the loving will of God. The soul finds itself, in the consciousness of self-surrendering love toward God, occupied, encircled, and upheld by Him.

And in this recognition the human heart for the first time enters into and properly feels its own existence: "In this we perceive that in Him *we exist*"<sup>1</sup> (comp. Acts 17. 28). "Existing in Him" (ver. 5) becomes in verse 6 (comp. 4. 13) "abiding in Him": "abiding in God" is existence in God perpetuated; it is union made restful and secure. *Abiding* is one of St John's key-words, learnt in its spiritual use from his Master (John 8. 31, 14. 10, 15. 4 ff.); in this idea the aged Apostle's experience and disposition of mind show their stamp.<sup>2</sup> His life has long been hid with Christ in God. His thoughts never move out of God, nor fix on any object in which God is not seen and His presence and direction realized. God is at the centre of every desire, at the spring of every impulse; God fills the circumference of outlook and of aim.

<sup>1</sup> Γινώσκομεν—"we perceive, come to know, recognize, that we are in Him." The inversion, *ἐν αὐτῷ ἵσμεν*, emphasizes the *verbum essentiæ*.

<sup>2</sup> The verb *μένω* occurs oftener in John's Gospel and Epistles than in all the N.T. besides. The phrase *μένειν ἐν* applied to spiritual objects (*Christ, God, love, &c.*), so conspicuously Johannine, is only found in 1 Tim. 2. 15 and 2 Tim. 3. 14 elsewhere.

God is "all things and in all" to the soul that loves Him wholly, that lives in the atmosphere and walks by the light of His word.

As it comes to this conclusion, at the end of verse 5 St John's thought doubles back on itself, to repeat, in amended and ampler form, the statement of verse 3. "Herein we know"—not simply (ver. 3) "that we *have known* God" (as the Gnostic loved to say), nor "that we *love* God" (as the Christian prefers to say, and as the former part of verse 5 leads one to expect the Apostle's saying)—but "that *we are in Him.*" The writer's mind moves in ever-widening circles, giving to the same substance incessantly new shapes and colours. Knowledge of God (vers. 3, 4) is restated as "love of God" in verse 5a; and where "love of God" might have been repeated, this gives place in turn to the idea of "being" and "abiding in God." The "fellowship" of chap. 1. 3 divided itself into knowledge and love (2. 3, 4), and these recombine in the enriched conception of a union through which the human spirit finds its home, its ground and sphere of being in the Divine.

The thought of man's abiding in God is complemented in the parallel context by that of God's abiding in him (4. 13, 16); for God tenants the believing and loving soul, while He enfolds it. The bird is in the air; but the air too is in the bird, filling breast and wings and lifting it to soar in the kindred element. This correlative truth of God's fellowship with men does not here come into view, since St John in confuting the false pretenders to religious knowledge, is concerned with the marks of the Christian state as these appear from the human and experimental side. Of this state there are three tokens: *obedience and love toward God*, resulting in a conscious *being and dwelling in God*; and these three are one.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bengel analyses vers. 3-6a somewhat differently, finding in them *three stages of progress*: the *ἐγνωκίναί αὐτόν, εἶναι ἐν αὐτῷ, μένειν ἐν αὐτῷ*,—"cognitio, communicio, constantia."

4. Finally, verse 6 sets up *the standard of the life of Divine fellowship furnished to mankind in Jesus Christ*. That knowledge of God by which the soul dwells in Him, belonged to *one* amongst men in perfect measure. In Him, if in no other, "the love of God has been perfected" by the constant keeping of His word: "I have kept my Father's commandments," said Jesus, "and abide in His love" (John 15. 10). Hence Jesus claimed in His debate with "the Jews" to possess the knowledge of the Father lacking to them, the want of which made all their professions futile. "It is my Father," He protested, "that glorifieth me, of whom you say that He is your God, and you have not known Him" (comp. vers. 3, 4 above). "But *I* know Him; and if I should say, 'I know Him not,' I shall be like you, a liar; but I do know Him, and I keep His word" (John 8. 54, 55). The secret of the Lord was with Jesus, when the spiritual guides of His people had altogether lost it. A gracious, loving temper, lowly purity of heart, calm, clear insight into the will of God—these were evidence in Him, signally wanting in His *impugners*, of the intimacy with the Father in which He lived and wrought. If He was in this respect a true witness, the Jewish leaders who challenged Him were liars.

Now St John, in meeting the antinomian sophistry of his later days, sees the situation of Jesus and the Rabbis of Jerusalem reproduced. These men also "say" of God, "I have known Him" (ver. 4); they "say that they abide in Him" (ver. 6); their aspect of wisdom and authority impose on simple minds. "But look at their lives," the Apostle says: "do they walk as *He walked?*"

It is a formidable criterion that the Gospel supplies to prove the title of those who come in Christ's name; its application they cannot escape. "I have left you an example," our Master said, "that you should do as I have done unto you,"—"by this shall

all men know that you are my disciples": if this example be not followed and the trend of our life bears in a direction other than that of His, men are justified in drawing the opposite inference. The example may be misapplied through narrowness or ill-will; a formal and mechanical construction is put upon it, when the imitation of Jesus is made to consist in the reproduction of circumstantial details and traits of the Blessed Life determined by His social environment and His personal mission. The essential character of the "walk of Jesus" and its exemplary power are often missed in the attempt to realize its superficial features. But with all the difficulties and limitations attaching to the use of this model, it remains the perfect pattern of a holy humanity, the creed rendered into flesh and blood, —breathing, walking, living, dying, rising again. In this actualized form the true life stamps itself upon the disciples of Jesus Christ; they cannot hold His faith as notional believers, by way of mere mental assent and conventional observance, if indeed they believe in the Word made flesh, in the life of God lived out through the soul and body of a man! It is impossible for a sane and sincere mind to accept the doctrine of Jesus without the responsibility of following the *walk* of Jesus. By this touchstone St John exposed the grandiose pretensions of contemporary Gnosticism; by it the true and the false Gospel are normally to be distinguished. That type of faith is nearest the faith of Jesus, which produces in the greatest number and of the finest quality men who "walk even as He walked."

The subject of the sentence "*He* walked" (ἐκεῖνος) is, in grammatical propriety, another person from that just named (ἐν αὐτῷ, "in Him"). The argument is not that if one *dwells* in Christ one must *walk* in Christ (as, for instance, in Gal. 5. 25), but that if one *dwells in God*, one will walk *like Jesus*. Jesus Christ is the pattern of the true life in God. It is

not consistency with ourselves, conformity of practice and profession, that the Apostle enjoins, but conformity of both to Jesus Christ. If you abide in God, you will love God and keep His word, just as the Lord Jesus did; your knowledge will thus prove itself to be of the same order and to have the like contents with the human knowledge of the Father that Jesus possessed, out of which He lived His life amongst men. As He held His earthly existence consciously in God and for God, so it should be with those who profess His faith, who present to the world His Gospel and represent Him on its behalf.

At later turns in the Epistle the writer commends two features of the walk of Jesus in particular to the imitation of his readers. In chap. 3. 3 its *purity*—the chastity of soul in the Holy One, that shrank from contamination with a delicate and instinctive repugnance. This positive purity, which goes beyond the mere cleansing from sin, this richer and finer strain of goodness, shone throughout the walk of Jesus Christ; and He breathes it, with His Spirit, into those who walk with Him.

Again, in chap. 3. 16 the crowning act of the earthly course of Jesus is adduced for imitation: "In this we have come to know love, in that He for us laid down His life; and we ought for the brethren to lay down our lives." Both here and there *obligation* is laid upon us (*ὀφείλει, ὀφείλομεν*); the duty is something that we *owe* (see Luke 17. 10); it is our personal *due* to God and to our brethren, under the relations in which we are placed to both by Jesus Christ. There is more incumbent on us in the following of Jesus than the copying of an example; it is the discharge of a debt. We do not simply see the beauty of Christ's self-devotion, the ideal purity of His spirit and life, and set ourselves for our own sake, out of admiration and aspiration, to the task of reproducing His lineaments. We are no volunteers, or amateurs, in the quest; necessity is laid upon us, and we are not free to act otherwise.

Every step of that lovely "walk" of Jesus was taken toward the goal of man's redemption by His blood; those who walk in His way aim at His end and mark. By treading this pathway to the end—a continuous course of self-sacrifice, self-inanition—Jesus Christ has established His claims upon us and become "our Lord"; we are not our own any more—we "were bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6. 20). To state the same principle in St Paul's words, "He died for all, that the living should no longer live to themselves, but to Him who for their sakes died and rose again"—to this kind of walk "the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. 5. 14, 15). The career of Jesus Christ does not afford His brethren merely an exterior copy, but an interior compulsive and assimilative force. Christ is to be "formed in" us, and till this is accomplished the Apostles "travail in birth" over their children (Gal. 4. 19). Only through experience of the cross are genuine Christians fashioned and made; when we are "conformed to the image of God's Son," we truly "keep the word of God," and "love is made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgement, because *as He is* we too are in this world" (4. 17).

The true knowledge of God is seen in the love of God; and the true love of God is seen in the obedient walk of His Son Jesus Christ, in His perfect purity and self-devotion to God and men. Let those who profess Divine knowledge, demonstrate it by such a life. This is the sum of the paragraph we have considered.





## THE OLD AND NEW COMMANDMENT

Teaching of last Paragraph familiar to Readers—"The Commandment"  
Christ's Law of Brother-love—St John harps on this String—The  
Breaker of the Christian Rule—The Sin of Hatred—Its Course and  
Issue—The Scandal it Creates—Life in the Light—The Commandment  
of Love Old as the Gospel—Old as Revelation—Old as the Being of  
God—New as the Incarnation and the Cross—"New in Him, and in  
You"—The Novelty of Christian Brotherhood—Dawn of the World's  
New Day.

“ Beloved, it is no new commandment that I write to you,  
But an old commandment which you had from the beginning ;  
The old commandment is the word which you heard.  
Again, it is a new commandment that I write to you :  
Which thing is true in Him,—and in you ;  
Because the darkness is passing, and the true light now shineth.  
He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the dark-  
ness even till now ;  
He that loveth his brother, abideth in the light,  
And no occasion of stumbling is in him ;  
But he that hateth his brother, is in the darkness,  
And he walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not where he is going ;  
Because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

1 JOHN 2. 7-11.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE OLD AND NEW COMMANDMENT

THE keeping of God's commands, it was shown in the last paragraph, is the test of a real knowledge of Him; this criterion distinguishes the true from the false "gnostic," or man of knowledge. In "the word" of God His commandments have their recognized expression, and in "the love of God" their sovereign principle. The example of Jesus Christ is the pattern of obedience to them, which we Christians are bound to copy. All this is perfectly familiar; the Apostle almost apologizes for the reiteration of these elementary matters, which Gnostic sophistry had rendered necessary. "In this insistence upon practical obedience as the proof of your knowledge of God, and on the centring of all duty in love, I am setting before you nothing new; I am telling the old story, and repeating the old commandment from the lips of Jesus. You heard it when the Gospel first reached you long ago; it has been sounding in your ears ever since."

"The commandment" here intended can be none other than Christ's law of love for His disciples—that which our Lord singled out amongst the Divine precepts to stamp it for His own by saying, "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I loved you" (John 15. 12); this ordinance is the touchstone of all the rest. It is *the* commandment of our Epistle, and recurs six times in its five chapters; verses 9-11 of

this paragraph are occupied with it. To the duty of *love* the writer challenges his "*beloved*" (comp. 4. 7, 11),—so addressing the readers for the first time in his letter. Some interpreters find the ἐντολή of verses 7, 8, in the command *to follow Jesus*, gathered from verse 6. They argue that the foregoing rather than the following context supplies the basis of this sentence; if it were merely a question of contextual sequence, their preference would be justified. But the point of St John's appeal lies in the fact that the commandment he means is a well-known rule, the ever-sounding order of the day for those to whom he writes; it is a precept which will occur of itself to the readers, needing no definition or preamble. There was but one law of the Christian life of which this could be assumed; and this was, not the general obligation to copy the pattern of Jesus, but the express direction coming from His lips, that those who believe in Him *should love one another*. The obligation "to walk as He walked," enforced in the last verse, suggests and leads up to "the old" and "new commandment" of verses 7 and 8, which is argued upon in verses 9-11.

"Love one another" was, moreover, the watchword of St John himself, the saying characteristic of him and which gained him his title of "the Apostle of Love,"—"no new commandment" certainly to those reared upon his teaching. The story goes that in age and feebleness, when no longer equal to his public ministry, the Apostle John would have himself carried in his chair by the young men into the assembly, and while all listened reverently, he would look round on them and breathe out the words, "Little children, love one another!" After this had occurred repeatedly, some one asked him, "Why, father, do you always say this to us, and nothing more?" "Because," he replied, "it is the commandment of the Lord; and because when this is done, all is done." The great commandment of the Gospel—old and not new, old and yet new—the alpha and omega of the rule of

Christ, could be none other than the Christian law of brother-love.

It may be convenient to reverse the order of St John's exposition in this passage, and to fix our attention first on the contrasted positions of *the breaker and the keeper of Christ's commandment* outlined in verses 9-11, and then on the contrasted aspects of the law itself—*its antiquity and its novelty*—signified in verses 7 and 8. By this means we may throw into greater relief the salient features of the paragraph.

I. *The man that breaks the Christian rule* is "he who . . . hates his brother" (vers. 9, 11), as *the man that keeps the Christian rule* is "he who loves his brother" (ver. 10). Of the former it is declared that he "is in the darkness," even while he "says that he is in the light," so that "he walks in the darkness," and consequently "knows not where he is going" (vers. 9, 11): the way and the end of life, the path he is taking and the goal he is making for, are both hidden from him; and while he misses his own way, he hinders others by setting offences in the road for them (σκάνδαλον . . . ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ, ver. 8). Of the latter—of him who obeys and copies Christ in serving God and man by love—the counter-assertions are made, explicitly or implicitly, at each point: "he dwells in the light," and nothing in him makes others stumble (ver. 10); he walks on a lighted pathway, to a visible and assured goal (ver. 11).

St John deals in plain and broad antitheses—light and darkness, love and hate, righteousness and lawlessness, eternal life and death. He knows nothing of the nuances and intermediate shades, in which modern thought with its analytical subtlety and critical irresolution habitually works (comp. p. 52). His ideas are severe and massive; they exhibit in their construction the classical purity of line and directness of movement. There burns under the calm surface of his speech a lambent fire too intense for passion, and a flood swells in him too deep for turbulence. His "lover" and "hater" (ἀγαπῶν, μισῶν) are the child of God and of

the Devil respectively (3. 8-11), the embodiments of heaven and hell upon this earth; they represent the two fundamental parties of mankind, the elementary factors to which the Apostle would reduce all the antagonisms existing in the soul and in society (comp. Chap. XVII).

But the character defined in verse 9 is no abstract type, no mere impersonation of the bad element in humanity. St John has an actual personality in view—the sort of man confronting him in the schismatics of the day, whom discerning readers will identify by the description: “he that says he is in the light, and hates his brother.” This is the boaster of verse 4 over again: “he that says, ‘I have known God,’ and does not keep His commands” (see p. 140). The first part of the previous definition is generalized (by way of recalling the great axiom of verse 5), while the second part of it is specialized: to “have known God” is to “be in the light”; to “hate one’s brother” is to break all “the commandments of God” in one. The bitter, prating religionist, who would serve God with a busy intellect and unquiet tongue out of a cold heart, knows not his own sin; in his vaunted knowledge he is the most deceived of men (see chap. i. 8, 9). “Vain talkers and deceivers” of this kind, who deemed themselves the “progressives” of the day (2 John 9), swarmed about the Churches of Asia, men puffed up with the pride of religious culture and full of scorn toward those who kept to the ways of a plain, old-fashioned faith. Their contempt for fellow-believers proved them to be “in the darkness”; though they deemed themselves possessors of a higher light. God, who “is light,” in being so “is love” (1. 5, 4. 8). To St John’s mind, there is a flat contradiction between walking in the light, or knowing God, and hating a brother; for hatred is spiritual darkness, and “blinds the eyes” of those walking in it. Not from above but from beneath comes the message that the new teachers bring, since they set at naught “the old command-

ment" of love; not out of a clearer light, but out of a miserable darkness do the voices speak that are charged with so much arrogance and anger.

The verb *μισέω* is broader than our word "hate," covering, in St John's vocabulary, the whole range of feeling opposed to "love" (*ἀγάπη*). Neutrality, a poise of mere indifference, is impossible, as the Apostle conceives things; one likes or dislikes, one is moved to sympathy or antagonism toward every personality one meets. And to be in contact with a Christian brother, a child of God, and yet to cherish ill-will towards him, is to show the lack of a Christian heart: not to love "the brother whom one has seen" is to fail in love to God the Unseen (4. 20 f.), whose Spirit dwells in that rejected child of His.

The term "brother" has a strict significance in St John's vocabulary. Neither here, nor elsewhere in the New Testament, does *ὁ ἀδελφός* signify "the brother-man"—though the doctrine of human brotherhood is rooted in the New Testament; nor is it synonymous with *ὁ πλησίον* (the neighbour) of our Lord's story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. The affinity of character that links the Christian brother to God his Father (3. 1, 2, 9, 24; 4. 13, 20; 5. 2, &c.), is the underlying assumption which justifies this test of a spurious Christian knowledge (comp. 5. 4). The phrase *ἕως ἄρτι* (*till this moment: usque adhuc*, Vulgate),<sup>1</sup> coming at the close of the verse, describes, with a touch of reproachful surprise, the darkness in which these mislikers of their brethren are, as continuing unbroken though "the true light" is shining around them (ver. 8) and while they congratulate themselves on being the most enlightened! Throughout they have remained in the darkness of sin, and are so at this moment, since their heart is untouched by the love of God or man. Such were the "false prophets," whom St

<sup>1</sup> In 1 Cor. 4. 11-13, *ἕως ἄρτι* (*until now*) at the end of the sentence repeats *ἄχρι τῆς ἄρτι ὥρας* (*even until this present hour*) at the beginning. Comp. John 2. 10, 5. 17, 16. 24; also Matt. 11. 12, 1 Cor. 15. 6.

John will shortly denounce (in vers. 18 ff., and 4. 1-6), who "went out from us because they were not of us"; the root of the matter was never in them.

The three clauses of verse 11 indicate, beside *the state* of the cold-hearted professor of Christianity, *the course* and *the issue* of his life: he "is in darkness, and he walks in the darkness, and he knows not whither he goes."<sup>1</sup> If he "walks in the darkness," it is because he "is in the darkness": his conduct matches his character; he cannot act otherwise than he is, or walk in any region other than that where his habitation lies. His acts of hostility and expressions of repugnance toward Christian brethren reveal the gloom of his spirit, the alienation from God and goodness in which he dwells. And with all his knowledge, he sees nothing of the doom coming upon him; he has no idea whither his self-conceit, and the animosity that he indulges toward men better than himself, are leading him. Such lack of foresight comes of living "in the darkness" of sin against God. He thinks himself on the highway to perfection. He affects to rise by ambitious speculations and communion with exalted minds above the common herd of men to the infinite source of light and being. But while he seems to mount, he is morally sinking. His sails are filled with the breeze of heaven, but the malignant hand upon the rudder steers him to the shores of perdition. Amid Christian enlightenment and rich in privilege and talent, one thing he lacks—a loving Christian heart; for want of the one thing needful, the best that he possesses is turned to its meanest and worst.

The Apostle writes in chap. 3. 15, "Every one who hates his brother is a murderer"; and Jesus had declared, "He who says to his brother, 'Thou fool!' is liable up to the measure of hell-fire!" (Matt. 5. 22).

<sup>1</sup> The verb *ὑπάγω*, "to go away," implies *destination*, future *destiny*, since it denotes leaving the present scene. It occurs frequently in the Fourth Gospel as applied to the departure of Jesus; see John 8. 14, 21 f.; 13. 3, 33; 14. 28, &c.



The man supposed by St John forgets these warnings, or misses their bearing on himself; he does not in the least perceive whither his evil heart tends, with what ruin for himself and mischief for others, the seeds of malice in his soul are charged. No man is in greater spiritual peril than the self-complacent intellectualist, the Pharisee of culture; and no man, commonly, is less open to reproof.

“Because the darkness has blinded his eyes”:<sup>1</sup> the fumes of pride, the dust of conflict, the mists of speculation and opinionativeness obfuscate the conscience; they will shut out from minds otherwise strong and clear the elementary truths of religion, and the plain distinctions of right and wrong. St John ominously recalls the words spoken by Jesus in His last appeal to the Jews (John 12. 35): “Walk as you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; and he that walks in the darkness, *knows not whither he goes.*” Little did the Jewish people dream of the sequel to their rejection of Jesus Christ, of the downfall to which their self-righteousness and “odium humani generis” were hurrying them. St John’s contemporaries had been witnesses to the result, which stands as history’s severest rebuke to religious pride and inhumanity. Let them read the lesson of the ruins of Jerusalem.

There lies in verse 10 another accusation against the unloving Christian professor. While he hastens to his own fall, he strews hindrances in the path of others; it is by way of contrast that St John writes of the lover of his brethren, *σκάνδαλον οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ*,—“Not in him,” but in the other, “there is offence.” Every schism is a scandal. Every ill-tempered or cynical professor of religion, every irritable, churlish man who bears the

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 4. 4 affords a striking parallel to the thought of St John here: “The God of this world (*αἰών*) hath blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers,” &c. (comp. also John 12. 40 f.). There the blinding is that of an *unbelief*, which forbids from the outset the reception of the Christian light; here of a *misbelief*, which perverts the light when it has been intellectually received and makes a darkness of it.

name of Christ, blocks the path of life for those who would enter. The spiteful story or base insinuation, the hasty and unjust reproach, the look of aversion or cold indifference, the explosion of anger, the act of retaliation, the mean advantage taken of a neighbour, is another stone of stumbling thrown into the much-hindered way of God's salvation. The unbeliever finds excuse to say, "If this is your Christian, I prefer men of the world. If conversion produces characters like that—better remain unconverted!" "Offences," Jesus once said, "must needs come; but woe to him through whom they come!" To remove them, and to combat their pernicious effect, is amongst the Church's constant, and her hardest tasks.

All that has been said of the "hater" holds in the inverse sense of "the lover of his brother." Not only "is he in the light," he "abides in" it (ver. 10), making his domicile there and growing into familiar and congenial relations with it. The light that "now shines" (ver. 8) about him, pervades his soul and conforms him to its nature; it illuminates for him life and death, things present and to come, with the meaning and the glory which the manifestation of God incarnate has given to man's finite existence. Safe himself, by the daily services of love the Christian makes the way of life safer and easier for his fellow-travellers, not treading it alone but drawing others after him. He keeps step in his march with the great brotherhood of those who in the love of Christ and the Father have evermore "one heart and one way."

II. Now we return to verses 7 and 8, to the double aspect of the law itself, whose operation we have viewed in the contrasted types of character that are produced under it. The commandment of love is *not new, but old*; again, it is *new while it is old*.

1. "Beloved, I am writing to you an old commandment" (ver. 7)—*how old?* The rule of Christian love is at least as old to the readers as their first hearing of the Gospel: "the old commandment is the word which you

heard." It is part of "the message which we [Apostles] heard from Him and report unto you" (1. 5). The essence of the Gospel was breathed into the law of brotherly love; this constitutes, in substance, "the word" which the first heralds of Christ proclaimed. St John is an aged man, and has been at Ephesus for well-nigh a generation; the Church in his province had a history before his coming. Many of the readers of his letter had been brought up within the Christian fold, and under the Apostle's pastorate; the image of Christ and the thought of "the brotherhood" blended with their earliest memories. Christianity and its law of love were no untried novelty, no fresh invention, like the Gnostic rules and speculations that were coming into vogue; they were of long standing in this region by the end of the first century, and in the circle where this late-surviving Apostle of Jesus Christ presides. He has nothing to impart to his readers, or to impose upon them, other than that they have known and held from the beginning. Naturally, as it is with old men, St John's thoughts turn to the past; standing upon the ground of the Church's settled faith and practice, he challenges innovators, and lays a stern arrest on men who, as he puts it in his short letter to the Lady Elect, "go forward and abide not in the teaching of Christ" (2 John 9).

To ourselves also his precept sounds as "the old commandment" which we "had from the beginning," "the word" which we "heard" at a mother's knee or from a father's reverend lips. With the command, "Little children, love one another," the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ visited our childish hearts at life's morning hour. But to us the old command comes with an antiquity vastly extended and enhanced. For the older of the Apostle's readers, the commencement of the Gospel and the commencement of their own Christian experience were conterminous; they "had it from the beginning," and "heard it" so soon as it was spoken. In our case a wide interval exists between the

two. Christianity has behind it now the tradition, not of two, but of sixty generations; its origin carries us back to a remote beginning. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" is the chain which runs through twenty centuries and binds the modern to the ancient world; it has knit the peoples and the ages into brotherhood. The corporate life of Christendom—flawed and imperfect, yet real and deeply working—supplies the surest bond of humanity; this commandment is its central cord. The love of Christ is the focus of history.

The train of blessing that has constantly followed on obedience to this rule, the peace and progress and moral order it secures, the spiritual treasures of a Christianly governed home and commonwealth, accumulating as they descend, are witness that the law of Christ is the guarantee of human happiness; it has laid down the ultimate, and only possible, basis for the federation and socialization of mankind. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid." Christ's principle of brotherly love may be traced working age after age in the ascent of man, through the growth of knowledge and the spread of freedom and the widening of human intercourse. It has provoked to war against it, for rebuke and overthrow, the powers of darkness—pride, sensuality, greed, the treachery and cruelty and immeasurable selfishness of the carnal mind that is enmity against God. In the diffusion of Christ's Spirit, in the proclamation and practice of His simple law illustrated by His divine example, the light "shines" more and more widely "in the darkness," and the darkness resents and repels it in vain (John 1. 5).

But if the commandment is so old as this, if it comes from the fountain-head of the Gospel and is operative wherever the life of Christ is known among men, it must be older still. Christianity was a revelation, not an invention. Nothing that is of its essence was really new and unprepared. Its roots are in the Old Testament; its principles were "hidden in God who created all things" (Eph. 3. 9). The Only-begotten issued "from the bosom

of the Father" (John 1. 18), bringing this law for God's children. He came to show what God eternally is, and what in His eternal purpose men are bound to be. "Before the mountains were brought forth or ever the earth and the world were framed," God was wisdom, and God was *love*. The commandment is grounded in His changeless being. God could not create, could not conceive, such creatures as ourselves otherwise than as designed to love Him and each other. Creation and redemption are parts of one order, and animated by one soul. The commandment, in its absolute basis and beginning, is old as the creation of the race, old as the love and fatherhood of God. Jesus rested it upon this foundation, when in bidding His disciples be "kind to the evil and unthankful" He said, "Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5. 48, Luke 6. 35). The relation of the child of God to its eternal Father imposes on it this consummate ideal.

When the Apostle reminds his children that they "had" this commandment "from the beginning," his backward gaze penetrates to the absolute starting-point. St John sees everything *sub specie æternitatis*. "That which was from the beginning" is the title of his Epistle; it is the "*eternal* life" manifested in Jesus Christ and communicated through Him to men, of which he thinks and writes throughout (comp. 1. 2 and 5. 20). "From the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) might, to be sure, have a limited reference given by the context, as, *e.g.*, in verse 24 below and in 3. 11 and 2 John 6, where it qualifies "you heard."<sup>1</sup> But with no such limitation in the sentence, one presumes that St John is reaching back to the unconditioned "beginning"; this presumption is strengthened by the recurrence of ἀπ' ἀρχῆς in the absolute sense in verses 13, 14 below.

<sup>1</sup> The erroneous reading of the T.R. "you heard (from the beginning)" —instead of "had" (ἠκούσατε for εἶχετε)—is doubtless due to these parallels, and is an example of the copyists' errors due to conscious or unconscious "harmonistic correction." Its effect has been to identify the clauses "you had from the beginning" and "you heard," which are in point of fact antithetical.

It is with a meaning therefore, and by way of distinction, that the Apostle attaches to "the commandment which you had from the beginning" a parallel definition, "the word which you heard." The second statement brings the readers down to the historical and subjective origin of the commandment which, in respect of its objective and absolute point of departure, they "had<sup>1</sup> *from the beginning*" (comp. 2 John 5). Rothe's comment on the sentence goes more deeply into St John's thought than Westcott's: "'From the beginning' points us back to the first clause of the Epistle—'you *had* from the beginning' that 'which *was* from the beginning.'" When the Apostle says later, in explaining the newness of the command, that "the darkness is passing by and the true light now shines," manifestly its oldness is the antiquity of that which existed long ago: the light was there, the command existed in principle; only the darkness eclipsed it and made it to be as though it were not. Of Christ's great *ἐντολή*, as of Himself (John 1. 10, 11), it may be said: "It was in the world, and the world knew it not; it came unto its own, and its own received it not."

2. Verse 8 turns the other side of the shield: "Again, it is a *new commandment* that I write to you."

The old Apostle has still the eyes of youth. New buddings and unfoldings, the fresh aspects of primitive and well-worn truth, he is quick to recognize. The teaching of his Gospel, so marvellous in its philosophic scope and adaptation to the Hellenic mind when considered as the work of a Galilean Jewish author, is evidence of this. He knows how not merely to vindicate the old against the new, when the new shows itself impatient and irreverent, but how to translate the old

<sup>1</sup> If *εἶχετε* (*had*) shared in the historical sense of *ἠκούσατε*, we should have expected to find it in the historical tense, viz. the aorist *ἔσχετε*, instead of the imperfect; or the present, *ἔχετε*, might have been used of a continuous possession, "from the first day until now." The imperfect expresses a tentative, growing realization of that which is eternal its source.

into the new, and to discern the old in the new under its altered face. This is, after all, the proper way to guard the old; it is the genuine conservatism. If St John lives out of the past, he lives in the present, and for the future.

To say "I write no new but an old commandment," could not be the Apostle's last word about Christ's law of love. He had seen so many new creations born of the word which "was from the beginning"; a world of young and eager life was in the Churches that stretched east and west before his eyes, and were filling the face of the world with new fruit of the Kingdom. To him *change* was even more in evidence than identity; the progress was as manifest as the persistence of the truth. St John had watched the profoundest spiritual revolution which the world has experienced. A new heaven and earth were in the making for mankind; and the law that governed this creation, though old in its origin as the being of God, was new in its operation as the character of Jesus Christ—old as the thought of the Eternal, new as the cross of Jesus, or as the latest sacrifice of a life laid down for His love's sake. That which is old as one looks up the stream of time and travels backward to the springs, is new at each point as one goes down the current. The commandment is old as that out of which the present has grown, new as that by which the past is done away and in which the future is germinally hidden; old to the eyes of memory and faith, new to the eyes of prophecy and hope; old as a potential, new as a dynamic energy; old in its intrinsic nature, new in its gradual and incomplete developments; old as the ever-shining sun, new as the daybreak; old as creation, new as individual birth.

The antiquity of the law of love St John left to speak for itself; its novelty he explains in the second clause of verse 8: "Which thing is true (ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθές) in Him and in you"—where the neuter relative pronoun refers not to the ἐντολή (which would have required in Greek

a feminine, as in verse 7), but to the principal sentence as a whole, to the fact that the old commandment is, notwithstanding, *new*. And its newness is twofold; in the Head and in the members of the Body of Christ, in the Vine-stock and in the branches.

(1) "New *in Him*": for the coming of God's Son in our flesh gave to love a scope and compelling force unknown before. The personality of Jesus Christ, His character, doctrine, works, above all His sacrificial death, revealed the love of God to man, and revealed at the same time a capacity of love and obligation to love in man, of which the world had no previous conception, and that were beyond measure astonishing in the given moral conditions and under the circumstances of Christ's advent. "*Herein* is love," writes St John, pointing to the Incarnation and the Cross, "herein have we known love" (3. 16, 4. 10)—as though one had never known or heard of love before! so completely did this demonstration surpass antecedent notions on the subject and antiquate earlier examples. The commandment was put upon another footing, and was clothed with a fresh and irresistible power.

In His teaching Jesus had recast the ancient law of Israel. He drew out of the mass of inferior and external precepts the golden rule and the two-fold duty of love to God and man; He appealed by all He said upon men's obligations to each other, to the primeval law of humanity "written in the heart," retracing its effaced characters and re-awakening the affections native to man as the offspring of the Father in heaven. His life and walk restored to the race its lost ideal, and presented to all eyes "the new man" reconstituted after the image of God. His death crowned His life's work, and perfected His own filial character. But the death of the cross accomplished more than this; it gave to the law of love an authority new in its kind, a vicarious and redeeming efficacy. "Born under" this "law" and yielding it a perfect obedience, Jesus Christ reconciled the world to God; in so doing He generated



a force which enables and constrains sinful men, now released from condemnation, to "keep the commandments" of God and to "fulfil the just demand of the law" (Rom. 8. 4). Christ's disciples follow their Lord's example by the virtue of His atonement; they "walk in love as Christ also loved them, and gave Himself up for them, an offering and sacrifice to God for an odour of fragrance." It was the cross that sent them forth to breathe Christ's love into the world, and "to lay down their lives for the brethren." "He died for all," writes the other theological Apostle, "in order that the living no longer to themselves should live, but to Him who for them died and was raised" (2 Cor. 5. 15); and living to Christ means living for the brethren on whose behalf He died, for the body of which Christ is Head (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 8. 9-13, 12. 12 ff.). The cross of Christ reconciles Gentile and Jew "in one body" to God; the fire of His passion fuses together natures the most hostile and remote (see Eph. 2. 11-22, Col. 3. 9-14). "The new covenant in His blood" is a covenant of amity and alliance for all who enter its bonds and share the peace with God which it secures.

This was "true in Christ," in point of fact as well as principle. The peace on earth heralded by the angels' song at the Nativity was realized in a multitude of Christian societies now planted through the Roman Empire and spreading from the Mediterranean shores—each of them the centre of forces of goodwill and charity, new-leavening a world where men had been "slaves to manifold lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hating one another" (Tit. 3. 3). The *philadelphia* of the followers of the Crucified was the most noticeable thing about the new movement; this was the outstanding characteristic dwelt upon both by its apologists and critics. "See," they said, "how these Christians love one another!" It was the peculiar mark fixed by the Master for His society: "In this shall all men know that you are my disciples" (John 13. 35). In the oldest Christian document, the letter of St Paul

to the infant Church of Thessalonica, this feature of the young community is noted with the liveliest satisfaction: "Concerning brotherly love you have no need that one write unto you; for indeed you do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia" (1 Thess. 4. 9 f.); in the second Epistle he thanks God, in the first place, "for that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth" (2 Thess. 1. 3). It behoves all Christian teachers to put this foremost among the "notes" of the Church and the tokens of apostolical descent.

(2) "Which is true," the Apostle testifies to his disciples, "in Him, *and in you*!" The fact that God's law of love is kept, that a new bond of affection is formed amongst men and a new gravitation draws the scattered elements of life together, is evident in the case of these Christian men as it had been in Christ Himself. It means much that St John should couple "Him" and "you" in this sentence and put the pronouns into the same construction. How many amongst ourselves, Christ's present servants, could bear to be put in this juxtaposition? of what Church could it be affirmed without qualification, concerning the law of love to the brethren, "Which is true in Him, and in you"?

In this double truth there is a deep distinction—between the root and the branches, the full fountain and the broken streams, which need constant replenishment. But in principle the identity holds good for all who are in Christ. The law that ruled His being rules theirs. The fires of His passion have thrown a spark into each of their souls, kindling them to something of the same glow. The prayer of Jesus Christ for His discipleship, as it should endure and witness unto the world's end, is fulfilled by such participation: "that they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee," and "that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17. 23, 26). Just so far as this affirmation respecting St John's little children "is true" in Christians, the true Chris-

tianity propagates itself and bears its healing fruit throughout the world.

The coming of this new love, that had given bright evidence of its efficacy in the Christian society, St John explains in verse 8b; he refers it to "the message" which Christ brought from God, and which His Apostles are announcing everywhere (1. 5). The true life springs from "the true light" (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει). In the light of the Gospel the new way of love is revealed and made practicable. St Paul in using this figure gave another turn to the same thought; he affirmed the social results of the Gospel to be the outgrowth of its religious conceptions, when he wrote, "The fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Eph. 5. 9). The ethical and theological are inseparable as life and light, as fruit and root (comp. pp. 63, 64). The morals of Paganism were the product of its idolatry (see Rom. 1. 18-32)—of "the darkness" which St John sees "passing off"<sup>2</sup>; Christian morals, the purity and charity of the Apostolic Church, sprang from the ideas of God and of His relations to men derived from Jesus Christ.

"*Already shineth*" (ἤδη φαίνει) is a questionable

<sup>1</sup> The double "true" of the E. V. in verse 8 represents two distinct Greek adjectives, ἀληθής and ἀληθινόν. The former signifies truth of *statement*, viz., of the statement made by the writer in ver. 8a, which is verified by fact; the latter signifies truth of *conception*, the correspondence of the reality to the idea that is expressed. A "true light" as ἀληθινόν, is that which is light indeed and worthy of the name; a "true light" as ἀληθής, would be light that does not deceive or mislead. Comp. the use of ἀληθινός (a favourite epithet with St John) in 5. 20, John 4. 23, 6. 32, 15. 1; also in 1 Thess. 1. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Παράγεται, passive voice, again in verse 17; more literally, "passes by." Elsewhere the active voice bears this (neuter) sense: so in the Pauline parallel of 1 Cor. 7. 31, παράγει τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου (comp. Ps. 143. 4, in LXX), and (in the literal sense) John 9. 1, Matt. 9. 9. The verb conveys the idea not of a mere vanishing or cessation, but of a visible movement from the scene, as when clouds are sailing off and the sky clears. Possibly, there is a touch of distinction in the use of the passive, which does not occur in the same sense outside of these two verses. Not of its own motion is "the darkness" passing; it is "borne away" by the flood of incoming light.

emendation by the Revisers of the older rendering "now." "Already" marks, in English usage, a present antithetical to some future—*so soon as this*; as though the Apostle meant; "The true light shines even now, while the darkness still strives against it; a brighter day is coming, when its light will flood the world and the whole sky will be aflame with the glory of God. 'It is beginning to have its course'" (Westcott). This thought, however true, and the predictive connotation this rendering reads into ἤδη,<sup>1</sup> are out of place in the given connexion. Ἡδη looks back as readily as forward; it denotes a present contrasted either with future or past<sup>2</sup>; in the latter reference it signifies *by this time, now at length*. This may be the rarer sense of the adverb, but it is a perfectly legitimate sense, and is imported here by the contrast of "old and new" dominating the paragraph. A new day is dawning for the world. *At last* the darkness lifts, the clouds break and scatter; "the true light shines" out in the sky; the sons of light can now walk with clear vision, toward a sure end.

Once besides the Apostle John has employed this phrase; where he writes in the prologue to his Gospel, "There was the true light (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν) . . . coming into the world." There, as here, his gaze is retrospective; and he describes the advent of the Word as that of a light long veiled (existing ages before the Baptist's day) but now piercing through all obstruction. *Now at last!* "The mystery hidden from the ages and generations—hidden away from the ages in God, who created all things" (Col. 1. 26, Eph. 3. 9)—comes to birth. The hour of the new creation has struck; the Voice has sounded, "Behold, I make all things new!"

To what splendour the great day may grow, St John does not suggest, or speculate. "The Son of God is come; we have eternal life in Him" (5. 11-13, 20): this conviction fills his mind and brings him perfect satis-

<sup>1</sup> As, e.g., in 4. 3, John 4. 35, 2 Thess. 2. 7, 2 Tim. 2. 18, &c.

<sup>2</sup> For the latter, comp. John 7. 14, 11. 17, 19. 28, Rom. 1. 10, 2 Tim. 4. 6.

faction. He has lived through a day of new creation ; he has "seen the kingdom of God come in power" (Mark 9. 1). The religious world of his childhood and that of his age—what a gulf lies between them, a contrast between the old and the new within his lifetime the more marvellous the more he reflects upon it. Enough for him that the darkness passes and the true light mounts the sky. He is as one who descries the morn in the east, after a long tempestuous night ; he has seen the sun climb the horizon, and is sure of day. The old Apostle is ready to say with Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word ; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."



## RELIGION IN AGE AND YOUTH

Pause in the Letter—"I write," "I have written"—Little children, Fathers, Young Men—*All* knowing the Father through Forgiveness—The "Fathers" deep in knowledge of Christ—Christology the Crown of Christian Thinking—"Young Men" and their Strength—Violence of Passion—Allurements of Novelty—Beacon Light of Scripture—The Militant Strength of Young Men.

**“I write to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you, for His name’s sake :**

**I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning ;**

**I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the Evil One.**

**I have written to you, little ones, because you have known the Father :**

**I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him that is from the beginning ;**

**I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the Evil One.”—1 JOHN 2. 12-14.**



## CHAPTER XII

### RELIGION IN AGE AND YOUTH

HERE we come to a pause, and almost a new beginning, in St John's letter. He told us at the outset that he was writing for the purpose of declaring anew the message he had received from Christ and testifying to the facts about Christ of which he and others had been witnesses. On the basis of this testimony, he reminded the readers, there is set up a holy fellowship of men with God, in which they too are partakers. To give this witness and to promote this fellowship is for St John and his companions in the testimony a perfect joy (1. 3, 4). Thus the ground of the Epistle was stated on its subjective side and as regards the intent of the author. But the letter assumes a corresponding disposition and attitude on the part of its receivers; it is grounded, objectively, upon *their* consciousness of the new life in Christ and the salvation from sin which it effects. To this side of the case the Apostle turns in verse 12, and appeals to the experience of Divine grace in those addressed by the Epistle: "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven . . . because you have known the Father" (ver. 14). In the preface St John spoke of what moved him to write on his own account; here he tells what led him to write on the readers' account,—to write particularly to them, and in this particular strain. This letter is meant for Christian people, for men delivered from sin and acquainted with God (see p. 59);

for old men advanced in Christian knowledge, for young men who have used their strength to conquer evil.

In making the pause and change of attitude we observe, St John does not change his theme. He still pursues the thread that has been followed from chap. 1. 3 onwards; the thought of fellowship with God is dominant in this and the two succeeding paragraphs, as much as in those preceding them. "Forgiveness" is admission to such fellowship; "knowledge of the Father" is its continuance; "victory over the Evil One" is its counterpart and the condition of its maintenance; "love of the world" would be its negation (vers. 15-17); the "antichrists" are those who have departed from the Church's fellowship with God in Christ, whose teaching means its dissolution (vers. 18-27).

The emendation of the received text, and the right arrangement of the clauses, go far to expound the meaning of the section of the Epistle before us. We must certainly read, with the Revisers, "I have written" (ἔγραψα), not "I write" (γράφω), in the last sentence of verse 13. The six statements of verses 12-14 are then seen to fall into two balanced sections of three clauses each—not into unequal parts of four and two clauses respectively—which are prefaced in the first half by the present tense, "I write," and in the second by the past, "I have written." In both sections "little children" ("or little ones") are first addressed, then "fathers" and "young men" in turn. By the former name St John habitually accosts his readers—as *τεκνία* in verses 1, 28, 3. 7, 5. 21, and *παῖδια* in verse 18 below; they were all of them the old Apostle's "little ones" (see p. 163). Accordingly, the content of the first and fourth clauses is of a comprehensive nature and applies to Christian believers generally. It is therefore a mistake, though a natural one, to discriminate the *children* of this passage from the *fathers* and *young men*, and to suppose that "little children," or "little ones,"<sup>1</sup> is

<sup>1</sup> There is a shade of difference between *τεκνία* (ver. 12) and *παῖδια* (ver. 13) which is not indicated in the E.V., for it renders both by

employed by the Apostle, like these other terms, as a definition of age. The order of the three classes—*children, fathers, young men*—speaks against this distinction. The Apostle, who was now ninety years old, out of his patriarchal dignity and affection thinks of all his flock as “little children,” while he distinguishes the elder and younger amongst them, to whom he writes as “fathers” and “young men” in terms appropriate to their several conditions. The duplication of the three-fold statement, under the verbs “I write” and “I have written,” is curious. It is St John’s manner to repeat himself; his mind hovers upon and plays round its cherished thoughts, bringing out at each turn fresh aspects of the same truth. Nowhere else in the Epistle is the repetition so formal and (as one may say) so barefaced as in this instance. The fourth clause is parallel to the first, but quite different; the sixth (the *young men’s* clause) enlarges upon the third; the fifth clause repeats the second unchanged.

But what does the device of repetition mean? It is to be noted that the present tense, “I write,” which heads each statement in the first half of the passage, was used in chap. 1. 4 and 2. 1, preceding this paragraph, while the past tense, “I wrote” or “have written,” displaces this in the later passages—viz. verses 21, 26 below and chap. 5. 13. This change of tense in the verb as between earlier and later parts of the Epistle goes to account for the variation made in this place. There is no need to suppose that some previous writing is meant, when St John says “I have written”; such reference is out of the question in verses 21, 26, and is very improbable here. The Apostle “little children.” The former is a word of endearment and tenderness, connoting attachment in the persons concerned. The latter is a word of encouragement and appeal, implying dependence on the part of those addressed and help or direction to be given them. *Παῖδες, παιδία* was in everyday use in Greek (like “lads” in Northern English) by way of familiar address to servants or work-people of all ages; comp. John 21. 5, Luke 12. 45; the Servant of Jehovah in the Deutero-Isaiah is *ὁ παῖς* (comp. Acts 3. 13, &c.).

has reached an advanced point in his letter. He has restated the message committed to him by Christ, and drawn out its import; he will appeal to his children on the strength of this declaration (vers. 15-17). By way of supporting his appeal, he reminds them of their own knowledge of the things of God; this experience common to them all, this varied experience of old and young, furnishes the reason for which he thus writes, and sustains his warning against the friendship of the world. But as, in making this entreaty and after thrice reiterating "I write to you," his eye glances over the manuscript in hand, he reminds himself that he *had already written* to this effect, and that the previous paragraphs imply in the readers the knowledge of God and the victory over sin of which he now speaks. Upon this suggestion he resumes his explanation, and states a second time, with added fulness, the reasons that justify him in using words of appeal so intimate and confident. What the Apostle has in mind to write, what he has written,—*all* is written as to men forgiven for Christ's sake and knowing God their Father—not to those who are ignorant of the Gospel or disobedient to it. These are the cleansed and enlightened, the good soldiers of Jesus Christ, the deep students of eternal truth. With this high opinion of his children in Christ, St John observes a little later, in verses 20, 21, "You have an anointing from the Holy One and *know*,—all of you: I have not written unto you because you know not the truth, but because you know it." It is an Apostolic lesson, to be learnt both from St John and St Paul, that one should think as well as possible of those one has to teach and give them credit for everything they know, that further instruction should be built on past attainment.

Some of our best interpreters, including Bengel and Rothe, read the six *ōri*'s of verses 12-14 as *that* instead of *because*,—as though the Apostle would give in these duplicated statements the content or substance of what he writes, rather than the reasons for writing as he

does. That the ordinary rendering of the conjunction is correct seems to be evident from verse 21 just quoted. St John is expressing in a fatherly, confiding way his satisfaction in the character of his readers, his certainty that the entreaty he is making will not be in vain. It is the same man who writes in the Third Epistle, "I have no greater joy than that I hear of my children walking in the truth" (ver. 4).

Now it is time to look at the experience of St John's Christian flock, and to compare it with our own.

1. Two things the Apostle says of his little children collectively; two features mark in common all those who have believed the Gospel and entered the fold of Christ: their "sins are forgiven for His name's sake"; they "have come to know the Father." These are concomitant gifts of grace, and correspond to the *justification* and *adoption* of St Paul's teaching. They are pictured in their relation to each other by Christ's parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). Through forgiveness the sinner comes for the first time to know his father, whom in blindness of heart he had most shamefully wronged and wounded. His pitiful confession is smothered in the embrace and kiss of pardon; his rags are replaced by "the best robe"; the feast of reconciliation is spread for him; he is called "my son," who had been a rebel and an outcast. In all this the love of the father's heart, hitherto unguessed as it was undeserved, reveals itself to the humbled prodigal. In estrangement he had broken the ties of home, and carried with him into exile a false image of the father, measuring him out of his perverse and vitiated nature; but from this moment misunderstandings are gone, mistrust and bitterness are swept away. Above all the happiness of the wanderer's reinstatement is this, that now *the son knows his father*; he feels, as never before, the infinite pity, tenderness, patience, generosity of a father's heart. It is as "Father" that God forgives the sins of men, accepting the Advocate's plea on their behalf, and is ready to do so for "the whole world"

(chap. 2. 2) ; only by forgiving can God prove His Fatherhood to the sinful. Verses 1, 2 of this chapter and verse 7 of chap. 1 have shown these two elements to be fundamental and inseparable in St John's message.

"We have an Advocate with the Father," he has told us, "Jesus Christ the righteous," who "is the propitiation for our sins," and "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." The Son of God who has interposed with His propitiation, is the brother of those whose part He takes, and reveals His Father to them as also theirs; by His advocacy He wins their restoration to the forfeited estate of sonship toward God. "The name" on account of which St John's little children have had their "sins forgiven," is that of Jesus, God's Son. His "name" signifies His person and achievements, His rights and standing with God, His relationship to mankind—all that prompted Him and qualified Him to sue with such effect for the forgiveness of a world of sinners (see p. 118). All the intercessory power that is in the name of Jesus Christ accrued to Him as the Son of God, and therefore goes to reveal *the Father* whom the world had not known (see John 17. 25, 26). Jesus has "shown us the Father" in Himself (John 14. 7-11)—in His incarnate person exhibiting the Father's nature, in His atonement accomplishing the Father's will, and in His words of forgiveness conveying the Father's grace to men. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, since it brings about a perfect remission of sins (comp. Heb. 10. 1-18), has made it possible for men estranged by sin for the first time to realize the Fatherhood of Almighty God. Jesus Christ has "brought us nigh" to God "through the cross" (see Eph. 2. 13-18; 1 Peter 3. 18),—so near that we can see Him as He is, and know that He is light and love (1. 5, 4. 8-10). All who have received and kept the word of Christ, "have known the Father." St John's gospel was the message of forgiveness bestowed by the Father for Christ's sake.

Here is the source of the distinctive Christian experience, the ground of all specifically Christian teaching

and appeal, for young and old alike. None of us can ever outgrow this stage of knowledge. The sense of forgiveness through Christ, the right to call God "Father" through the Spirit of His love, the temper of a little child toward God, are confirmed in the Christian believer as life goes on; he becomes ever more childlike in heart, more humble in the remembrance of pardoned sin, as his fellowship with God grows deeper. Other truths are important; this is all-important. The Gospel has nothing to say except to sinful men; it can do nothing for those who will not confess their sins. Its countless benefits for the race of mankind rest upon this one boon of personal forgiveness by God and reception into His family. Men belong to two categories—the saved and the unsaved: to the latter the messenger of the Gospel has to say, "Confess your sin; know the truth, be reconciled to God"; to the former, "Your sins are forgiven you; you know the Father. Walk worthily, henceforth, of your calling; conquer the Evil One; grow in the knowledge of God, till you are filled with His fulness."

Among St John's "little children" there are seniors and juniors; some he calls "fathers," others are addressed as "young men." To both classes he gives warm commendation. *Knowledge* is the excellence of the elder, *strength* of the younger amongst the Apostle's approved disciples—the wisdom of age, and the vigour of youth. For the most part, these contrasted qualities are the properties of the two stages of life; but this broad distinction is crossed by varieties of temperament, vocation, and personal history. There is the difference between the sanguine and phlegmatic, between the active and meditative disposition, between manual and intellectual occupation, between the life of town and country. One man is always keen to *know*; knowledge appears to him in itself the end and the treasure of life,—a pondering, probing, speculative mind; he wears "an old man's head upon a young man's shoulders." To another knowledge is useless but as

a means to *action*, as a tool to work with or a weapon with which to strike,—a scheming, contriving, restless brain; into old age such a man carries the eagerness and combativeness of his youth. St Peter represents the latter type, St John himself the former—the one marked from the first by quick speech and bold initiative, the other by brooding thought and reflective insight; the second was a “father” amongst young men, the first a “young man” amongst the fathers. In St Paul the two factors were blended to a rare degree; we find him in contrary moods—keen, vehement, practical, as in the Epistle to the Galatians, or wrapt in heavenly communion, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians—now at the pole of action and now of contemplation. This union is complete in Jesus Christ, whom we scarcely think of either as young or old; for knowledge of the Father and strength to overcome the Evil One were combined to perfection in the Son of man.

2. The “fathers” are those who “have known<sup>1</sup> Him that is from the beginning.” The Apostle reaffirms in verse 14 the ground of satisfaction respecting the older men of his Churches which he stated in verse 13. “That which was from the beginning” (chap. 1. 1) is the subject of the whole letter and the matter of the Apostle’s preaching; he bears witness of “the eternal life” that “has been manifested” to mankind in Jesus Christ and “was with the Father” before the worlds were. The eternity of the life brought by Christ into the world inheres in the Bringer; *it* is “from the beginning” inasmuch as *He* is “from the beginning.” For, as St Paul has said, Christ “is our life” (Col. 1. 4); St John later affirms this identity in the words of chap. 5. 12: “He that hath the Son of God hath the life.” To be “in the Son” (2. 24)—“in Christ,” as St Paul loved to say—to be one’s mere self no longer but a very branch of the true Vine, this is “the life indeed,” for which death is abolished. Now the fathers of St John’s Churches “have known” this; they have entered intelligently,

<sup>1</sup> For the force of *ἐγνώκατε*, see p. 139.



through mature experience, into the mystery of the life that is hid with Christ in God.

Christ is undoubtedly meant by "Him that is from the beginning," in verses 13 and 14. To say of God the Father that He "is from the beginning" would have been a platitude; but that this is true of Jesus Christ—that He is "the Word" who "was with God" and so "was in the beginning," the primordial source of life and light for men—is a matter of supreme importance for the writer to declare and for his disciples to realize, especially the senior and more responsible amongst them. This is the whole doctrine of the Prologue to St John's Gospel. In verses 3 and 4, it is true, *God* (not Christ) was the object of this same verb ("we have known," "I have known Him": see p. 133); but there the context was very different (see pp. 134–6). In this place *Christ* is before our thoughts as He "for whose name's sake" His people's "sins have been forgiven" (ver. 12). Such forgiveness is the fundamental experience of all believers: those of deeper knowledge discern in their Sin-bearer the eternal Word; they identify "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" with "the Son of God" coming "from the bosom" of the Father (see John 1. 18, 29–34).

This sublime Christology belonged to the advanced Apostolic teaching; it is not contained explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount, nor in the message of the day of Pentecost; but it is conspicuous in St Paul's Epistles to Colossæ and Ephesus, in St John's Epistles and Gospel. This is meat for strong men, rather than milk for babes. For the Apostles themselves, their Master's Deity was the last lesson to be learnt from Him. St Thomas' exclamation, "My Lord and my God," signalized the culmination of discipleship. The truths that are first in the nature of things come last in the order of acquisition. Christ is known as Saviour first, then as Lord; the death of the cross that wins pardon for human sin, leads to His enthronement as bearer of the name that is above every name

and partner of the everlasting throne. This profounder apprehension of Christ, which had been more slowly gained, supplied (as we shall see in verses 22-24)<sup>1</sup> the test of the Church's faith at the close of the Apostolic age; and in the mastery of it lay the proof of ripeness and stability in the Christian life, and the qualification of those whom St. John ranked as "fathers."

The case is much the same amongst ourselves. The Christological question is the crucial problem of the day. The due knowledge of Christ in His Headship of the Church and Lordship over the universe, the acknowledgement of God in Christ and the consequent recognition, in the light of modern thought, of our Lord's eternal attributes and sovereign relations to nature and to humanity, form the chief desideratum of theology at the beginning of the twentieth century, as they did at the close of the first century of our era.

In the history of the soul, just as in that of the Church, "to know Him" is the supreme quest. Both the great thinkers amongst the Apostles, in their old age, set this down as the crown of knowledge. St Paul counted every other prize as vanity beside this—"that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings"; for the sake of this he had "suffered the loss of all things, and counted them dross" (Phil. 3. 7-11). He represents the mark of the Christian calling in a different light from that in which it is set by our Apostle, for he sought the knowledge of his Master as it lay in the path of his ministry and came by the way of cross-bearing and self-emptying. St John contemplates the knowledge of Christ from the objective side, as it concerns what the Redeemer is, not in His servants and the members of His body, but in Himself, in His absolute relations to God and the world. The experimental question possessed the mind of the one Apostle, the theological question that of the other. But Jesus Christ is the centre of both problems. "To know Him" is the goal alike of life and thought, whether

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. XIV; also Chap. XIX, and chap. 4. 1-6.

one would sink by fellowship into the depth of His sufferings or rise in contemplation to the heights of His glory. As time goes on, this becomes with each of these great men the supreme pre-occupation of life; to them "Christ is all things and in all." What He was to St Paul and St John as the central object of the mind, Jesus Christ must increasingly become to the world's deeper thought. It is for *the fathers*—for those who have learnt most and proved most of life's needs—that the knowledge of Jesus Christ has the greatest wealth of interest.

3. The "young men" are congratulated on that they "have overcome the Evil One" (ver. 13); and again, more explicitly, "because" they "are strong, and the word of God abideth in" them, and they "have overcome the Evil One." A victory is recorded, and the forces are noted by virtue of which it is gained.

In the years of early manhood, for the most part, the decisive battles of life are fought out. The paths open before the youth as he steps on from the shelter of home and the bounds of school into the untried world—"the narrow gate and the strait way that lead to life," "the wide gate and the broad way that lead to destruction." God or Mammon, Christ or Belial, offer themselves for his choice; by the choice that he makes at the outset, he is likely to abide. The bent of a man's mind and character, the groove in which his life's course will run, in most cases are settled by the time he is twenty-five or thirty. If he does not "overcome the Evil One" before he has reached that point, it is too probable that he never will. With God nothing is impossible; but it lies in the laws of our nature that the practices of youth become the habits of age, that in our later days we are limited to building on the foundations earlier laid, and have little choice but to work out the plans and realize the ideas that were conceived in the prime of manhood.

In young manhood the inward conflict between the spirit and the flesh springs up, when the passions are

in their first heat, and when the conscience and heart, with their manifold susceptibilities, are most impressionable. For many this means a secret and severe struggle. Personal chastity, a manly self-respect and self-mastery, are gained at adolescence or are forfeited. To win a clean heart—an imagination pure and sweet, affections unsullied, a soul to which love is altogether high and sacred—is a great prize of victory. “The Evil One” assails Christ’s young soldier with insidious and searching temptations; the world spreads snares at each step for the unwary feet. On the outcome of the conflict for youth’s crown of purity the hope depends of an honourable and happy future; wholesomeness of mind, integrity of conscience, and the moral vigour and purpose of the man’s work through life, the soundness of his relations to society as well as to the laws of God, turn on the delicate issues that are here involved.

If evil is strong in its assault on the young man when this battle rages, the powers of good are also strong within him and about him; he may feel their might, and ally his unspent force to them, as at no other age. How beautiful is holiness to the ingenuous youthful heart; how keen the shame of sin; how glorious the fight of faith, and how inspiring the examples of its heroes; how dear the love of Christ; how sovereign the authority of truth; how splendid to his eyes are the shining walls of the city of God! “You are strong,” cries St John to his young men, “and should be brave and glad in the strength of a consecrated youth.”

At the same blossoming-time of life, along with the passions the intellect and will assert themselves. The young man has his own notions and impulses, which are bound to differ from those of his elders. New fancies, schemes, ambitions pour in upon him; they catch his imagination and take hold of his reason at the plastic stage, while the mind is unprejudiced and open to every generous impression. The world’s progress from one generation to another depends upon the susceptibility of young men’s minds, upon the

responsiveness to fresh ideas, the power of entertaining and working out new conceptions, which is the priceless gift of youth. But this brings with it a grave peril. The young man is apt to embrace new principles *because* they are new, because he can make them his own and air his independence on the strength of them. There is no vanity more foolish or treacherous than the vanity of thinking for oneself; contentiousness, irreverence, frivolity are bound up in this conceit. Humility, patient discipline, thoroughness in labour, are the price at which truth is won; to this yoke the pride of youth and talent will not bend its neck. Eager and sympathetic young men, but of volatile, unbalanced temper, unschooled in mental effort, unseasoned by experience, form the natural prey of plausible theorists and clever talkers. Having no anchored faith, no grasp on the deeper verities of life, they drift with the currents; they are swept along now by this gust, now by that, of the "winds of doctrine." The lessons taught by the "fathers" who "have known Him that is from the beginning," the long-tested wisdom of God in Scripture, count for nothing with such minds as against the latest novelties of unsifted modern thought.

It is by a hazardous fight, and often through much tribulation, that the thoughtful young man, in times of change and distraction such as those in which the Apostle wrote, attains a stable faith and a reasoned persuasion of Christian truth. This will not come to him without much prayer to the Father of lights, nor without the aid of the Spirit who "guides" Christ's disciples "into all the truth" (John 16. 13). Hard indeed it seems to win a footing on the Rock of Ages, round which the storms beat and surge on every side; but the Captain of Salvation is there Himself to grasp the outstretched hand and to raise the sinking head. Once more He says, "Peace, be still!" when the waves mount high against His trembling Church. Shaken in mind and sick at heart, Christ's servants hear Him cry, out of the midnight of His passion and from the black-

ness of the tempest, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!" and the winds are hushed and there is a great calm. An hour ago discomfited and beaten down, now they are more than conquerors through Him that loved them. In His will is our peace, and in His word our strength. The Apostle holds a guarantee for the safety of his young men, surer than their own strength and courage: "*The word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the Evil One.*"

Holy Scripture holds the lamp for the path of each new generation; its light has guided the leaders of mankind for ages past. In the Bible, to say the least of it, is treasured the best spiritual experience of sixty generations of our race, and the young man who scoffs at that is ignorant and vain beyond all other folly. As safely might the mariner, crossing unknown waters, leave his chart upon the shelf and mock at the familiar beacons, as may the new voyager on the sea of life discard the word of God, or the men of the coming generation attempt to steer by other lights.

For that word to "dwell in" us, it must become familiar by daily consultation, by devout and pondering use. It will not do for the young man to take the word of Christ and the Apostles upon credit as from the faith of others, to adopt at second-hand what minister or church may tell him about Scripture, and to let his judgement of its worth and of its meaning be determined by the popular notions of to-day or yesterday concerning it. He must come to the Bible and deal with it, under all the light available, for himself and upon his own part, listening to hear through it "the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Within the general word, there is laid up "the word of God" for himself in particular, which will meet him when he seeks it, to awaken, enlighten, cleanse, and save him. Thus becoming his personal possession, it will "abide in" him, making itself the tenant of the house, the garrison that keeps the fortress of his soul for God and beats back the assault of evil. By this

aid Jesus Christ foiled the Tempter, when, as a young man on the threshold of His life's work, He found in the indwelling word of God the shield to quench Satan's fiery darts, the sword with whose thrust He drove back the malignant foe. Recalling that great encounter, and thinking of conflicts that he had himself passed through in youth, when the word of God brought deliverance in hours of extreme peril, St John testifies, "The word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the Evil One."

The inward and personal conflict opens out into the universal warfare between Christ and the Prince of this world, which still pursues its course. The Church of God counts now, as she did in St John's day, upon her *young men*. Young men form the strength of every militant and progressive cause. Forward movements, in all fields of action, depend upon their sympathy. The sacred optimism and heaven-kindled fire of youth, its unspent, incalculable energy and ingenuity, its high daring and capacity for self-sacrifice, its readiness to follow heroic leading, carry the day wherever victory is gained on the world's battlefields. Christian young men swell the tide of each successive advance in the kingdom of God; they give to each new assault on evil its impetus. "We are strong," says St John to Christ's young men—to such as the writer himself had been when he and his comrades followed Jesus sixty years before; and the Church is strong, and the ministry, that know how to enlist such men while "the dew of youth" is upon them, and to use for the warfare of God's kingdom their fresh ardour and unwasted vigour,—men of pure heart and resolute will, men in whose soul there burns as a deep fire the word of the Living God.





## THE LOVE THAT PERISHES

The Rival Loves—"The World" in St John—To be loved and to be loathed—The Church and the World—"All that is in the World"—The Temptations in the Garden and in the Desert—Physical Appetite—Subjection of the Body—Æsthetic Sensibility—The Worlds of Fashion and of Art—Life's Vainglory—Intellectual Ambition—Pride of Wealth—The Essence of Worldliness—Transience of the Evil World—Of the Roman Empire—Of the Kingdom of Satan on Earth.

“Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world ;  
If any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.  
For all that is in the world—

The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of  
life—

Is not of the Father, but it is of the world.  
And the world is passing away, and the lust thereof ;  
But he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever.”

1 JOHN 2. 15-17.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE LOVE THAT PERISHES

“**L**OVE the Father” (ver. 5), “love the brethren” (vers. 9–11), is the sum of St John’s exhortations; “love not the world” is the key-note of his warnings and dehortations. This is what he has to write to all his “little children,” who “know the Father” by His forgiving love—to the old men who have learnt the mystery of the eternal Son and sounded the depths of the hidden life, to the young men strong in their loyalty to the word of God, who have conquered the world’s evil Prince (vers. 12–14). By heeding this warning the Apostle’s readers will abide in the Divine fellowship upon which they have entered, and will hold fast the treasure of eternal life (chap. 1. 2, 3); they will escape “the darkness blinding the eyes” of worldly men and the peril of relapse into the old sins which have been forgiven them, and will make good the victories over the Evil One already gained.

In this forbidding of love to the world, and in the warning against Anti-christian teaching that follows it in verses 18–27, the leading thought with which the letter began arrives at its conclusion. Fellowship in the eternal life is forfeited by attachment to this present evil world; “the love of the world” and “the love of the Father” are mutually exclusive affections—to love the one is to hate the other, to hold to one is to despise the other (Matt. 6. 24). And in the struggle the latter of these two is bound to prevail: nothing can

persist that defies "the will of God" and that puts itself outside the circle of the Father's love.

We may study this paragraph by considering in turn *the nature* of the world whose love the Apostle condemns, its *characteristic passions*, and *the transience* of all that belongs to it in comparison with the permanence of the life of love to God.

1. What then is "the world" which God's children must not love? This is an important but difficult question for the interpreter of St John. The Apostle employs the term  $\acute{\omicron}$   $\kappa\acute{\omicron}\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$  oftener than all the other New Testament writers put together—over twenty times in this Epistle, nearly eighty times in his Gospel; in the Apocalypse it is commonly replaced by  $\eta$   $\gamma\eta$  ("the earth")—a word very frequent there.

We are not to understand by "the world" the natural universe, as many of the Gnostics did. Scripture is full of admiration of the works of the Creator; at their making He pronounced them "very good," and His Son Jesus Christ found in them a pure and high delight. Nor is it the natural system of human existence that the Apostle denounces, the world of sense and physical activity, the daily work by which men secure "the means of life in the world" (3. 17), the engagements of home and friendship, of business and art and civil government. St John and the first Christian teachers throw no disparagement upon the material and secular order of society; the Apostle Paul has, indeed, expressed himself in the opposite sense and vindicates the sacredness of the natural constitution of man's life in this world (Rom. 13. 1-7; Eph. 5. 23-31; 1 Tim. 2. 3, 4. 1-5). The *cosmos* St John condemns is not the world as God made it and rules it by His providence, but the world "lying in the power of the Evil One" (5. 19, John 14. 30, &c.), the world that is filled with lust and vanity, whose desires are the contrary to those born "of the Father," the world that knows not God, and therefore "crucified the Lord of glory" and laid on Him the burden of its sin (1 Cor. 2. 8; John 1. 29, 17. 25).

The Apostle views the world of men around him in its relationship to God ; he has few thoughts for any aspect of life but this. The *cosmos* means to him the prevailing spiritual and moral order of human affairs ; and this system of things is hostile to God and alien from His love, and therefore radically evil and doomed to perish. It is in this character that the Apostle, as a son of God and a servant and witness of Christ, has to deal with the world. He speaks of it as he finds it.

But there are expressions of opposite strain in St John's sayings respecting the world. In the second verse of this chapter we read of Christ the Advocate as "the propitiation for the sins of the world"; again, in chap. 4. 14, "the Father hath sent the Son as Saviour of the world"; we see a reason for this mission in the wonderful fact disclosed to us, that "the world was made through" Christ, the eternal Word (John 1. 10). How dear, then, the world is to God ! He "so loved the world, that He gave" for its salvation "His Son, the Only-begotten." With strong emphasis the Apostle represents "the whole world"—nothing else and nothing less—as the object of the Father's redeeming grace, as the province of Christ's mission of sacrifice and conquest. The entire race of mankind, and of mankind in its actual life and present sphere of existence, is embraced and dealt with in the plans of Divine redemption. "The *cosmos*" signifies man not abstractly considered and apart from nature, but man and nature as a single complex of being, along with the sin and misery in which man is entangled. The sinful and lost world, which Jesus Christ has come into and finds in its ill plight, is the world that God in His love is resolved to save through Him.

But while the world has become the object of the pitying love of God, it is, because of its blind hatred towards Him, the foe of His children. "The world hates" them, as Cain hated Abel, as it hated Jesus to the death (3. 12, 13, John 15. 18-24, &c.). Out of it come the Antichrists who seduce them (vers. 18-26,

4. 1-6); its persecution harasses them; its corruptions and idolatries would destroy them. They have to conquer it; and they can do so by virtue of the mightier Spirit in themselves (4. 4)—they have already vanquished the Evil One who holds sway over it.

The Tempter vauntingly displayed to Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," saying, "All this is delivered unto me"; and well might Satan say so (comp. pp. 208, 430). The world in which our Lord passed the days of His flesh was wicked to an extreme degree. Human society, as most of us know it, is in a far better and cleaner condition than in St John's time. The worldliest men of to-day would be nauseated if taken back 1800 years and set down in one of those imposing Greek or Roman cities in which the Apostles preached. We owe the change to Christ and His servants. The Church of the Redeemer has not toiled and suffered through these centuries without raising the moral standard and softening the temper of civilized mankind. But the bad old world of St John's time exists; its vices and cruelties flourish, in the most horrible form, amongst heathen peoples. Though combated and checked, it propagates itself in the midst of Christendom, hiding in haunts of shame, poisoning our literature and art, debasing our politics and trade, wearing sometimes the mask of religion and with fine moral phrases and airs of virtue deceiving the very elect. It is still the same enemy of God and destroyer of men,—the world of the carnal mind and the selfish spirit, of the bitter tongue and the evil heart of unbelief; it is a world no less hateful, no less fascinating, than that which plied St John's disciples in the Asian cities with its terrors and its enchantments.

The world is a bewildering paradox; each man bears in his own breast the mirror of the contradiction, its counterpart in little. It is the sphere at once of light and darkness, heaven and hell; the Divine and the Satanic wrestle there for mastery, and their forms are confused in the struggle. The world is at once to be

loved and to be(loathed; to be loved, as God made it and Christ redeemed it; to be loathed and feared, as sin has marred it, as the serpent has drawn over it his trail and charged it with his venom.

“The world” is practically defined by its opposition to “the love of the Father.” St John does not decide for his people whether this or that avocation is allowable; he nowhere “draws the line” for them between the permissible and the forbidden in employments and recreations. He makes the decision one of spiritual instinct and conscience for the individual case. Everything is prohibited, is marked as evil for the Christian believer, which comes into competition with the love of God; any and every such thing, though innocent to appearance and though safe and lawful under other conditions, is wrong for him, since it chills his heart toward God; such a pursuit, such an affection, proves by its tendency to be “not of the Father but of the world.” St Paul has said, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14. 23); this Apostle virtually says, “Whatsoever is not of the love of God is sin.” Whatever puts God out of one’s thoughts, whatever weakens the power of religion over the soul, whatever hinders one from doing God’s will in the ordering of his life, whatever sets itself up to rival the love of God in one’s heart—be it even the love of father or mother—this belongs to what St John understands by “the world.” The world has a separate being for each man; it may meet him in the cloister as well as in the theatre, it follows him into the sanctuary from the exchange. “The world” is not made up of so many outward objects that can be specified; it is the sum of those influences emanating from men and things around us, which draw us away from God. It is the awful down-dragging current in life. “The spirit of the world” is the atmosphere, laden with germs of disease, which constantly exhales from the moral corruption and ungodliness of mankind, and it penetrates everywhere.

“The world” being thus ubiquitous, evidently mere

exclusion and prohibition are ineffectual defences. Jesus would not have His disciples "taken out of the world," in order to be "kept from its evil" (John 17. 15). There must of course be separation from manifest wrong, and "no fellowship" admitted "with the works of darkness" (Eph. 5. 11). But antipathy is not salvation; local distance gives no security. It is not enough to mark off certain places, certain pursuits and associations, and to say, "Now these belong to the world: I will hold aloof from them, and I shall be safe"—though there are things with which a Christian man can no more identify himself than Christ with Belial. Nor will it suffice to say, "Such and such persons are worldly people; I will keep clear of them, and I shall escape the contamination of the world"—though, to be sure, there are those with whom a religious man will as little consort as light with darkness. But this kind of protection is quite inadequate, and may be fatally deceptive. For the world has secret allies within us, and the love of it is native to our hearts. There is no way of conquering its affections and casting out its lusts but by the power of a stronger passion. Nothing will save ourselves, nothing will save our modern Churches, from the engulfing tide of worldliness, but "the expulsive power of a new affection"; the "pouring out of the love of God in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that was given unto us," is the one safeguard (Rom. 5. 5). The true love thrusts out the false. Spiritual religion is the only antidote to idolatry, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost the cure for worldliness in the Church. God **must** fill the man's being and occupy it for Himself; nothing else will expel the world, with its vain desires and its sordid and slavish cares, from the temple of the soul.

2. The unlovely features of the world should repel the children of God, and make friendship between them and it impossible; St John speaks of them as "the things that are in the world,"—the passions which animate it and the pursuits which occupy it. These are "the lust



of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of this life,"—which make up, in the Apostle's view, "all that is in the world": who can *love* things like these? The three categories of moral evil named must be understood in their widest sense, for they embrace the characteristics of the world's ungodliness as a whole.

They are defined as "not of the Father"—they form no part of God's creation and spring from no seed of His sowing—"but of the world," being "tares" that were later sown by an enemy's hand, diseases of the blood that had their rise within the frame of man's existence.<sup>1</sup> The dispositions named are corruptions, and not of "that which was from the beginning"; sin is finite and creaturely in origin, and will be transient in its reign; "the world and its lust are passing." Sin is not primordial and essential to humanity; its development is a dark episode in the history of the universe.

In this trinity of evil, there are *two lusts* and *one vaunt*, two forms of depravation arising from our needs and one from our possessions,—unholy desire for things one has not, and unholy pride in things one has. The three correspond, broadly speaking, to the three attractions of the forbidden fruit which overcame our mother Eve in the garden, and to the three temptations overcome by the Seed of the Woman in the desert.

(1) Under *the lust of the flesh* are included all corrupt bodily desires. "The woman saw that the tree was good for food" (Gen. 3. 6); the Tempter said to Jesus, after His long fast, "Command that these stones become bread" (Matt. 4. 3). Such is the appeal which sin makes to our poor hungry bodies. The primitive temptation, the imperious craving of physical need under circumstances morally prohibiting gratification, assails with more or less of violence and frequency every child of man. The body has its claims, its legitimate and appointed appetites; the force of the temptation lies in

<sup>1</sup> It is St John's habit of mind to refer the disposition of each kind of existence, and the operation of every principle, to its origin; nature is, strictly, *birth*, and birth determines potency and scope of being.

this fact—the attraction is not merely that of pleasure and self-indulgence, it is that of fitness and seeming necessity: as “food” the fruit offers itself, and it is “good for food”; yet there is a *veto!* Unless the tempted man knows the heavenly Father, as Jesus did, and has tasted in His word “the true bread from heaven,” unless a spiritual hunger has been awakened that is keener than the fleshly, he will naturally consult for his appetites and “make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof”; he will make *food*, in some shape or other, the end of his labour and the regulative necessity of his life. To the earthly man and from the mere physical standpoint, food is the prime criterion of value.

This order of desire holds an immense place, and a necessary place, in the economy of life. Jesus Christ perfectly recognized in His teaching, and His works of mercy, man’s earthly wants; He made them the province of God’s daily providence; He told His disciples that “their heavenly Father knoweth that they have need of all these things” and will see that they are “added” to those who “seek first His kingdom and righteousness” (Matt. 6. 24–34). But to put these things first is, He showed, to subordinate life to the means of living and to become a slave of Mammon instead of a child of God. When bodily desire of any sort breaks through its limits, when it absorbs the mind and fills the heart and masters the man, then it has swollen into a *lust*, which darkens the soul and disorders the whole frame of life.

Every species of disordered appetite is included under “the lust of the flesh” in the phraseology of Scripture,—every form of licence, every longing that looks beyond the fences of temperance and chastity. Beside fleshly desires that have a natural basis, there are a multitude of adventitious and injurious appetites, which habit and fashion have engendered; such is the lust for strong drink in our English population. In New Testament times sexual vice was the most conspicuous and ruinous form of animalism, and is marked out specifically as “the lust

of the flesh"; it became the occasion of the severest rebukes and warnings, particularly in some of St Paul's Epistles. Modern worldly society appears to be gravitating towards the same condition; and "the corruption that is in the world through lust" needs to be put to shame in many quarters, with Apostolic plainness and sternness of reproof. It is eating into the vitals of manhood and national life, and threatening to undermine our Western civilization, as it did in the case of ancient Greece and Rome. Let no man dream that he is out of the reach of sensual seduction, while he is in the flesh. No matter how refined or spiritual he has become, he has a body, and must watch and rule it. When the baits of physical pleasure lose their grossness, they become so much the more insidious, and the more enervating and depraving in their effects. "I keep my body under," writes St Paul to the lax and self-indulgent Corinthians—"I make it my slave and not my master, lest after that I have preached to others, I should become myself a castaway" (1 Cor. 9. 27). If the holy Apostle needed such vigilance and strictness in bodily regimen, who does not?

Great as the subjection of the poor to bodily conditions may seem to be, they are not in the greatest danger in this respect. It is the affluent who are beset above others by the temptations of sense. Luxury and indolence are more ruinous to the moral nature than crushing poverty. For this reason, amongst others, it is hard for rich men to "enter into the kingdom of heaven." Neither rich nor poor will break the bondage of the flesh except as our Master did, by faith in the better bread, in the "word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." In that strength one is "able to bridle the whole body"; but scarcely otherwise.

(2) *The lust of the eyes* denotes an order of temptation different from the last; it is concerned with taste as distinguished from appetite. The æsthetic sensibilities are generated at the juncture of flesh and spirit; these

give rise to pleasures of soul superior to those of sense and mere physical existence ; they come into play along with the elementary cravings, where the latter allow them room. "The woman saw that the tree was a delight to the eyes"—a perception showing that the pains of hunger were not severe ; she observed that the forbidden fruit was goodly to behold, as well as good to eat. Eve was the mother of all the painters and poets, no less than of all the famishing children of mankind. "The Devil taketh Jesus up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them." Both these representative temptations appealed to the sense of beauty and glory in the soul ; their range lay beyond the material and utilitarian interests of life. "The lust of the flesh" is excited through the eyes ; but it is not properly "the lust of the eyes." These create a world of their own full of wealth and enjoyment, which has its peculiar perils and corruptions, its glamour and witchery. Neighbouring to the realm of form and colour ruled by the eye, is that of tone and measure belonging to the ear : the two constitute one chief province of life, the domain of art and beauty ; in this sphere, we may take it, the Apostle's "lust of the eyes" found its place.

There is the world of dress and fashion, which exists for the eyes alone. What excitements, temptations, heart-burnings, follies, extravagances it contains ! How large a part of human life—of the exercise of thought and skill, of the manifestation and the testing of character—revolves about the question, "Wherewithal shall we be clothed ?" The exercise of taste, the sense of fitness and beauty, in matters of personal appearance and social intercourse, of expression and handiwork, are inborn faculties. These sensibilities belong to our God-given nature ; in the higher forms of genius, they bespeak an inspiration of the Almighty ; but they have their diseases and excesses. The craving for adornment, and for the luxuries of beauty,

grows by indulgence into a veritable *lust*, that may be as lawless and wasteful as any sensual appetite. There is nothing which makes a human being more frivolous and heartless, which eats away more completely the spiritual capacities, than the unbridled passion for dress and display.

Beyond the world of fashion rises the grander and enduring realm of plastic and poetic art, the product of powers the loftiest that man possesses. The world in which the Apostle John moved had reached a high level of achievement in this direction. No other people has been endowed with such an eye and sense for beauty as the ancient Greeks; the broken relics of their work are the models and the despair of our artists to-day. The finest modern cities would look mean and ugly beside the creations of the ancient architects and sculptors. But a deadly taint of corruption ran through that wondrous activity of genius. The world of art has its idolatries, its revolts, its meretricious elements. St James was a Hebrew puritan,—the last man in the world to appreciate Hellenic art; but he has written the history of its fall: “Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when arrived at full growth, bringeth forth death” (James 1. 15). God’s curse fell in blight and defacement and shameful ruin on all that magnificent classic civilization. Restraint, reverence, is half the secret of noble craftsmanship. When it grows blind to the beauty of holiness, when it forgets its spiritual ideal and gives the rein to licence, art loses its vigour in losing its purity; its loveliness allies itself to foulness, and becomes a horror. The motto, “Art for art’s sake,” if this signifies indifference to the religious interests of life and repudiation of ethical motives, is sheer idolatry; it means the enthronement of pleasure in the place of duty. Sterility is the doom of such isolation, in any field of human work. Impotence comes on every faculty that severs itself from the kingdom of God and withholds its tribute to His glory.

(3) It was *the vainglory of life* to which our blessed Lord was tempted, when the Evil One said to Him on the temple-pinnacle, "Cast thyself down from hence; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee"—as though Jesus should have paraded His trust in the Father, and His supernatural powers, to win the applause of the multitude and a ready credence for His Messiahship. "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil": so the Serpent promised, and stirred in the soul of the woman the deep craving for knowledge, the pride and ambition of the intellect. Eve was the mother of all the thinkers, of the philosophers and scientists, along with the poets and artists of the race; their faculties slumbered in her breast. Granted the story of the Fall to be a poem, its inspired author has struck his finest note in adding this attraction to the charm of the forbidden fruit of Eden.

The "knowledge of good and evil" promised to Eve, the Tempter appears already to possess; this emancipates him from fears and scruples, and gives him the "subtlety" which astonishes the mother's simple mind and excites her envy; she "saw that the tree was to be desired to make one wise." Conceit of knowledge is the especial sin of Satan, which set itself by direct intent against the ordinance of God; he claimed to see behind the Divine law, to judge it and despise its threatenings in virtue of his own godlike insight. "Knowledge is power"; but that is a surface knowledge, however extensive and minute, which discerns not the "eternal power and Godhead" in the works of the Creator; it is a spurious and treacherous knowledge that deems itself wiser than conscience and that asks the sceptic question, "Yea, hath God said?" when His voice sounds in the soul's ear. There is nothing more daring, and more intoxicating to our human nature, than the arrogance of knowledge. How puny its pretensions, how narrow its farthest range, in the presence of the All-wise and Infinite God!

The words employed by St John, in verse 16, both for

“vainglory” and for “life” are notable. *Life* in this passage is βίος, not ζωή—the βίος of chap. 3. 17 (“If any one has the *livelihood* of this world”), not the ζωή of chap. 1. 1, 2 (“The *life* was manifested,” &c.); it is the βίος (“living”) which the father of the prodigal, in the parable of Luke 15 (ver. 12), divided to his sons. The *pride* here in question is ἀλαζονεία, which in earlier Greek meant “swagger” or “braggadocio.” The only other example of the term in the New Testament is in James 4. 16: the travelling Jewish trader boastfully tells of his schemes,—how he will visit this town and that, and make so much gain in each; “So,” writes the inspired satirist, “you glory in your *vauntings!*” Such ἀλαζόνες, “braggarts,” St Paul condemns in Romans 1. 30, 2 Timothy 3. 2, distinguishing them from the “overweening” (ὑπερήφανοι). The “vainglory of life” that St John ascribes to “the world,” is therefore an ostentation of worldly possessions or advantages, the disposition to “show off” and to make other people look small.

In its crudest form this temper manifests itself in the vulgar rich man, proud of his money, of his house, his table and his wines, of his pictures or his horses; in the vain woman, proud of her beauty and its admirers, proud of her jewels and dresses, of her fashionable style and fashionable friends. The like “vainglory” is seen in the criminal relating his daring exploits and clever rogueries; in the actor puffed up by his triumphs on the stage, or the artist vaunting his genius and fame, and the prices that his work commands; in the preacher who, while he gives the glory to God, speaks of his crowded congregations and recounts his conversions with a self-complacent air; in the sectarian, who magnifies his own communion, its numbers and wealth and men of talent and the place it fills in the public eye, or its national glory and antiquity, disparaging other bodies of his Master’s servants because they cannot boast these distinctions. All pluming of oneself upon outward things, all conceit of them as though they added worth and importance to one-

self, is essential worldliness; it is a part of "the vain-glory of this life," and is "not of the Father but of the world." Filled with such desires and vanities, though the objects with which they are concerned should be ever so innocent in themselves and good and fitting in their degree, we are like children who should spend all their thoughts in plots and quarrels about cakes and toys, having no wish for their parents' company and no sense of their parents' love, shown to them in these gifts and in better things besides. The boons of the world and of temporal livelihood are trash and frippery, compared to the Father's love and the wealth of His eternal kingdom.

3. Finally, St John declares the transience of worldly passions and possessions: "the world is passing away, and the lust of it." In saying this, the Apostle is not thinking of the destruction of the visible universe; he foretells the abolition of the existing moral economy of human life, of "the present evil world." "The darkness" of rebellion towards God and of hatred amongst men "is passing away"—so he wrote in verse 8; with it "the world," filled with this darkness and, dominated by it, is in course of dissolution. The seer of the Apocalypse had witnessed the fall of Jerusalem—"the great city, which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11. 8). He foresaw in the Spirit at Patmos the overthrow of the new Babylon, "drunken with the blood of the saints."

For the Empire of Rome had declared war against Christ; she had proscribed Christianity. Doing this, she passed sentence of death upon herself. That mightiest of world-kingsdoms the Apostle looked upon as a gigantic iniquity, a domain overshadowed and dominated by Satan. Like the old empires that had trampled upon Israel, Rome must pass into ruin and oblivion. Foul lust and demonic pride possessed it, and were conspicuous in its rulers. It was *Rome* of which St John drew the lurid picture found in the 17th chapter of the Apocalypse: "On her forehead is a name



written: *Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth.*" On the "scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy," he sees her riding to perdition. St John's foresight was justified in due time; the Babylon of his visions fell under the stroke of God's judgements. But her abominations survived, to propagate themselves under new forms. The present evil world descends from that of St John's day; there is continuity in the kingdom of Satan, as in that of God. Yet the dominion of darkness wanes from age to age; slowly and surely the light gains upon it (comp. p. 172). With that vile world of Paganism, its passions are decaying. Lust must lose its hold of human life. The Son of God is fulfilling the end for which He was manifested, "to destroy the works of the Devil" (chap. 3. 8). Higher ambitions, more serious thoughts, more spiritual cravings, will displace the frivolity and animalism of our times.

Through the ruin of empires and the fall of human pride, through the overthrow of worldly systems decayed with evil, God's will remains, the enduring foundation of truth and right; the purpose of His grace toward men moves onward to its accomplishment. He who "does the will of God" making it his own, whose life is yielded to its service and is spent in its furtherance, partakes of its eternity. He also, with the Holy Will to which he has yoked himself, "abideth for ever."

"Leave me, O Love which reachest but to dust,  
 And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;  
 Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;  
 Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings.  
 Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might  
 To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;  
 Which breaks the clouds, and opens forth the light  
 That doth both shine and give us sight to see.  
 O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide  
 In this small course which birth draws out to death;  
 And think how ill beseemeth him to slide,  
 Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.  
 Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see;  
 Eternal Love, maintain Thy life in me."

—PHILIP SIDNEY.



## THE LAST HOUR

St John in Old Age—The Veteran sure of Victory—Seceders from the Church—"Last Hour" of the Apostolic Age—Ignorance of Times and Seasons—Cyclical Course of History—Etymology of "Antichrist"—Gnostic Denial of the Son of God—Separation of "Jesus" from "Christ"—Axiom of Gnosticism—Safeguards of Faith—The *Chrism* of the Spirit—The Witness of the Apostles—The Promise of Christ.

“My little ones, it is the last hour.

And as you know that Antichrist cometh, even now many Antichrists have arisen ;

Whence we perceive that it is the last hour.

From us they went out, but they were not of us ;

For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us ;

But it was so, that they might be made manifest, all of them, to be not of us.

And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know : I have not written to you because you know not the truth, but because you know it,

And that no lie is of the truth.

Who is the liar, except he who denieth that Jesus is the Christ ?

This is the Antichrist—he who denieth the Father and the Son.

Every one who denieth the Son, hath not the Father either :

He that confesseth the Son, hath the Father also.

As for you, let that which you heard from the beginning abide in you ;

If that abide in you which you heard from the beginning,

You too in the Son, and in the Father, shall abide ;

And this is the promise which He Himself made to us—the eternal life.

These things I have written to you about them that mislead you.

And as for you, the anointing you received from Him abideth in you ;

And you have no need that any one be teaching you ;

But as His anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true and is no lie—even as it hath taught you—

Abide in Him.

1 JOHN 2. 18-27.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE LAST HOUR

THE Apostle John is an old man ; he has lived through a long day. The way of the Lord that he teaches is by this time a well-marked path, trodden by the feet of two generations. Amongst his "little children" he counts many grey-headed "fathers" in Christ. In his lifetime and since the hour when he heard the elder John say on the banks of Jordan, "Behold the Lamb of God!" centuries seem to have passed ; the cumulative effect of ages—what the Gentile Apostle called "the ends of the world"—has been accomplished and a thousand years transacted in one day.

Though new in aspect and surpassing all that heart of man conceived, there is nothing of raw invention, nothing fugitive or tentative in the things of which St John writes. These teachings are as old as they are new (vers. 7, 8) ; they belong to the universal Divine order ; they reveal "the eternal life, which was with the Father" (1. 1) and lies beyond the range of time. Swiftly laid, the foundation of the Apostles is surely laid. While "the world is passing away and the lust thereof" (ver. 17), while it rocks in the paroxysms of moral dissolution, while threatenings from without and apostasies within their ranks frighten infirm believers who do not "*know* that they have eternal life" (5. 13), the note sounded by this Epistle is that of serene assurance ; an absolute stability attaches to the Apostolic witness concerning Jesus Christ. The veteran leader

whose eye has long watched and his voice guided the battle, proclaims the victory already won. "Our faith" has proved the temper of its weapons upon the world's stoutest armour (5. 5; see Chap. XXII). Its "young men have overcome the Evil One" (ver. 13); its martyrs "have overcome him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12. 11). The Christian brotherhood has shown itself to possess "an unction" which "teaches it about all things," and holds it safe from poisonous error. In Ephesus, for example, faulty as the Church there was, it has "tried them which call themselves apostles, and they are not," and has "found them false" (Rev. 2. 2, 3, 6). Whatever trials yet remain, whatever conflicts are preparing for the kingdom of God in that dim future which St John had read in the isle of Patmos through the mirror of prophecy, the faith that he and his companions have delivered to the saints is secure in the keeping of the Spirit of truth. It has no foes to meet more dangerous than those already foiled.

Time has vindicated the inference that the aged Apostle drew from his experience. The disciples of Jesus "have known the truth, which abideth in us and shall be with us for ever" (2 John 2). The Apostolic era was a rehearsal of the Church's entire history; and the New Testament, into which the era condensed itself, contains the principles and forces that are destined to subjugate the world to Jesus Christ. St John has but one thing to say to his successors: "Abide in Him." The allurements of the heathen world which his converts had once loved (vers. 15-17), and the seductions of false prophets arising amongst themselves (ver. 26), are alike powerless to move those who build upon this rock. They have chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from them.

As for the recent seceders from the Apostolic communion, their departure is a gain and not a loss; for that is manifest in them which was before concealed (vers. 18, 19). They bore the name of Christ falsely;

*antichrist* is their proper title; and that there are "many" such, who stand in imposing array against His servants, proves that God's word is doing its judicial work, that the Divine life within the body of Christ is casting off dead limbs and foreign elements (see John 15. 6) and that the age is coming to its ripeness and its crisis: "Whence we perceive that it is the last hour."

We may best expound the paragraph before us by considering in order the crisis to which the Apostle refers, the danger which he denounces, and the safeguards on which he relies—in other words, *the last hour*, *the many antichrists*, and *the chrism from the Holy One*.

1. "My little ones, it is the last hour—we perceive that it is the last hour." Westcott, in his profound and learned Commentary on this Epistle, calls our attention to the absence of the Greek article: "*A last hour* it is (ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν)"—so the Apostle literally puts it; the anarthrous combination is peculiar here. St Paul's saying in 1 Thessalonians 5. 2, "*A day of the Lord* is coming," resembles the expression. The phrase "seems to mark the general character of the period, and not its specific relation to 'the end.' It was a period of critical change." *The hour* is a term repeatedly used in the Gospel of John for the crisis of the earthly course of Jesus, the supreme epoch of His death and return to the Father. This guides us to St John's meaning here. He is looking backward, not forward, and speaking the language of memory more than of prophecy (comp. p. 172). The "last hour" closes a succession of hours; it is the end of an expiring day.

The venerable Apostle stands on the border of the first Christian age. He is nearing the horizon, the outmost verge of that great "day of the Lord" which began with the birth of the first John, the forerunner, and would terminate with his own departure—himself the solitary survivor of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. The shadows are closing upon John; everything is altered about him. The world he knew had passed, or

was passing, quite away. Jerusalem had fallen; he had seen in vision the overthrow of mighty Rome, and the Empire is shaken with rumours and fears of change. The work of revelation, he felt, was all but complete. Those deadly opposers of the truth had risen who were foretold in the words of Jesus, and in the teachings of Paul so well remembered at Ephesus; the Satanic apostasy within the Church, foreboding the last judgement, had reared its head. The finished truth of the revelation of the Father in the Son is confronted by the consummate lie of heresy, which denies them both (ver. 22).

A last hour it certainly was; and it might be (who could tell?) the last hour of all. The Master had said concerning John, "If I will that he tarry till I come!" (John 21. 22). Many deemed this to signify that the beloved disciple would live on earth until the Lord's return in glory. He relates the incident in the appendix to his Gospel without giving his opinion for or against this notion; he only states the exact words of Jesus, and intimates that so much was never promised. But this saying might well excite the desire for such a favour. And why was John kept waiting for so long, when all the rest had been summoned away?

It may seem strange to us that the inspired Apostles should have known almost nothing of the duration of future history; but even from Himself, in the days of His flesh, our Lord confesses that such knowledge was veiled: "Of that day or hour knoweth no man, not even the angels in heaven, *nor the Son*, but the Father only." Christ left His disciples in all matters of the times and seasons, and leaves them still, to wish and hope, but not to *know*. So the wise Apostle writes humbly and with guarded caution, keeping the hour of the advent an open question. He was not permitted to see into the next century. He presided over the completion of the great creative age, and he felt that its end was come. Clearly it was *his* last hour; and



for aught he knew it might be the world's last,—the sun of time setting to rise no more, the crash of doom breaking upon his dying ears.

History passes through great cycles, each of which has its last hour anticipating the absolute conclusion. The year with its seasons changing from spring to winter, the day revolving from dawn to dark, image the total course of time. You have watched the sun set on a still summer evening, yielding yourself to the influences of the hour—the light slowly waning and the shadows creeping stealthily from their ambush, the colours dying out of earth and sky, the sounds of life ceasing one by one, the night wind striking chill on your cheek and whispering amongst the trees the riddle that no man reads—and you have had the strange sense that all was over! a foretaste of life's and the world's last hour; you came away doubting if that sun will rise again! The great epochs and "days" of human history have a similar finality. Each of these periods in turn sensibly anticipates the end of all things. The world is seen sweeping in its orbit towards the gulf; it grazes the edge, to escape it for that time, and to set forth upon a wider circuit which must bring it to the final plunge. Like the moth wheeling round the taper's flame and flitting by with singed wings, to fall at last consumed, like some huge creature of heavy flight powerless to soar to the mark of its desire, but that circles in ascending spires passing its goal again and again, till it lands spent upon the summit—such appears to be the destined course of the world toward judgement. Many great and notable days of the Lord there have been, and perhaps will be—many last hours before the last of all. The earth is a mausoleum of dead worlds; in its grave-mounds, tier above tier, extinct creations and civilizations lie orderly interred. Eschatology, like everything else in Scripture, has its laws of development—"the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear." Each "day" of history, with its last hour, is a moment in that "age of the

ages" which circumscribes the measureless orbit of time.

2. The Apostle John saw the proof of the end of the age in the appearance of *many antichrists*. He could not say that "the Antichrist" had come, whom the Church looked for to herald the second coming of the Lord Jesus; but "even now" there were many who deserved this name. Their appearance was the signal of a crisis which, for aught one could say, might be the prelude of the final judgement.

The word "antichrist" has, by etymology, a double meaning. The Antichrist of whose coming St John's readers had "heard," if identical, as one presumes, with the awful figure of 2 Thessalonians 2, is a mock-Christ, a Satanic caricature of the Lord Jesus; the "many antichrists" were not that, but deniers of Christ and destroyers of the true faith concerning Him. This the epithet may equally well signify. There is no real disagreement in the matter between St Paul and St John. The heretic opponents of Christ who started up before St John's eyes in the Asian Churches, are forerunners, whether at a greater or less distance, of the supreme antagonist (2 Thess. 2. 4), messengers who prepare his way. They are of the same breed and likeness, and set forth principles that will find in Antichrist their full impersonation.

The Antichrists of St John's last hour, the opponents then most to be dreaded by the Church, were teachers of false doctrine. They "deny that Jesus is the Christ" (ver. 22). This denial is other than that which the same words had denoted fifty years before. It is not the denial of Jewish unbelief, a refusal to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah; it is the denial of Gnostic error, the refusal to admit the Divine Sonship of Jesus and the revelation of the Godhead in manhood through His person (see Chap. XIX). Such a refusal makes the knowledge of both impossible; neither is God understood as Father, nor Jesus Christ as Son, by these misbelievers. To "confess" or "deny the Son" is in effect

to "hold" or "not to hold" the Father (ver. 23). The man who in this way "denies the Father and the Son," he is "the antichrist" and "the liar" (ver. 22). His denial negatives the central truth of Christianity, as St John conceived it; it dissolves the bond which gives unity and force to the entire new covenant, and nullifies the Gospel absolutely. The nature of the person of Christ, in St John's view, was not a question of transcendental dogma or theological speculation; there lay in it the vital point of an experimental and working Christian belief. "Who is he," the Apostle cries, "that overcomes the world, except he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (5. 5); and again, "Every one that believes that Jesus is the Christ, is begotten of God" (5. 1). The one saving and conquering faith is that which beholds in the crucified Nazarene the Son of God seated at the right hand of power (see Chap. XXII).

The traditions of the rise of heresy point to the attempts made about this time, and especially in St John's province of Asia, to divide Jesus Christ (whose Messianic title had by this time become His proper name) into the human *Jesus* on the one hand, mortal and imperfect as other men, and *the Christ*, a Divine æon or emanation, that descended upon Jesus and was associated with Him from His baptism till the hour of His death. This was to make of Jesus Christ *two* beings, to break up His Divine-human person, as the disciples had known Him, into shadowy and discrepant fragments (comp. Chap. XIX). Those who taught this, denied that "Jesus is the Son of God." They denied "Jesus Christ come in flesh" (4. 2, 3); they renounced the Incarnation, and thereby abandoned the basis laid by Christianity for fellowship between God and man; they closed the way of access to the Father given us in the Son of His love.

This error, which beset the Church for generations and deeply affected its development, grew from the philosophical notion of the incompatibility of the finite

and infinite and the absolute separation of God from the world (see pp. 88, 363). With this axiom were involved the postulates of the illusive nature of phenomena and the intrinsic evil of matter—assumptions that implicate in their fatal coil every truth of religion, doctrinal and practical, and that struck at the root of Apostolic faith. To St John's mind, there was no lie to compare with this. Those who brought such maxims with them into the Church, could never have been Christians. Christ Jesus the Lord was, from the outset, to them a non-reality; the critique of their philosophy dissolved the facts about Him into a play of the senses, a Doketic spectacle. The manifestation of the Godhead in Jesus, upon this theory, was a train of symbols, grander and fairer it might be than others,—a shadow still of the heavenly things and not their "very image," a parable of ideal truth that each man must unriddle as he could. To maintain this was to take away all certainty from the Gospel, and all fellowship from the Church.

In proceeding from St Paul's chief Epistles to this of St John, the doctrinal conflict is carried back from the atonement to the incarnation, from the *work* to the *nature* of Christ, from Calvary to Bethlehem. There it culminates. Religious truth could reach no higher than the affirmation, error could proceed no further than the contradiction, of the completed doctrine of the Person of Christ inculcated by St John. The final teaching of revelation is countered by the "antichrists." The Apostle justly specifies this as the conclusive issue. For Christ is all and in all to His own system. "What think ye of the Christ?" is His crucial question to every age. The two answers—that of the world with its false prophets and seducers (ver. 19; 4. 5), and that of the Christian brotherhood one with its Divine Head—are now delivered in categorical assertion and negation. Faith and unfaith have each said its last word. Subsequent debates of Christ with Antichrist will be only the repetition, upon an ever-enlarging scale, of what is contained, and in

principle settled and disposed of, by the word of the Apostles of the Lord and within the pages of the New Testament (comp. Chap. XIX).

3. While the Apostle John insists on the radical nature of the assaults made in his last days upon the Church's Christological belief, he points with confidence to *the safeguards* by which that belief is guaranteed.

(1) In the first place, "*you* (emphatic *ὑμεῖς*—in contrast with the Antichrists) have a chrism from the Holy One (*i.e.* Christ); all of you know" the truth and can discern its verity (vers. 20, 21). Again, in verse 27, "The chrism that you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that any one be teaching you. But as His chrism teaches you about all things, and is true and is no lie, and as it did teach you, abide in Him." *Χρῖσμα* is "anointing," as *χριστός* is "anointed"; the argument lies in this verbal connexion. The *chrism* makes *Christians*, and is wanting to Antichrists. It is the constitutive element common to Christ and His people; it pervades members and Head alike.

We soon perceive wherein this "chrism" consists. What the Apostle says of the chrism he says of *the Spirit* afterwards in chap. 5. 7: "It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth." And in chap. 4. 6 he contrasts the influences working in Apostolic and heretical circles respectively as "*the spirit of truth*" and "of error." The bestowal of the Spirit on Jesus of Nazareth was described under the figure of *unction* by St Peter in Acts 10. 38, telling "how God anointed (*christened*) Him—made Him officially the Christ—with the Holy Spirit and power." <sup>1</sup> It was

<sup>1</sup> In the Early Church, as it is still in the Eastern Churches, the rite of Unction, along with the Imposition of Hands, followed immediately upon Baptism and formed a part of the same Sacrament. It was not till the thirteenth century that the Roman Church separated the two latter acts from Baptism, making them a distinct Sacrament of *Confirmation*. Before this time, the chrism appears for a while to have been used in the West both at Baptism and the Imposition of Hands. The impartation of the Holy Ghost was specifically connected with the latter act, reserved for the bishop, while any priest baptizes.

the possession without limit of "the Spirit of truth" which gave to the words of Christ their unlimited authority; "He whom God sent speaketh the words of God, for He giveth Him not the Spirit by measure" (John 3. 34, 35). Out of the self-same Spirit which He possessed infinitely in His Divine fashion, and which His presence and teaching continually breathed, "the Holy One" gave to His disciples. All members of His body receive, according to their capacity, "the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive," but "whom" He "sends" unto His own "from the Father" (John 14. 17, 15. 26, &c.). The Spirit of the Head is the vital principle of the Church, resident in every limb; by His inhabitation and operation the Body of Christ subsists. The communion of the Holy Ghost is the inner side of all that is outwardly visible in Church activity and fellowship. It is the life of God within the society of men.

This Divine principle of life in Christ possesses an *antiseptic* power. It affords the real security for the Church's preservation from corruption and decay. The Spirit of God is the only, and the sufficient, Infallibility on earth. He is our pledged protector against mortal sin and deadly error; for He is the *Holy Spirit* and the *Spirit of truth*,—who "abideth with you," said Christ to His people, "and He shall be in you." It is His office to teach, no less than to sanctify (John 14. 26, 16. 13). To the true believer and faithful seeker after the knowledge of God He gives an instinct for truth, a sense for the Divine in knowledge and in doctrine, which works through the reason and yet above the reason, and which works collectively in the communion of saints. For this gift St Paul had prayed long ago, on behalf of the Ephesian and Asian Christians: "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him—the eyes of your heart enlightened to know" the great things of God (Eph. 1. 17–23). This prayer had been answered.

Paul's and John's children in the faith were endowed with a discernment that enabled them to detect the sophistries and resist the blandishments of Gnostic error. This Spirit of wisdom and revelation has never deserted the Church. Through centuries rife with all kinds of ignorance and perversion the Apostolic truth has been preserved to this day, and Scripture retains its unique authority, its light shining more brightly for every eclipse.

"You know, all of you," the Apostle says in verse 20.<sup>1</sup> This is the most remarkable thing in the passage. "I have not written unto you," he continues, "because you know not the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth." St John appeals to the judgement of the enlightened lay commonalty of the Church, just as St Paul when he writes, "I speak as to men of sense; judge ye what I say" (1 Cor. 10. 15). We look in spiritual matters too much to the opinion of the few—to experts and specialists, priests, Councils, Congresses; we have too little faith in the Holy Spirit filling the Church, in the *communis sensus* of the body of Christ and the general suffrage of the citizens of the Divine commonwealth. Yet, however we disguise the fact, it is with this grand jury that the verdict ultimately lies.

St John's "chrism" did not guarantee a precise agreement in every point of doctrine and practice; it covers essential truth, such as that of the Godhead of the Redeemer here in question. Much less does the witness of the Spirit warrant individual men, whose hearts are touched with His grace, in setting up to be oracles of God. In that case the Holy Spirit must contradict Himself endlessly, and God becomes the author of confusion and not of peace. But there is in matters of collective faith a spiritual common sense, a Christian public opinion in the communion of saints, behind the extravagances of individuals and the party cries of the

<sup>1</sup> *Οἴδατε πάντες*, not *πάντα*, is decidedly the best-attested reading. See R.V. margin, and Westcott's *Additional Note on 2. 20*.

hour, which acts informally by a silent and impalpable pressure, but all the more effectually, after the manner of the Spirit. The motto of Vincent of Lerinum, which John H. Newman so sadly misapplied, is after all true and indispensable: "Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus."

(2) To this inward and cumulative witness there corresponds an outward witness, defined once for all: "You know *the truth* . . . that no lie is of *the truth*. . . . *That which you heard from the beginning*,—let it abide in you" (vers. 21, 24).

So we have an objective criterion given in the truth about Christ and the Father, as St John's readers heard it from the Apostles at the first and as we find it written in their books. Believing that to be true, the Church rejected promptly what did not square with it. In the most downright and peremptory fashion St John asserts the Apostolic witness to be a test of religious truth: "We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears us not. By this we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (4. 6; see Chap. XIX). His words echo those of Christ addressed to the first disciples: "As the Father sent me, even so send I you. . . . He that receiveth you, receiveth me" (Matt. 10. 40; John 20. 21). And St Paul made the like claim when he said, "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things that I write unto you, that they are a commandment of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14. 37). This touchstone, however contested, is equally valid to-day.

Here is the exterior test of the inner light. The witness of the Spirit in the living Church, and in the abiding Apostolic word, authenticate and guard each other. This must be so, if one and the self-same Spirit testifies in both. Experience and Scripture coincide. Neither will suffice for us apart from the other. Without experience, Scripture becomes a dead letter; without the norm of Scripture, experience becomes a speculation, a fanaticism, or a conceit.



(3) The third guarantee cited by St John lies outside ourselves and the Church. Behind the chrism that rests upon all Christians, and the Apostolic message deposited with the Church in the beginning, there abides *the faithfulness of our promise-giving Lord*. His fidelity is our ultimate dependence; it is involved in the two safeguards previously described.

Accordingly, when the Apostle has said, in verse 24, "If that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning, you too shall abide in the Son and in the Father," he adds in the next verse, to make all sure: "And this is the promise which He made to us,—the eternal life!" It is our Lord's own assurance over again: "Abide in me, and I will abide in you. . . . Verily, verily, I say unto you, If any one keep my word, death he will never see" (John 8. 51, 15. 4). The life of fellowship with the Father in the Son, which the Antichrist would destroy at its root by denying the Son, the Son of God pledges Himself to maintain amongst those who are loyal to His word. On this rock He builds the Church; "the gates of death will not prevail against it," while it stands upon the true confession of His name. To the soul and to the Church, the individual believer and the community of faith, the same promise of life and incorruption is made. So long as we hold His word, Christ holds by us for ever.

"He has promised us" this (*αὐτὸς ἐπηγγείλατο*)<sup>1</sup>—He who says, "I am the resurrection and the life." No brief, no transient existence is that secured to His people, but "the eternal life." Now eternal life means with St John not a prize to be won (as St Paul loves to represent it), but a foundation on which to rest, a fountain from which to draw; not a future attainment so much as a Divine, and therefore abiding, possession in the present. It is the life which came into the world from God with Jesus Christ (1. 1, 2), and in which every soul lives that is grafted into Him. Understanding this, we see that the "promise of life

<sup>1</sup> Compare the *αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν* of 2. 2.

eternal," in verse 25, is not brought in as an incitement to hope, but as a re-assurance to faith. "These things have I written unto you," the Apostle says, "concerning those that mislead you" (ver. 26). *Christ's* word is set against theirs. His promise stands fast, the unchanging rock amidst the tides of opinion and the winds of doctrine, unshaken by the storms that break up one after another the strongest fabrics of human thought and policy. Our little "systems have their day"; but the fellowship of souls which rests upon the foundation of the Apostles, has within it the power of an indissoluble life.

Such are the three guarantees of the permanence of Christian doctrine and the Christian life, as they were asserted by St John at his last hour, when the tempests of persecution and of sceptical error were on all sides let loose against the Church. They are the witness of the Spirit in the soul, of the word on the lips of the Apostles transmitted by their pen, and of the living Christ, the pledged executor of His own promise of eternal life.

## DIVISION II

### SONSHIP TOWARD GOD

#### THE FILIAL CHARACTER AND HOPE

Main Division of the Letter—Comparison of its two Halves—St John awaiting Christ's Coming—New Testament Horizon—Confidence or Shame at the Judgement-seat—Pauline and Johannine Eschatology—“ Begotten of God ”—*Doing* the Vital Thing—The Righteous Father and Righteous Sons—“ Look, what Love ! ”—To be, and to be called, God's Children—Veiling of the Sons of God—The Hope of Glory—Internal and External Likeness to Christ—Vision presumes Assimilation—Purification by Hope.

“ And now, little children, abide in Him ;  
So that if He should be manifested, we may have confidence,  
And not shrink with shame from Him in His coming.  
If you know that He is righteous,  
You perceive that every one doing righteousness is begotten of Him.  
See what manner of love the Father hath given to us,  
Purposing that we should be called children of God ;  
And so we are !  
For this reason the world knoweth us not, inasmuch as it knew not Him.  
Beloved, we are now children of God ;  
And it hath not yet been manifested what we shall be !  
We know that, if He should be manifested, we shall be like Him ;  
Because we shall see Him as He is.  
And every one who hath this hope set upon Him,  
Purifieth himself, according as He is pure.”

1 JOHN 2. 28-3. 3.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE FILIAL CHARACTER AND HOPE

HAUPT<sup>1</sup> is right in attaching verses 28 and 29 of the second chapter to the third, and in marking at this point a main division in the structure of the Epistle. "With the exception of μένειν at the beginning of the two verses," he observes, "all the ideas in them are new and enter the Epistle for the first time"; and these "special ideas, touched here for the first time, are the ever recurring constitutive elements" of its second half. "Φανερωῦσθαι is taken up again in 3. 2-5; παρησίαν ἔχειν is elucidated in 3. 19-22, 4. 17 f., 5. 13 ff.; ποιῆν τὴν δικαιοσύνην forms the fundamental thought of the first ten verses of chap. 3; ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγεννηῆσθαι is not only repeated in τέκνα Θεοῦ, 3. 1 f., but also from 3. 24 onwards is more closely considered. The thought announced in 2. 28 is precisely in the same sense the theme of the next part of the Letter, as 1. 5 was of that which has just closed." The abrupt opening of 3. 1 suggested to the chapter-dividers the break they have made there; but one has only to read on into verses 2 and 3 to find that the writer's mind is following closely the vein struck at the close of the previous chapter; he is full of the thought of the Lord's approaching "manifestation," which excites solicitude for the state in which His people may then be found. The exclamatory ἴδετε of 3. 1 is the sign not of logical discontinuity, but of emotional disturbance. Striking for the first time in

<sup>1</sup> See his *Commentary* (Eng. ed.), pp. 142 ff.

his letter on the idea of the believer's *sonship* toward God (γεγέννηται ἕξ αὐτοῦ, 2. 29), St John falls into astonishment at the love thus disclosed in God, at the fact that God cares to be our Father and deigns to give us the name and status of His children. But he quickly comes round again, in the ἐὰν φανερωθῆ of verse 2, to the point of view assumed in 2. 28; the "hope" which is held out in verse 3, of "seeing Christ as He is" (ver. 2), is one with the hope of standing before Him with "boldness in" that "coming" which the readers were led to expect in 2. 28.

The introductory words of address, "And now, little children,"<sup>1</sup> call attention to the prospect rising before the writer's mind. With the watchword "abide in Him" St John opens the new line of appeal, as he closed with it his former protestation in the last words of verse 27. "Abiding in God" by retaining "the chrism" of the Spirit, who "teaches about all things" (ver. 27), the readers will not be led astray by the Antichrists and false prophets appearing in this "last hour" (verses 18-26). But more than that, by so abiding—by loyalty to the Apostolic message and to their own convictions of spiritual truth—they will prepare for Christ's coming and will be able to meet Him without fear or shame. They will thus make good their title to be the children of God, and will realize the Divine wealth of their inheritance, the glory of which is as yet unrevealed; for they have in God's fatherly love, and in the purity of Jesus reproduced in themselves, a pledge of the loftiest hopes. Such is the gist of the paragraph we are dealing with; and such appears to be its connexion with the foregoing context, to which it is linked not only by the double "abide in Him," but also by the foreboding "last hour" of verse 18 and "the promise of eternal life" in verse 25, which led the way to the "coming" announced in verse 28.

<sup>1</sup> Comp. 2 John 5, Acts 3. 17, 10. 5, 13. 11, for *καὶ νῦν* as a rhetorical form of transition, continuative and resumptive; for *τεκνία*, introducing a fresh topic, comp. 2. 1, 12, 3. 7.

At this point it is possible to take a wider survey of the course of the Epistle. From 1. 5 onwards to 2. 27 St John has been working out and expanding his conception of the fellowship with God, and in God, that is realized through the message brought by Jesus Christ, under the conception of dwelling and walking "in the light." Over against the true light was set "the darkness" of sin, which combats it under every form of contradiction and deceit—in the individual soul (1. 6–2. 11), in the world (2. 15–17), and in the Antichristian movement that has developed within the Church (2. 18–27). But from this paragraph forwards the fellowship of the soul and God takes on a more intimate character, a more vivid colour and a warmer tone, as it opens out into sonship toward God and brotherhood toward men. We no longer read of "light" and "darkness," "the truth" and "the lie," of those who "walk in the light" or "the darkness," who are "of the truth" or "who lie and do not the truth," who profess truly or falsely to "have known God," but of "the children of God" and "of the Devil" respectively, of those who "have confidence toward God and do the things pleasing in His sight" or who "shrink away in shame before" Christ and suffer "the fear that has punishment," because they "are of God" or "are not of God" in either case. Thus in the progress of the Epistle the general gives place to the particular, the metaphysical to the psychological; the doctrine heard from the beginning, and the light shining evermore in the darkness, are represented now as a "seed" of God's Spirit germinating amid the world's evil growths and overpowering them, as a holy love and will working for salvation and winning their victory over hate and falsehood. This second half of the Epistle, like the first, sets out from the thought of the *φανέρωσις* of Christ<sup>1</sup>—there His past, here His future manifestation; the first is that from which faith springs, the second is that to which hope looks; the first that which begins, the

<sup>1</sup> Comp. ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, 1. 2, and ἐὰν φανερωθῇ, 2. 28, 3. 2.

second that which completes the victory of God's light and love over human sin.

The stress of verse 28 lies not on the imperative, "abide in Him," which is carried over from verse 27, but on the reason therefor,—“that, if He should be manifested,” &c. “Christ is to be manifested in His promised advent,—*when* we know not, but it may be soon; and we must appear before Him, with shame or confidence. Abiding in Him, we shall be prepared whenever He may come. If the present should prove to be the world's last hour and the Lord should appear from heaven while we are yet on earth,<sup>1</sup> how welcome His appearing to those who love Him and who keep His word!” So the aged Apostle wistfully explores the future. His hypothetic “if He should be manifested,” echoes the “If I will that he tarry till I come!” of the Lord's enigmatical saying about himself (John 21. 22). After those words of Jesus, the possibility of His coming within the Apostolic era and while St John remained in the flesh, was bound to be entertained; and the prolongation of the Apostle's life to the verge of human age might well encourage the hope of an early advent,—delayed indeed but to be expected before the veteran Apostle's departure, and now therefore, possibly, quite imminent.

That such an impression existed in the Church, in some minds amounting to a certain expectation, the reference in the appendix of St John's Gospel seems to indicate. The preceding paragraphs have brought the Apostle's readers to the verge of the last things. They see “the world passing away,” the Antichrists arrived, precursors of the great Antichrist who was predicted to arise before Christ's return. Unbelief seems to have reached its limit, and faith to have attained its climax in the teaching of St John. It is a time of crisis, perhaps the closing hour of the Church's trials. “The

<sup>1</sup> Comp. 1 Thess. 4. 15, 17, 1 Cor. 15. 51, for St Paul's impression on the subject at a much earlier date, when he classed himself, provisionally, amongst “those that are left unto the coming of the Lord.” But no such expression recurs in his later Epistles.



Judge is at the door"; Christ stands waiting to return. At any moment the heavens may open and He "may be manifested," who is all the while so near us, walking unseen amongst His Churches.<sup>1</sup> The conditions of the time have revived the prospect of the Lord's glorious return, and bring it near to men's imaginations. The Christian man, susceptible to these impressions, will surely ask himself, "What if my Lord should now appear? how should I meet Him, if He came to-day: with joy or grief; with shame or rapture?" This is a test that Christ's servants might often with advantage put to themselves. Not for His first disciples alone did the Lord say, "Let your loins be girt about and your lamps burning, and yourselves like unto men that look for their Lord, when He shall return from the wedding" (Luke 12. 35 ff.). If suddenly the clouds should part and the unseen Saviour and Judge stood revealed, if the day of the Lord should instantly break on the world "as a thief in the night," or if we should ourselves without further notice or preparation be summoned to His presence, amid the vast surprise could we then turn to Him a glad and eager face?

In this one instance St John writes of the *parousia*, as St Paul has done so frequently, and builds on the anticipation of a definitive return of the Lord Jesus. The fact that he does speak of it in this way, though but once, and that he lays a solemn stress on the expectation, proves his agreement with the prevalent eschatology of the Church. The saying of our Lord respecting the beloved disciple with which his Gospel concludes (21. 22 f.), implies an actual "coming": such words the subject of them could neither forget nor explain away; even supposing the Apostle were not himself the

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Rev. 1. 12 ff., 2. 1; John 14. 18; Matt. 28. 20. It is noticeable that the Apostle John uses *φανερῶς*, as St Paul used *ἀποκαλύπτω*, alike of Christ's first and second coming. He conceives the eternal Word, the only Life and Light of men, as always present in creation and in humanity, but *manifested*—shining forth and made cognizable—at these two great epochs; comp. John 1. 10.

writer of the above chapter, it embodies a genuine Johannine tradition.

This isolated allusion supplies a caution against the inferences frequently drawn from the presence or absence of this expression or that in a particular book, as to supposed variations of doctrine in the New Testament. It is said that St John conceived only of a spiritual coming of Christ and a moral and inward judgement effected by His word amongst men, so that the external Parousia and the great judgement-scene sketched in the Synoptic prophecies and in the preaching of St Paul were transcended in his doctrine and became superfluous. This passage and the kindred saying of chap. 4. 17 f. suffice to show that the Apostle drew no such consequence from his principles, that he felt no contradiction between the thought of Christ's spiritual action upon mankind, with the gradual process of sifting effected thereby, and that of His eventual return in glory as the universal Judge, between this constant visiting and judging of the world and that ultimate "manifestation" and supreme "crisis" at the "consummation of the age," which dominates the New Testament horizon generally. Here the Apostle John contemplates the coming of the glorified Jesus to the world in judgement, just as explicitly and formally as did the Apostle Paul when he declared, "We must all be manifested before the judgement-seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5. 10). There is a difference, but it is that of emphasis and prevailing standpoint: St John dwells on the process, St Paul and others on the issue—he on the evolution, they on the *dénouement* of the great drama of Christ and the World (comp. pp. 67, 68). The Gospel of John, in contrast with the others, spends itself in working out the development of principles and character. He traces the catastrophe of our Lord's incarnate manifestation back to its antecedents eternal and temporal, showing how it was brought about by the moral forces operative in the world, as these collided with the character and the purposes of God disclosed by the coming of His Son;

the tremendous issue, in many of its features, he rather indicates and takes for granted than draws out in detail. The Parousia and the Day of the Lord take in the theodicy of the Apostle John much the same relative position that the scenes of the Passion occupy in his Gospel narrative. They are held, so to speak, in solution throughout, and are presented in their latent preparations and prelude more than in their patent consummation, in root and growth more than in the ripened fruit.

Assuming in common with all who relied on the word of Jesus His return as the King and Judge of mankind, and contemplating the possibility of His near approach, the Apostle calls his readers to consider how they will face the advent; they must desire to meet their Lord *with confidence of bearing* (παρρησία)<sup>1</sup> and *without the shrinking of shame*. If found, when the Lord comes, out of Christ instead of "abiding in Him"—suddenly confronted by the dread Presence which John saw in the Patmos visions, and standing before His tribunal—they must be overwhelmed with confusion and struck dumb with shame. The great "appearing"—the goal of Christian hope and satisfaction—brings to the unprepared inconceivable dismay. This admonition is brief as it is affecting, and stands alone in St John's writings (see however 4. 17, 18); but it recalls the purport of our

<sup>1</sup> Using the word παρρησία (=παν-ρῆσις, *saying everything*; then *frankness of speech, unreservedness, publicity, confidence or courage of bearing*), as also in 3. 21, 4. 17, 5. 14, St John might seem to be drawing again on the Pauline vocabulary; comp. 2 Cor. 3. 12, Eph. 3. 12, 1 Tim. 3. 13. The aorist σχῶμεν (not present, ἔχωμεν, as in the other places) after *ἵνα* seems to imply the *gaining* rather than the continued possession of courage, and points to the testing *occasion* of the Advent; "that we may *take courage*, and not be put to shame (*aorist, αἰσχυνθῶμεν*), shrinking from Him in His coming." Comp. for the aorist of ἔχω, Rom. 1. 13, 2 Cor. 1. 15, 2. 3; 2 Pet. 2. 16; in each of these instances it signifies not a continued state of mind, but an *experience* associated with some particular occurrence. For the pregnant ἀπό (of separation) in this connexion, comp. 1. 7; Rom. 6. 7, 9. 3; Col. 2. 20; and after αἰσχύνομαι, Sir. 21. 22, 41. 17 ff., in the Septuagint. In Isa. 1. 29, Jer. 2. 36, 12. 13, αἰσχύνεσθαι ἀπό means "to be ashamed of."

Lord's prophetic warnings given at length in the Synoptic discourses on the Last Judgement; and the words echo the frequent appeals of St Paul to the same effect.

In prospect of this august and heart-shaking event, such as must dash all self-complacency and trust in human judgement, what is St John's confidence for himself and for his children? This appears in the sentences that follow, in verse 29 and verses 1 and 2 of chap. 3. The ground of assurance lies in *the filial consciousness*. Here is the spring of Christian happiness and courage in view of death and judgement, and of the eternal issues of human destiny.

We note at this place again how completely St Paul and St John are at one, and how surely they come round, by different paths, to the same central points of experience and of theology. St Paul's exposition of the Christian salvation culminates in his doctrine of the believer's "adoption," in Romans 8; "if children, also heirs," is the argument that reassures him against the counter-forces and measureless possibilities of evil looming in the future. "Beloved, now we are children of God!" is the ground on which St John stands in the same joyous certainty of a life eternal already won, that is rich as the love of God and sure as His almighty will.

But the sonship in question, which is to supply the key-note of the Epistle from chap. 3. 1 onwards, is not affirmed at once; it is inferred, in 2. 29, from the correspondence of character that unites the Christian with his God: "If you know that He is righteous, you are aware that every one who does righteousness has been begotten of Him." *God*, and not Christ, is the subject of the assertion "He is righteous"; for God is, in all consistency, the antecedent of ἐξ αὐτοῦ ("of Him") in the subsequent clause. Of "the Father" one "is begotten" (comp. 3. 1, 9 ff., 4. 4 ff., 5. 1, 4, 18 f.): this goes so much without saying, that in passing from verse 28 to 29, having in his mind the final and emphatic

γεγέννηται, the writer makes the transition of subject unconsciously; he does not observe that the "of Him" of the second sentence is referred, without explanation, to a person other than that denoted by the "from Him" of verse 28 foregoing. For grammatical clearness, "God" should have been expressed as the subject of the new predicate "is righteous" in verse 29. The righteousness of God (1. 9) and of Christ (2. 1) is, however, so identical that *δικαίως ἔστιν* ("He is righteous") supplies by itself a link of transition; the subjects are practically identified in the writer's mind; the idea of Christ in this connexion melts into that of God. In Him God "is righteous," to our knowledge. But if the assertion "is righteous" does not, "hath been begotten of Him" does involve distinction of Father and Son; one cannot extend the saying of John 10. 30, "I and the Father are one," to the point of making Christ also the *begetter*; when believers are said to be "born of the Spirit" (John 3. 6, 8), *spirit* is opposed to *flesh* and being "begotten of the Spirit" is tantamount to being "begotten of God" (John 1. 13). The latter predicate, as it is here used, finds its interpretation immediately in the next verse: "Begotten of *Him*, I say; for look at *the Father's* love to us!"

1. The first ground of confidence on which the Apostle would have his little children rest—a ground derived from the vindication he has now made of the Christian character—lies in *the practice of righteousness*. This proves a Divine filiation in the Christian man: "The doer of righteousness hath been begotten of Him" (2. 29). St John seeks to encourage and calm his readers. The prospect of Christ's coming as Judge of mankind is naturally fearful to the soul, calling up images such as those with which the Apocalypse clothes the Redeemer's person. The Apostle knows that his children are leading worthy lives, and that most of them have no need for fear in this event. He bids them "take courage" (2. 28), since their conduct shows that God's Spirit is in them and their "doing"

is such as Christ must approve. Under similar terms—dwelling now on disposition, now on conduct—St John has previously described the filial life; he holds up the same ideal throughout the letter: he who “walks in the light” (1. 7), who “keeps God’s commandments” (2. 3, 5), who “loves his brother” (2. 10), who “does the will of God” (2. 17), becomes now the man “who does (executes) righteousness” and who thus approves himself as “begotten of God,” in contrast with “the doer of sin” who is “of the Devil” (3. 7–9). On the same principle, in chap. 5. 2, the one evidence of brotherhood that St John will allow is that of “loving God and doing His commandments.” *Doing* is the vital thing: sentiments, high notions, pious talk, go for nothing without performance. Not “word and tongue,” but “deed and truth” are what God demands in Christian men (3. 18).

That God “is righteous,” dealing justly and fairly by all His creatures in all His relations with them and responsibilities to them, is an axiom of revelation.<sup>1</sup> The principle is laid down hypothetically (“if you know”), for the sake of the consequence to be deduced from it and not because of any real doubt (comp. 4. 12, John 14. 15, for the form of expression),—though indeed our knowledge of the surest certainties of Divine truth is subjectively contingent, and clouds may cross the sunniest skies of faith. From this axiom the consequence follows, which the readers are bound to recognize, that “every man of righteous life is God’s offspring.” In this argumentative form of statement *γινώσκετε* is better read in the indicative (*you know, perceive*) than the imperative;<sup>2</sup> the Apostle is making explicit what is already implicit in his children’s knowledge of God and of themselves.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See in particular Psa. 11. 7, 116. 5, 145. 17; Isa. 59. 17; John 17. 25; Rom. 1. 17, 3. 26; 1 John 1. 9; Rev. 16. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See R.V. margin: the difference is practically very slight.

<sup>3</sup> *Γινώσκετε* in the apodosis—the verb proper to truth of *acquisition* (comp. vers. 5, 18, 3. 19, 24, 4. 6); *εἰδῆτε* (*οἶδα*) in the protasis, “If you know,” indicating a truth of *intuition*, or established conviction, belonging to one’s realized stock of knowledge (comp. vers. 20 f., 5. 18, 18 ff.).

Not only is God righteous, but He alone is righteous originally and absolutely. "None is good save One," said Jesus, "that is God" (Luke 18. 19). Human excellence in every instance is derivative—is "begotten of God." Unrighteousness (*ἀδικία*, 1. 9) is the characteristic of humanity apart from God; "the whole world lieth in the Evil One" (5. 19). God is the source of all right-being and right-doing; apart from the Father of Jesus Christ, there is no righteousness in any child of man. It follows that the presence of a living, operative righteousness is the sign of a Divine sonship, of that pure filial spirit which breeds heart-peace and guarantees final victory. "Other tests of adoption are offered in the Epistle: 'love' (4. 7) and belief that 'Jesus is the Christ' (5. 1). Each one, it will be found, includes the others" (Westcott *ad loc.*).

May we take this reasoning of St John's in the full breadth of its application? Can we say that every righteous man is born of God—even if he be palpably heterodox, if he be an unbeliever, or a heathen? We are bound to do so. But we must understand "righteousness" and "unbelief" in the strict Christian sense. St John writes "*the righteousness*" (*ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην*, not *δικαιοσύνην*)—that which deserves the name and has in it the genuine stuff, which "exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. 5. 20) and differs in quality and flavour from morality of that stamp; it means doing right by God Himself, first of all. When St Paul speaks of "Gentiles which have not the law doing by nature the things of the law" and "showing the work of the law written in their hearts," of "the uncircumcision keeping the righteous demands of the law" and being thus "accounted for circumcision," when he describes a type of man who is "a Jew in secret" and has a "circumcision of spirit" that is "in heart, not in letter," and "whose praise is not of men but of God" (Rom. 2. 14 f., 26-29), he asserts the existence in certain cases of a righteousness availing before God that cannot be labelled or authenticated,

that extends beyond the pale of orthodoxy and refuses to answer to any of the stated and necessary tests of religious communion. There are moral paradoxes in the connexion between faith and practice—cases of men who rise quite above their ostensible creed—that are baffling to our superficial knowledge, secrets of the heart inscrutable except to its Maker; their solution stands over to the Judgement-day. Certain we may be of this, that whatever righteousness shows itself in any man comes from God his Father, whether the channel of its derivation be traceable or not; that whatever light shines in a human soul has radiated from “the true light that lighteth every man,” whether the recipient knows the Sun of righteousness that has risen upon him, or the clouds conceal its form.

2. Behind the first encouragement lies a second. If the Christian believer's right-doing evidences God's paternal relation to him, this proves again *God's fatherly love* bestowed upon the man. Over this the Apostle—here alone in his letter—breaks into exclamation; argument passes into wonder. “Look,<sup>1</sup> what a love the Father hath given to us!” The soul's rock of assurance is God's manifested love. If the final crash should come, if the ground should crumble beneath our feet and the graves open and heaven and earth pass away like a scroll that is rolled together,—in the thought of this shattering convulsion, to which our Lord's prophecies led the Church to look forward and which a moment ago (2. 28) was called up to the imagination, the heart finds refuge here. This anchor of the soul holds, through the wreck of nature. St John's saying is St Paul's in other words: “Hope maketh not ashamed, because *the love of God* hath been poured out in our hearts” (Rom. 5. 5); or again, “I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . . nor

<sup>1</sup> He uses ἴδετε, however, the proper imperative governing an accusative object—not the interjectional ἰδοὺ or ἰδέ, the latter of which is common in St John's Gospel. He wishes his readers actually to “see” what they had not adequately realized; comp. Rom. 11. 22.



things present nor things to come . . . will be able to separate us from *the love of God* that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8. 38, 39).

The sense and emphasis of the words demand a pause at the end of verse 1a (after *ὁ πατήρ* and before the continuing *ἴνα*). Let the readers for a moment contemplate, as it stands alone in its wonder and glory, "the love that the Father has given" them! The clause that follows is not one of definition or explanation—as though God's love consisted in giving us the name of "children." *How* God loves men—to what length, and in what fashion—will be shown later; the *ποταπή ἀγάπη* finds its exegesis in chap. 4. 9-14. Here we ponder the bare fact, put in the briefest words and brought home to experience<sup>1</sup>—God's bestowed and all-inclusive gift to us of His fatherly love in Jesus Christ.

Now the love of God, where it is lodged in the heart and is bearing fruit in a righteous life that mirrors God's own righteousness (2. 29), tends toward a certain mark for those who possess it: "that we should be called *God's children*." Unless we are to rob *ἴνα* of its purposive force, this clause imports a vocation still to be realized, an intention on God's part, *the aim of His love*<sup>2</sup> reaching beyond actual experience. He has *given* His love; but that love means more than it can now give. "That we should be called" must be read in the light of the "coming" of 2. 28, and by contrast with the words "and we *are* so" (of the true text), immediately interjected, and "now we *are* God's children" in verse 2. "We *are* children of God"—the Father's love has made us actually such already; we are to be *called* so<sup>3</sup>—pronounced and

<sup>1</sup> Δέδωκεν, "hath given us," the perfect of abiding result; comp. for the tense, and for the experimental bearing of δίδωμι, 4. 13, 5. 20; also the perfects in 1. 1f., 4. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Comp Eph. 1. 4, 5: ἐν ἀγάπῃ προορίσας κ.τ.λ., "having in love fore-ordained us unto filial adoption to Himself."

<sup>3</sup> Καλέω implies, beyond the mere *naming* or *designating*, an *entitling*, *instating*. St John uses the verb here only in his Epp. and rarely

acknowledged as His sons and on this title summoned to the heritage. "If He should be manifested," and "at His coming" (2. 28, 3. 2), are the tacit adjuncts of "called children." This declaration is identical with what St Paul describes as "the revelation of the sons of God," the event for which creation waits with strained expectancy (Rom. 8. 19),—the occasion when the Son of man, according to His own words, "will say to those on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25. 34). These the Son of God will not be ashamed to own as brethren, "when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8. 38); the *owning* of the sons of God by Christ and the Father before the universe admits them to the full rank and rights of children. This is the goal to which all the bestowments of the Father's love look onward.

That we shall be "called children of God," being addressed as such and invited to the children's place in His house, is a hope that maketh not ashamed (2. 28). "Boldness," indeed, will be theirs in the dread day who hear the Judge pronounce, "Come, ye blessed ones of my Father!" That sentence, however, will but declare the fact which already holds good. The words *καὶ ἐσμέν*, abruptly thrown out, correct the mistaken implication that might be drawn from the previous clause, as though the Divine sonship of Christians would be constituted at the Parousia. When the true bearing of the purpose-clause, "that we should be called," &c., was lost and it was referred, as by most interpreters, to the *present* adoption of the saints (to the "adoption" of Gal. 4. 5 instead of that of Rom. 8. 23), the eager assertion "and (such) we are"

in the Gospel (but see Rev. 19. 9). For this pregnant sense of *καλέω*, comp. Matt. 5. 9, *υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται* (parallel to *τὸν θεόν ὄψονται*, ver. 8, and to *αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τ. οὐρανῶν*, vers. 3, 10, 22. 45), Luke 1. 35, John 1. 42, Rom. 9. 25 f., Heb. 2. 11, James 2. 23; similarly *λέγω* . . . *φίλους* in John 15. 15. With St Paul, the *κλησις* is already past.

naturally dropped from the text; it appeared otiose and superfluous. But when St John's κλησις is rightly understood, this καὶ ἐστέν of the present fact stands out in relief against the purpose of future acknowledgement and investiture. What we shall then *be called*, already we *are*! "These are my sons," God will say of His pilgrims coming home; they are His sons even now, but in exile and obscurity.

"For this reason,"<sup>1</sup> the Apostle remarks, "the world knows us not." The sons of God are at present under a veil, and their "life is hid" (Rom. 8. 19, Col. 3. 3); things are not seen in the true light, nor called by their right names. How should the world recognize us—"it did not know Him!" *God* was unknown to men—to the wisest and deepest in research (1 Cor. 1. 21)—and this was proved to the world's shame by its treatment of Him in whom God was: "You know," Jesus said, "neither me nor my Father" (John 8. 19). "The rulers of this world,—none of them knew the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2. 8) beneath the servant's garb; they had no eye for the moral beauty and dignity of Jesus, for the Godhead in Him. For the same reasons the world ignores or despises His companions; they treat His Apostles, God's messengers to them, as "the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. 4. 13). The more Christians were like Christ, the less the world appreciated them. They must not be surprised at this, nor take the world's scoffs amiss; nay, Jesus bade them "rejoice and be exceeding glad," counting this contempt their beatitude (Matt. 5. 11 f.) and a pledge that as sufferers with their Lord they shall share His glory. Thus the whole of verse 1 goes to sustain the confidence of St John's little children, who shrank needlessly from the thought of Christ's near and sudden advent.

### 3. The assurance which the Apostle gives his readers

<sup>1</sup> Διὰ τοῦτο, as regularly with St John, rests upon the foregoing context, and receives its confirmation and further explanation in the following ὅτι clause; comp. John 5. 18, 8. 47, 12. 18, 39.

is carried to its height, and their fears receive a full reproof, in the words of verse 2. Crowning *the active righteousness* of sons of God and their *conscious experience of the Father's love*, they have, springing out of all this, *the hope of sharing the Redeemer's state of glory*: "We know that, if He should be manifested, we shall be like Him." This central clause of verse 2 is its vital statement. The first two clauses resume and interpret verse 1: "Beloved, we are now God's children, and it has not yet been manifested what we shall be"—we are children away from home, wearing other names and the garb of exiles, awaiting our "manifestation" as the Son of God awaits His; our "call" to the filial estate, our full "adoption" and enfeoffment, is matter of promise not of attainment; it is a "hope not seen" (Rom. 8. 24). But it is a sure hope—"we know"<sup>1</sup> that it will come about, as we "know the love that God hath toward us" (4. 16) and the fidelity of His promises (2. 25); our guarantee is in the character of God, whom "the world knew not"—but "you know Him," said Jesus to His disciples, "and have seen Him" (John 14. 7; comp. 2. 14 f. above).

While the subject of "it has not yet been manifested" is given in the following "what we shall be," *ἐὰν φανερωθῇ* is pointedly resumed from 2. 28, the verse in which this train of thought took its commencement: "If He should be manifested"—the hidden but ever present Son of God and Judge of men—"we shall not view Him with guilty dread; nay, we shall be like Him!"<sup>2</sup> The awkwardness of referring, within the compass of seven words, the all but identical forms of *φανερόμαι* ("to be manifested") to distinct subjects is relieved by the consideration that the two subjects are closely kindred and identified in the writer's thought: "What we shall be" and what He is—the glory of the redeemed and the Redeemer—are one in nature and

<sup>1</sup> *Οἶδαμεν*: see note <sup>3</sup> on p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> Note the unconscious transition of the pronoun from *God* to *Christ*, in vers. 1, 2, the reverse of that made in 2. 28, 29 (see pp. 236, 237).

coincident in manifestation, since "we shall be like to Him" (comp. 2 Thess. 2. 14, 1 Cor. 15. 48 f., Col. 3. 4, Phil. 3. 21).

This future likeness of Christians to Christ, along with their future call to the state and place of God's sons, is for the present a mystery; it involves an unimaginable change in the conditions of human existence (1 Cor. 15. 51). "Not yet was it manifested what we shall be." St John speaks in the past tense (*ἔφανερώθη*), referring to the great historical manifestation of "the life," which he has summed up at the beginning of this letter (1. 1 ff.), the revelation of the Incarnate Son. But through all this great disclosure the life of the hereafter remained under the veil; many wondrous secrets of God were made plain, but not this. The form of Christ's risen body, and His appearances in glory to the dying Stephen, to Saul of Tarsus, and to John himself in the Apocalypse, might give hints and prompt speculations touching the state of the glorified; but they supplied no more. One thing "we know"—surely it is enough: "We shall be *like Him*." This stands amongst the certainties of Christian faith.

Ignorant though we are of the future state, how much we know if we are sure of this. Such final resemblance of Christians to their Lord appears to be involved in the Incarnation and in our Lord's chosen title "Son of man,"—in the fact that He was "made in all things like to His brethren" (Heb. 2. 17). Christ has embarked Himself with humanity, has identified Himself heartily and abidingly with our lot, so that what was ours became His and what is His becomes ours. If He has left His brethren, it was "to prepare a place" for them, that they may be where He is (John 14. 2, 3). He has not gone to the Father by way of separating Himself from mankind, but has passed "within the veil" as "a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb. 6. 20). Jesus rose from the dead as "the First-begotten" and "first-fruit of them that fell asleep," the "first-born amongst many brethren," who will be assimilated to His ex-

ternal, as they are already to His internal and spiritual character, who will put off "the body of humiliation" for a worthier frame, a "body spiritual" and "celestial" and "of the same form with His body of glory" (1 Cor. 15. 20-57, Rom. 8. 29 f., Col. 1. 18, Phil. 3. 20 f.). St Paul's teaching upon the mystery of the heavenly life of the saints explains this allusion of St John's; it gives substance and content to the "likeness" anticipated here. This cannot be a merely interior and moral affinity; for the latter, as St John insists, is now attained and "as He is"—in respect of love and righteousness—"so we are in this world" (vers. 3, 22, 24, 4. 17, 19, 5. 18). "Now are we children of God"—that is one thing; "what we shall be," is something further and distinct from this.

The nature of the hidden likeness is indicated by the reason given for expecting it, in the last clause of verse 2: "because we shall see Him as He is." The double *Him* of verse 2 must be *Christ*, who has been reintroduced by the clause, "if He should be manifested," and not God whom "none hath beheld at any time" (4. 12; comp. John 1. 18; 1 Tim. 6. 16, &c.). *Manifestation* and *vision* are correlatives; "if" and when the Lord Jesus "is manifested," His saints "will see Him as He is." But for vision there must be correspondence—new organs for a new revelation, eyes to behold the supernal light of the Advent-day. Like sees like; so "the pure in heart shall see God" (Matt. 5. 8). Such is St John's reasoning. Christ is to be manifested, His disciples, as He prayed and promised (John 17. 5, 24, 12. 26, 13. 31-14. 3), are to behold the glory which the Father has given Him and which was His eternally; but to be capable of this, they must be transformed into a state as yet undisclosed and endowed with powers like His own, with faculties of apprehension incomparably higher than those they now possess. "Then shall I see face to face" (τότε πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον, 1 Cor. 13. 12), says St Paul—face matching face, eye meeting eye. The transient foretaste of our Lord's

celestial glory which Peter and James and John enjoyed with Him in the Holy Mount, was overpowering to their natural senses; and if the vision prefacing the Book of Revelation was a veritable experience of the writer, he was well convinced that one must pass into a very different mode of being if one is to realize the present glory of Jesus Christ and to bear the weight of His manifestation. Accordingly St Paul, in speaking of the Parousia in 1 Thessalonians 4. 16 f. (comp. 1 Cor. 15. 50 ff. and 2 Cor. 5. 1-3), implies that a miraculous change, simultaneous with the raising of the dead, will supervene upon the living saints to prepare them to meet their Lord. There is nothing that gives the Christian so exalted a conception of future blessedness as the thought of being in the Saviour's company, admitted to the sight of His face and taking part in His heavenly service. Such approximation presupposes an environment and faculties incalculably enlarged and ennobled. "In treating of this final transfiguration the Greek Fathers did not scruple to speak of men as being 'deified' (*θεοποιεῖσθαι*), though the phrase sounds strange to our ears" (Westcott, quoting Athanasius, *de Incarn. Verbi*, iv. 22). As the Son of God humbled Himself to share our estate, so in turn He will glorify men that they may take their part in His.

The other interpretation of *ὄτι*, which regards assimilation as the *effect* of vision ("we shall resemble Him, for to see Him as He is will make us such"), instead of the precondition for the sight of the glorified Redeemer, contains a true idea, but one unsuitable to the context. Westcott's attempt to combine the two renderings makes confusion of the sense. Moreover, as he himself points out, *γενησόμεθα* (we shall *become*), not *ἴσόμεθα* (we shall *be*, ver. 2), would be the proper verb to express a consequent assimilation to Christ in the future estate of the saints, the *growing effect* of companionship with Him (comp. John 15. 8, 2 Cor. 5. 21, Heb. 3. 14, &c.).

4. The future identification of state is prepared for by

the present *assimilation of character*; and the hope of the former is a keen incentive to the latter. This is the purport of verse 3, which brings us round again to the ground of assurance laid down in chap. 2. 29. "Every one that has this hope set on Him" (ἐπ' αὐτῷ :<sup>1</sup> on *Christ*, in continuation of verse 2; the hope of seeing Him "as He is," of witnessing and taking part in His manifestation), "purifies himself as He is pure." Moral likeness of spirit is the precondition of the likeness to their Lord in body and faculty which constitutes "the glory which shall be revealed to usward" (Rom. 8. 18). The transformation works from within outwards, according to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The future body of the redeemed, as St Paul teaches, will be "a spiritual body," fitted to the spirit that it clothes, whose organism and expression it is designed to be (1 Cor. 15. 42-49). Those who are like the Heavenly One in temper and disposition, will be like Him at last in frame and function. The ethical rules the material, which has no other use or significance but to be its vehicle. Place and state wait upon character and conduct: "If any man serve me," said Jesus, "let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be" (John 12. 26).

This imitation was enjoined in chap. 2. 6: "He that saith he abideth in Him (in God), ought himself so to walk even as That One walked"—words pointing to the earthly course of Jesus. What was there imposed as matter of plain duty and consistency, is here urged on the ground of hope and preparation. The vivid demon-

<sup>1</sup> Ἐλπίδα ἔχειν, as distinguished from ἐλπίζω, is to *hold, possess a hope*, thus regarded as a characteristic, or cherished belonging, of the man; comp. παρρησίαν ἔχειν, 2. 28, κοινωνίαν ἔχειν, 1. 3; also Acts 24. 15, Eph. 2. 12. Ἐλπὶς (ἐλπίζω) ἐπί with *dative* occurs here only and in 1 Tim. 4. 10, 6. 17, in the N.T.; and with *accusative*, in 1 Tim. 5. 5, Rom. 15. 12, 1 Peter 1. 13. The force of the preposition is the same that it has with πιστεῖω, πέποιθα, and other verbs denoting mental direction; it signifies a *leaning against*, a *reliance upon* the object. Our Lord's promises on this subject were the specific occasion and warrant of the hope in question. This ἐπί construction is common enough in the LXX.



strative is again employed—"that one is pure"; while ἐπ' αὐτῷ and ἐκεῖνος in this sentence relate to the same person (Christ), there is this difference: using ἐκεῖνος one looks away ("that one yonder"),—not to the present *Christ* waiting to be manifested, but to the historical *Jesus*, whose pure image stands before us an abiding pattern of all that man should be (see pp. 149–151).<sup>1</sup>

The broad moral term δικαιοσύνη (*righteousness*), which defined in chap. 2. 29 the practical Christian character with its basis in God, is now substituted by the fine and delicate ἀγνότης (*purity*) exemplified in Jesus. Both adjective and noun are rare in the New Testament; this is the only example afforded by St John. The word does not signify a negative purity, the "cleanness" (καθαρότης) of one from whom defilement is removed (as in 1. 7, John 15. 3, Matt. 5. 8, &c.)—which would never be ascribed to Jesus; this is a positive, chaste purity (comp. 2 Cor. 11. 2, Phil. 4. 8, James 3. 17), the whiteness of virgin thoughts and an uncontaminated mind (comp. p. 150). The purity of the ἀγνότης imports not the mere absence of corrupt passion, a deliverance from baseness of desire and feeling, but repugnance thereto, a moral incompatibility with any foulness, a spirit that resents the touch and breath of evil. The man who hopes to be like Him as He is, must be thus like Him as He was.

To see Jesus, we must follow in His train; we must catch His temper and acquire His habit of mind, if we are to breathe the atmosphere in which He dwells. The heavenly glory of the Lord Jesus that He shares with His saints, is but the shining forth in Him, and in them, of the purity intrinsic to Him and veiled in the earthly state of discipline. If this character is hereafter to be revealed, it must first be possessed; and to be possessed by us, it must be learnt of Him.

<sup>1</sup> Hence the present ἐστίν—"as He is (not *was*) pure," since the example has become perpetual and holds good for ever; comp. 4. 17.



## THE INADMISSIBILITY OF SIN

Hope awakens Fear—Five Reasons against Sin in Believers—Sin Ruinous—Sin Illegal—Deepening of Sense of Sin in Scripture—The Constitutional Objection to Sin—Sin Unchristian—Bearing and Removing Sin—Sinlessness of Sin's Abolisher—Sin and Christ incompatibles—Paradox of a Sinning Christian—Sin Diabolical—Extra-human Origin of Sin—The Dominion of Satan—Its coming Dissolution—"Children of the Devil"—Sin Unnatural in God's Child—The Facts of Saintship—The Source of Saintship—The Christian *non possumus*—St John's High Doctrine of Holiness.

“ Every one that doeth sin, doeth also lawlessness ;

Indeed sin is lawlessness.

And you know that He was manifested, that He might take away sins ;

And sin in Him there is not.

Every one that abideth in Him, sinneth not :

Every one that sinneth, hath not seen Him nor come to know Him.

Little children, let no one deceive you :

He that doeth righteousness is righteous, according as He is righteous :

He that doeth sin is of the Devil,—for from the beginning the Devil sinneth ;

For this end the Son of God was manifested, that He might undo the works of the Devil.

Every one that is begotten of God, doeth no sin,

Because His seed abideth in him :

Indeed he cannot sin, because he hath been begotten of God.”

1 JOHN iii. 4-9.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE INADMISSIBILITY OF SIN

THE Church of the first age lived in expectation of the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven. At any hour He might "be manifested" (2. 28, 3. 2), to the shame or glory of His servants. This *ἀποκαταδοκία* as the Apostle Paul called it (Rom. 8. 19)—the uplifted head and the wistful look of the Bride waiting for her Lord—was the attitude still maintained by the Christian communities amongst which St John laboured, toward the close of the first century. The expectation was less vivid and absorbing than it had been at an earlier time—the strain was too intense for continuance—but it remained, and supplied the motives for fidelity and aspiration to which the Apostle John appealed in the previous paragraph of the Epistle. For one who believes in Jesus Christ the Lord of glory, the hope of acceptance at His coming furnishes an incentive as powerful and honourable as any that the mind can entertain. This motive St John regarded as well-grounded, and as indispensable for his "little children," though he seldom appeals to it.

The hope of the Christian man, based on his Lord's promise, is to see Him in His state of heavenly glory. Now that implies, the Apostle had asserted, a moral congruity, a harmony of character between the see-er and the Seen. Vision, in the spiritual sphere, turns upon affinity and moral sympathy.

There is a pre-adjustment between the eye and the light; the sun finds itself mirrored in the optic instrument. Those who expect to "see Christ as He is," make their account therefore with "being like Him" and aim at this; he who seeks Christ as his goal, takes Him for his way and studies to "walk even as He walked:" so the Apostle has just been arguing (3. 2, 3; comp. 2. 6). But the "confidence" of the Christian at the Parousia may, on the other hand, be turned to confusion (2. 28); his "hope" awakens a fear lest he should be found unlike his Saviour, and so debarred from a sight of His glory: this fear is the other side of his hope, the hope translated into negative terms. In this association of ideas the tacit connexion lies between verses 3 and 4, between the paragraph of encouragement in prospect of Christ's coming (2. 28-3. 3) and that of warning against the deceitfulness of sin, which is its sequel (3. 4-9). That connexion is aptly expressed by the language of 2 Peter 3. 14: "Wherefore, beloved, as you expect these things, give diligence to be found in peace, without spot and without reproach before Him."

1. Viewed in this light, the passage before us supplies a strong deterrent against moral declension, in the fact that such relapse will rob the servant of Christ of his dear reward, and defeat his hope of entrance into the eternal kingdom. In a word, *sin is ruinous*; it destroys the Christian man's future, and turns the salvation he had looked for into perdition.

This is the first of five reasons why they should not sin, which the Apostle gives his little children in this paragraph. The other four follow in the verses before us,—which are so many "Checks to Antinomianism,"<sup>1</sup> so many darts aimed by St John's powerful hand at sin in believers. The whole passage

<sup>1</sup> The title of Fletcher of Madeley's polemic on the subject of Holiness, one of the classics of Methodism.

is a keen, concise demonstration of the inadmissibility of sin. In the first sentence of chap. 2 ("My little children, these things I am writing to you so that you may not sin") the Apostle acknowledged his fear on this account, and indicated one chief intention governing the Epistle. The present section of the letter shows how deeply this purpose entered into his thoughts (comp. pp. 63, 64), and how grave the danger was lest the Church, infected with Gnostic errors of doctrine, should be tainted at the same time with antinomian corruptions of life. He makes out that on every ground it is impossible for the followers of Jesus Christ and children of God to acquiesce in sin,—in any kind or degree thereof.

2. If the first reason against a Christian's sinning, implicitly contained in verse 3, was that the act is ruinous to his eternal prospects, the second, explicitly stated in verse 4, is that *sin is illegal*: "Every one who commits sin, commits also lawlessness; indeed, sin is lawlessness."

To ourselves this is a commonplace; the predicate adds nothing to the content of the subject in the sentence *ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία*, nor to its dehortatory force. The word "sin" carries, to our conscience, a fuller and more pregnant sense than "illegality" or mere "breach of law." Not so for the original readers. *Ἀμαρτία*, i.e., "missing the mark," did not convey in common speech a uniform nor very strong moral significance; it might mean no more than a *mistake*, a fault of ignorance, or ill-luck. This is one of the many Greek Christian words which had contracted a new religious stamp and depth of intension from the Septuagint. As the rendering of the Hebrew *chatta'th*, *ἀμαρτία* became something graver than before—more serious in the degree in which the faith of Israel was more serious and morally earnest than Greek humanism. "Sin," it is said, "is a creation of the Bible." Etymologically, this is perfectly true. For the Bible has given voice to the stifled conscience of

mankind. Paralysed and half-articulate, the moral consciousness could not even *name* the evil that crushed it. "The knowledge of sin," which, as St Paul says, "came through the law," was a condition precedent to its removal. Sin must be known, to be hated; defined, so that it may be denounced and done away. It had to be identified, to be distinguished from the man himself, to be recognized in its abnormal character and traced to its alien origin. And this was a first necessity of revelation; the task required the supernatural aid of the Spirit of truth and of God.

The Apostle in saying "Sin is lawlessness" virtually affirms that "Lawlessness is sin." His proposition is convertible; the predicate (*ἡ ἀνομία*) as well as the subject (*ἡ ἁμαρτία*), is written with the Greek article of definition: the two terms cover the same ground, since they denote the same thing, defining it from different sides. The Bible knows of no boundary line between the religious and the ethical. Since man was created in the image of God and the end of his life is determined by God, every lapse from that end, every moral aberration (*ἁμαρτία*), is an act of rebellion, a violation of the constitutional laws of human nature (*ἀνομία*).

The equation is fixed by the intrinsic affinity of our being to the Divine. The heathen regarded the gods as, like earthly potentates, beings external to themselves, possessing certain rights over men and dictating certain duties for men as it might please them. So long as men give them their dues, observing the ceremonies of religion and conforming to the laws of the State imposed under their sanction, they are content. With private morals and the inner condition of the soul they have nothing to do: that is the man's own affair. Individual thinkers—Sophocles, for example, or Socrates—might rise above this level of belief; but Pagan thought tended in general to externalize religion in forms of custom, and to divorce morality and piety. From the ethical side the same severance was maintained. The moral philosophy of the Greeks was developed mainly



upon naturalistic and political lines, apart from religion ; it suffers still from this deficiency. The attempts are constantly renewed to frame a self-contained ethical theory, resting on materialistic assumptions and historical induction in disregard of the religious implications of morality, to shape an ideal of human character and a norm of human duty wherein God the Creator has no place. This is to build without a foundation upon the sand.

In quite another sense, the same artificial separation was made by Jewish Pharisaism. Formal transgressions of God's written law, constituting indictable offences, were eschewed by men who contrived to commit notwithstanding many kinds of wrong and vileness. With wonderful ingenuity, they evaded the spirit and intent of the law whose letter they punctiliously observed and fenced round with regulations of their own, designed to ward off the most distant possibility of infraction. A man might sin, as it was supposed, might be morally culpable and contemptible, while he broke no law of God ; or he might escape Divine chastisement by rendering a legal satisfaction, which had no ethical value and in no way touched the heart. The law of Israel was thus reduced to a system of technical jurisprudence, with which "righteousness, mercy, and faith" had little to do.

These sophistications, whether Jewish or Pagan in their conception, St John traverses, cutting clean across the web of error when he writes : "Whosoever doeth sin, doeth also lawlessness." The teaching of the New Testament deepens the conception of *sin*, by treating it as a lapse from man's true end posited in God ; it broadens the conception of *law*, by regarding it as the norm for man's action fixed by his relationship to God.

Both the end of man's existence defeated by "sin," and its rule violated by "lawlessness," are grounded on the nature of God, in whose image man was made. This image is seen in Jesus Christ, "through whom are

all things, and we through Him" (1 Cor. 8. 6). He presents to mankind the ideal, of which written codes are no more than the approximate expression. Thus Christianity brings the two conceptions into the same plane, and makes them coincide. Every deviation from the right (*ἀμαρτία*), every moral error and flaw, is opposed to the sovereignty of God and to the revealed law of our nature as men (*ἀνομία*). Here lies the fundamental and constitutional objection to sin. It is condemned by the laws of the universe.

3. In verses 5-7 St John goes on to say that *sin is unchristian*. Here, again, we must put ourselves at the standpoint of the readers, if we are not to make the Apostle write mere truisms. They had things to learn which we have been learning for centuries, and to unlearn evil presumptions that were their second nature. The current religions rested on non-ethical conceptions; their gods and prophets were not distinguished by much severity against sin or aloofness from it. To the Paganism of the day it was a startling message, to be told of a God who "is light," in whom "there is no darkness at all" (Chap. VIII). The same thing is virtually said, by the emphatic and precise declarations of verses 5 and 7, respecting the *messenger*, the Word and Son of God (see 1. 1, 7), through whom the eternal Father was made known. The channel of the new life is as pure as its source. All Christians "know" this to be so; by their knowledge they are bound to abjure sin. "You *know* that He was manifested<sup>1</sup> to take away sins." St John has twice said, "if He should be manifested," thinking of Christ's expected revelation in that body of glory to which the children of God are to be conformed (2. 28, 3. 2); but "He *has been* manifested"—a signal appearance of the Divine in our flesh has taken place, which was God's demonstration against sin. God's Son was sent to rid

<sup>1</sup> Ἐκεῖνος ἐφανερώθη: the distinctive pronoun points, as it did in verse 3 and in chap. 2. 6, again in verse 7 below, to the historical *Jesus*; comp. 2. 6, 3. 3, and p. 134.

the human race of it—to take the world's manifold “sins” clean away (*iva τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἄρῃ*). Christ and sin are utter contraries; each meant the death of the other.

For “taking away (*ἀρῆναι*) sins” signifies more than the sacrificial *bearing* of sins; it adds to this the idea of *removal*. The Sin-bearer lifts the load and takes its weight upon Him, not to let the burden fall again upon

victims, but to carry it right off and make an end of it. “He hath been manifested,” as another writer puts it, “once for all at the consummation of the ages, for the abolition of sins through His sacrifice” (Heb. 9. 26). According to the double use of the Hebrew *nasa'*, with *ḥṭ'* or *‘āvōn*, *ἀίρω* in such connexion has this twofold use. Herein lies the completeness of Christ's redemption. The cross destroys both the guilt and power of sin; righteousness is imputed and implanted in one act. John does not credit this undoing of sin to the sacrifice of Calvary by itself, but to the entire incarnate revelation; for the verb *ἐφανερώθη* is unqualified, and it calls the saying of chap. 1. 2, “the life was manifested.” The whole appearance, character, and action of the Incarnate Son went to counter-work and overthrow the world's sins. This manifestation of God against sin culminated in the “propitiation for sins” effected by our Lord's sacrificial death (2. 2; see pp. 126-127); all that Jesus was and did wrought toward this end, which He pursued with a single mind. We hear another echo (see p. 130) of the Baptist's saying, which in the first instance led the Apostle to Jesus and supplied him afterwards with the key to his Master's mission: “Behold the Lamb of God, which *taketh away the sin of the world.*”

The qualifying “our” of the Received Text, before “sins,” is due to the copyists: the Apostle is speaking broadly of that which is true not “for our sins” only, but “for the whole world” (2. 2). Writing *τὰς ἀμαρτίας* (plural) instead of *τὴν ἀμαρτίαν* (as in John 1. 29), he is thinking of the abolition of sin as this is to be realized

in detail, and realized without limit: similarly it was said in chap. 1. 9, that God "is faithful and righteous, that He should forgive us our *sins* and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We speak too often, vaguely, of "sin," as a general principle and power, too little of definite, actual "sins." Yet an abstract confession of the former may cover an obstinate adherence to the latter.

The Remover of sin is, to be sure, Himself without it. "And in Him there is no sin" sums up what has been said of Jesus in chap. 2. 2, in verse 3 above, what will be said in verse 7 below, and in chap. 5. 20 at the end of the letter. He is "righteous," "pure," "true." He is "the Son of God," "the Only-begotten"; "the eternal life" is His, and was manifested in His earthly course. These predicates altogether exclude the notion of sin from our conception of Christ. This goes so much without saying, and the negation of sin in Him is obvious, that it would be superfluous to state it here but for the sake of the inference forthwith to be drawn since "*in Him* there is no sin," no one "who abides *in Him*" can practise sin (ver. 6). The union of sin and Christ in the same breast is impossible. The man in Christ inhabits a sinless region; he sees a light unsullied, he breathes an air untainted. Sin has no foothold or lodgement, where the redeemed walk with the risen Christ; it forms no part or parcel of the life that is hid with Christ in God.

Verses 6 and 7 deduce, with a fine combination of mysticism and blunt simplicity, the consequences for Christians of what St John has testified about Christ. If He is sinless and came for the express purpose of abolishing sin, if Christ and sin are incompatible, then to harbour sin is to dissociate oneself from Him. Herein is the saying true: "He that is not with me, is against me." Not only is the practiser of sin *ipso facto* out of Christ; his life argues that he always has been so, and that his Christian profession was never genuine. "Every one that sins has not seen Him nor known

Him."¹ The same thing St John had said of the "many antichrists," extruded from the Church and seducing its membership: "they went out from us, but they were not of us" (2. 19). Their outer severance and overt rebellion against the law of Christ disclose a radical difference of spirit in them. Men of religious profession living in deceit or impurity or lovelessness, who reconcile themselves to sinful practice and yet deem themselves Christians, had from the beginning (the Apostle supposes) no proper knowledge of the Lord they profess to serve. They have never truly seen what Jesus Christ is like nor come to any real acquaintance with Him, or they would recognize the absurdity of their position. For his own part, the writer felt that once to have known the Lord makes any other ideal impossible; once and for all, the love of sin was killed in the disciple by the companionship of Jesus. He would no more think of returning to it now, than the civilized man of reverting to the tastes of the savage, or the philosopher to the babblings of the child. "Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" cries the young prophet Isaiah; his purged lips could not after this return to their uncleanness (Isa. 6. 5-7). "The time past may suffice" to have wrought folly, to have lived in envy and malice. The sun is up! who that sees it can longer walk as in darkness?

The contradiction, lying on the surface, between verse 6, with its total exclusion of sin from the life of a Christian man, and chap. 2. 1 f. which provides for the case of a Christian brother falling into sin, was noticed in the consideration of the former passage (p. 114). There the aorist subjunctive suggested the possibility of such an occurrence (ἐάν τις ἁμαρτήῃ): here the present participle (ὁ ἁμαρτάνων, ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν) presumes a habit and character. "Every one that sin-

¹ The perfects οὐχ ἔώρακεν, οὐδὲ ἔγνωκεν, connote facts that have taken effect, the settled results of action, the state into which one has passed thereby; comp. 1. 10 (ἡμαρτήκαμεν), 2. 3 (see p. 139), and the perfect tense-forms in 2. 12, 13.

neth, that doeth sin," is as much as to say, "Every sinner, every one whose life yields sin for its product,"—or in the words of chap. 1. 6, "who walks in the darkness." The Apostle is not dealing in casuistry. He has not before his mind the dubious cases—doubtful to human judgement—that lie on the border-line of Christian assurance, where a man with a sincere faith and love has acted inconsistently or has been "overtaken in some trespass" (Gal. 6. 1). There are two broadly contrasted classes of men in view (comp. p. 273), each claiming the Christian name,—those who follow the example of Jesus and those who do not. He is dealing with the latter sort, with pretenders to Christianity who excuse wrong-doing and make provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts, who justify sin as allowable and even normal in the Christian man (since he lives in the body and under material conditions), and who see no necessity that the disciple should be as his Lord. Against these vain talkers and deceivers, against all abettors and apologists of laxity, St John reaffirms in verse 7 the axiom of moral common sense and of every honest Christian conscience: "Little children, let no one deceive you: he who *does righteousness* is righteous, even as He (the sinless Christ) is righteous." His doctrine equally disposes of the modern antinomianism that goes about under an evangelical cloak, and would make the blood-stained robe of Christ's righteousness the cover for a loose morality,—as though the Lord had said to the absolved adulteress, "Go in peace, and sin again"!

4. Being, negatively, an un-Christian, anti-Christian thing, verse 8 affirms that sin is positively *diabolical*. The righteous Son of God stands forth as the leader of the sons of God, cleansed by His blood and abiding in His righteousness. For the doers of sin there is another leader; they choose another patron and pattern: "He that commits sin is of the Devil." The reason St John gives for ascribing this shameful complicity to sinners is that "from the beginning the Devil sins." There

sin, so far as revelation indicates and according to the Apostle's theory of evil, took its rise,—from that most wretched and wicked being whom Scripture names “the Devil” (“the slanderer”), and “Satan” (“the enemy” of God and man). Satan was the first to lapse from God; and he has continued to sin all along—he “sinneth from the beginning.” From this personal source the law of sin and death first proceeded and “the darkness” spread over the world, even as Christ's law of love and all the light of the Gospel were “from the beginning” in God the Father (1. 1, 2. 7, 13). Sin is Satan's domain, his sphere, his work; and every sinner is his ally and instrument. The committer of sin makes himself of the Devil's party, of the Devil's spirit, and finally—according to the fearful words of Jesus (Matt. 25. 41)—of the Devil's doom. He is engaged in building up those “works of the Devil,” which “the Son of God came that He might destroy.”<sup>1</sup> Every such man is abetting the enemies of God and goodness; he aids the captain of rebellion to maintain that fortress of evil, that huge rampart erected in the universe against the holy and almighty will of God, which we call “sin.”

To follow such a leader is as futile a course as it is evil. It is to resist the design of the mission of Jesus Christ and thereby to fight against God, opposing the central stream of His purposes toward mankind. To espouse the cause of Satan against Christ is to embark on a sinking vessel, to enlist under the flag of despair. With triumphant certainty St John writes, “For this end the Son of God was manifested—to *undo* the works of the Devil”! Unless the Son of God has come in vain, unless He has stepped into the arena to be vanquished, the mischief wrought by Satan in this world is to be undone; the entire confederacy, the compacted

<sup>1</sup> “*ἵνα λύσῃ, ut dissolvat* (Vulgate), “that He might take to pieces” or “pull down.” “The works of the Devil are represented as having a certain consistency and coherence. They show a kind of solid front. Christ has undone the seeming bonds by which they were held together” (Westcott).

forces of evil, will be dissolved (comp. Mark 3. 27, 28). The empire of "the god of this world" is in course of dissolution.

Included in "the works of the Devil," the life-work of every man who has served upon his side and stood for sin and the world against Christ, is marked for destruction. The sentence "the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the Devil's works," is parallel to "He was manifested, that He might take away sins" (ver. 5) : men's "sins" are "the Devil's works"—there is a superhuman potency and direction behind them ; in "taking" these "away," Christ breaks up the fabric of evil and brings Satan's kingdom to an end.

"Children of the Devil" (τὰ τέκνα τοῦ διαβόλου) at last St John calls the antinomian religionists outright, who neither "do righteousness" nor "love their brethren" (ver. 10). He had the warrant for this epithet in the words with which the Lord Jesus stigmatized the Jewish party who sought His life, who hated the light that shone in Him because their deeds were evil : "You are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a man-slayer from the beginning, and in the truth he standeth not. . . . He is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8. 44). Those who claimed Abraham, and even God, for their father, are referred to this dreadful paternity, since they have Satan's disposition and work his will against the Son of God. Their moral affinity proved their spiritual descent ; their features betrayed their family. On the same principle, Elymas the sorcerer was in the eyes of the Apostle Paul, a "*son of the Devil*," being "full of all guile and all villany, an enemy of all righteousness, a perverter of the ways of the Lord" (Acts 13. 9 f.). It gives an added odiousness and horror to our sins to consider that they are no detached and casual misdoings, beginning and ending with ourselves. They are threads in a great web of iniquity, cogs in the huge machinery and system of evil extending through this world and reaching, it would seem, beyond it ; they implicate us—each sinful



act so far as it goes—in that monstrous conspiracy against the government of God, which is represented in the teaching of Christ and Scripture under the name of “the kingdom of darkness” and “of Satan.”

5. In his impeachment of sin in believers, St John comes round in the end to what, under other words, he had said at the beginning: Sin is *unnatural in the child of God*; it is contradictory to the very subsistence of the regenerate life and constitutes the denial of its reality. Sin is as foreign to the character of the redeemed man himself, as it is alien to the Christ in whom he dwells, and as it is congenial and connatural to the Evil One who tempts him.

The two sentences of verse 9 amount to the above position: as a matter of fact, the child of God “does not do sin” (*ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ*)—the produce of his life is not of that kind; and as a matter of principle, “he cannot sin.” In the former of these statements St John is appealing to the facts: they are “manifest” (ver. 10); the evidence is plain to any one who cares to look. “We know,” he writes in verse 14 below, “that we have passed from death into life, because we love the brethren”; so in chap. 2. 13 f. he said, “You young men are strong, and have overcome the Evil One”; in chap. 5. 4, “This is the victory that has overcome the world,—it is our faith”; finally, in chap. 5. 18, “We know that every one that is begotten of God does not sin.” This was the witness of the Apostolic Christian consciousness to the moral efficacy of the Christian spirit. St John’s faithful readers know how widely different their life is from what it had been before conversion, from the daily life of the heathen around them,—and, as he seems to imply, from the life of the Antichrists and false prophets, who are thrusting on them their arrogant claims to a higher knowledge of God than that reached through faith. There are the grapes and figs on the one side—“the fruit of the Spirit,” in love and joy and peace; and the thorns and thistles giving their inevitable yield in “the works of the flesh,” upon the other. The contrast

was patent, in the actual condition of society; Christ's true disciples could not but know that they were "abiding in Him, from the Spirit He had given" them, in crying contrast as that was with the spirit of the world. Each believer had in himself the witness, open to be known and read by all men, of his new birth from God; his freedom from sin, the changed temper and tenor of his life, showed him to be a changed man. To many a one in his beloved flock the Apostle could point and say: "There is a man begotten of God; for, look! he lives a life unstained by sin."

While behind all sin a Satanic inspiration and pater-nity are operative, the righteousness of the Christian is due to "a seed of God abiding in him" (ver. 9). There is a hidden master-force governing the man's behaviour, a mystic influence about him, a principle of Divine sonship in his nature counteracting "the spirit of the world" and rendering him immune from its infection (4. 4; comp. 1 Cor. 2. 12; Eph. 5. 8, 9), a seed which bears the fruit of righteousness where evil fruits once grew rankly. That "seed of God" dwelling in the believer in Christ is the power of *the Holy Spirit*, concerning whom St John says in verse 24: "In this we know that He abideth in us, from the Spirit that He gave us." The "seed" of this passage is the "chrism" of chap. 2. 27: it invests the Christian with knowledge and power; it inspires him with purity and goodness. St John's teaching about the Holy Spirit and His relations to individual Christian men agrees with that of St Paul (see p. 68), who recognized in this gift of the Father at once the seal of the adoption of the sons of God and the seed of all Christian growth and fruitage in them. There are, it appears, two lines of spiritual heredity and propagation, diametrically opposed: the filiation from God and from the Devil respectively,— "the Spirit" with His "fruit" and "the flesh" with its "works," each "lusting against" the other (see Gal. 5. 16-24). Each desires what its opposite abhors. To be "led by the Spirit" is "to mortify the deeds of the

body" (Rom. 8. 5, 13); the man Spirit-born and Spirit-led works the works of God and counterworks, in and around himself, "the works of the Devil."

Thus sin is got rid of not by repression, but by pre-occupation. The man is possessed by another generative principle. As in land full of good seed actively germinating, weeds want the room to grow; so in a soul in which the Holy Spirit "abides"—where He dwells at the sources of feeling and impulse touching all the springs of action and breathing on all the issues of life, where this God-planted "seed" sends its roots into the depths and its branches into the heights and breadths of the man's nature—what place is there left for sin? "He *cannot* sin," cries the Apostle: "he has been begotten of God!" The children of God can no more live in sin than the children of the Devil out of it. To the Christian man, in the integrity of his regenerate nature and the consciousness of his fellowship with Jesus Christ and his filial relationship to God, sin becomes a moral impossibility. Could St John, for instance, lie or steal? could he hate his fellow-man, or deny the Lord that bought him? Such delinquency was inconceivable, in such a man. When the act of transgression is proposed to the child of God, however strong the inducements or fascinating the allurements it presents, he simply *cannot* do it. It is against his nature; to commit the offence he must deny himself, and violate not merely his conscience and personal honour, but the instincts of the being received in his new and better birth from God.

There is obviously a certain idealism in the Apostle's sweeping assertions. His dictum in verse 9 applies in its absolute truth to the "perfect man" in Christ Jesus. Principle must be wrought into habit, before it has full play and sway. Ignorance and surprise will betray the unpractised believer, turning aside his true purpose; through the mechanical force of old practice, or the pressure of hostile circumstance acting upon him unawares, the man who is yet weak in faith may stumble or yield ground. He is bewildered, against his

settled judgement, by some glamour of temptation or sophistry of error. St John would not count a babe in Christ so suffering as reprobate, nor be hasty to take that for a deadly sin which was not deliberately chosen by the will and did not proceed out of his heart. "There is," he writes in chap. 5. 16 f., "a sin unto death"; and "there is a sin not unto death." Acts of "wrong-doing" (*ἀδικίαι*, 5. 17) are committed by Christian men, which call for prayer on their behalf—prayer that will be answered by God's "giving life" to those that have so sinned. In all such instances—and charity will extend the limit of them widely—the intercession of the sinner's Advocate is hopefully invoked (2. 1 f.). Yet the sin itself in every case, so far as its scope extends and so long as it continues, makes for death: it clouds the soul's light; it involves a forfeiture of sonship, a severance of some one or other of the bonds that unite the soul to God, a grieving of the Holy Spirit and a chilling of His fire within the breast; it calls for the special intercession of Christ, and a further cleansing by His blood (1. 7). A deeper planting of the seed of the Spirit must take place, if the effect of the lapse from grace is to be undone. The hand of God must again be reached out, or the man who has tripped will stumble into an utter fall; by such help he may become through his stumbling, like Peter after his denial of the Lord, the stronger and warier for the time to come.

Such qualifications of the maxim of these verses the Apostle does virtually make elsewhere. They do not militate against its vital truth, nor detract from the reasonableness and consistency of St John's doctrine of Sanctification. Sin is that which has no right to be, which therefore must not be; and the Son of God has declared that it shall not be. In the offspring of God, the new man fashioned after Christ, sin has no place whatever; it is banned and barred out at every point, since it is the abominable thing which God hates, vile in itself and ruinous to His creatures. Sin is against law

and against nature ; it is un-Christian and devilish ; it blights every virtue and every aspiration of our being. It is disorder and disease and disfigurement ; it is a shameful bondage, and a most miserable death. Sin is dehumanizing to ourselves, because it is the dethronement of God within us—unmanly, since it is ungodly ; the perdition of the individual, and the dissolution of society.

Such, in effect, is St John's indictment of sin ; and he warns and arms his readers on all sides against this one deadly mischief, which besets men from first to last in the present evil world. From sin no salvation has been found save in the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ; but in His love there is a free salvation, and a salvation without limit either in duration or degree.



## LOVE AND HATRED, AND THEIR PATTERNS

Divine or Diabolic Sonship “manifest”—Two Sorts of Men—Personality of the Evil One—Marks of Spiritual Parentage—Love the Burden of the Gospel—*Diligo, ergo sum*—The Master of Love, and His Lesson—Testing of Love by Material Needs—Cain a Prototype—Evil must hate Good—Implicit Murder—Misanthropy.

“ In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil ;  
Whosoever doth not do righteousness is not of God, and he that doth  
not love his brother ;

For this is the message which you heard from the beginning,—that we  
should love one another.

Not as Cain was of the Evil One, and slew his brother.

And for what cause did he slay him ?

Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous :

Do not wonder, brothers, that the world hateth you.

As for us, we know that we have passed out of death into life, in that  
we love the brethren.

He that doth not love, abideth in death ;

Every one who hateth his brother, is a murderer ;

And you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him !

In this have we known love,—in that He for us laid down His life ;

And we ought, for the brethren, to lay down our lives.

But where any one hath worldly means, and beholdeth his brother in  
want, and shutteth up his heart from him,—

How doth the love of God abide in him ?

Little children, let us not love in word nor with the tongue, but in deed  
and truth.”

1 JOHN 3. 10-18.



## CHAPTER XVII

### LOVE AND HATRED, AND THEIR PATTERNS

THE previous paragraph of the Epistle (3. 4-9) ended with the strong declaration concerning the child of God, "He cannot continue in sin (*ἀμαρτάνειν*), because he has been begotten of God." The argument of that passage went to show that the filial relation to God is, on every account, incompatible with a life of sin. The two states are mutually exclusive; they are ethical contradictories, just as, in St Paul's way of thinking, are the dominion of the Spirit and of the flesh. And just as St Paul, after he has laid down this axiom, at once draws its consequences in the sphere of practical and visible life saying, "The works of the flesh *are manifest*, which are these," and then in turn describes the opposite "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5. 16-24); so St John, in his concise and positive fashion, proceeds here: "In this *are manifest* the children of God, and the children of the Devil: every one who does not do righteousness is not of God, and he who does not love his brother." On this antithetic statement the paragraph is based. Two families are set in contrast with each other—the two races who occupy the moral world, the two forces that contest the field of human life—which have God and Satan for their fathers, Christ and Cain for their respective prototypes.

How simple are the Apostle's views of life! The complexities of human nature, the baffling mixtures and contradictions of character, for him scarcely exist.

Men are parted, as they will be at the judgement-seat of Christ, when the ultimate analysis is reached, into two classes and no more—the sheep and the goats. We are the subjects of two warring kingdoms, the offspring of two opposed progenitors; no third category exists. The undecided must and will decide. The universe resolves itself into heaven or hell. Right or wrong, love or hate, God or Satan, eternal life or death—these are the alternatives that St John never ceases to press upon us. Through the whole Epistle the duel goes on between these master-powers; at each turn the light of God's love and the night of Satanic hate confront each other; the former chases the latter from verse to verse of this paragraph (comp. p. 52).

“Children of the Devil” is a frightful designation. It was suggested by verse 8: “He that committeth sin is of the Devil, for the Devil sinneth from the beginning” (see p. 264). Jesus Christ had first said to the Jews who hated Him, “You have the Devil for your father. . . . He was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8. 37-41). The Apostle generalizes this impeachment, and applies it to all habitual sinners. The Evil One is the author and father of sin; sinners therefore are of his kindred. Especially do the more violent and shameless forms of wickedness suggest such paternity; the intensity of the evil, and its furious resistance to the Divine will, point to an infernal origin. Similarly our Lord described the tares sown amongst the wheat in God's field as “the sons of the Evil One”; for they spring from seed sown by him, even as there is a “seed of God abiding” in His children (ver. 9).

Such expressions are nowadays commonly regarded as metaphors and personifications of moral influences; and our Lord in employing this form of statement is supposed to be adopting, as a part of His incarnation under the given environment, the modes of speech and the mental concepts belonging to His time, or accommodating Himself for didactic purposes to the current superstitions. For it is assumed that physical science

and psychology have explained away the phenomena of demonism, reducing its symptoms to mere cases of brain-disturbance and nervous derangement. But the explanation is not so complete as might be desired. The same physical antecedents result in effects widely different in different instances, and varying in accordance with the spiritual condition and affinities of the patient. Moreover, if Jesus Christ had a real insight, such as He decidedly claims, into the powers and movements of the supersensible world, the sayings which attest His recognition of unseen evil wills affecting the lives of men and hostile to Himself, are a witness to the affirmative that must not lightly be set aside. The hypothesis appears to be supported by a considerable amount of personal experience and evidence, more easily ridiculed than explained away. The force of this testimony will be variously estimated according to the nature of our faith in His word, and our reliance upon the fidelity of the Evangelic record.

Two conjoint marks distinguish the children of the opposed spiritual parents—*righteousness and brotherly love* on the one side, *unrighteousness and hatred* upon the other (ver. 10). The latter tendencies have reached their goal in *murder* (ver. 12), the former in the supreme *self-sacrifice* (ver. 16).

The Apostle at this point combines the separate tests of the Christian character which he laid down in chap. 2. 9–11 and 29. "Righteousness," the first of these signs, is obviously in agreement with Divine law; the expression "to do righteousness," in fact, sums up the performance of all that God's *will and law* require from men, alike in their relations to Him and to each other. St John was careful to assert that the true righteousness is no less derived from God's *nature*, and proves a Divine filiation in him who exhibits it (3. 7). The second quality, viz. "love to the brethren," while it is an assimilation to the nature of God (4. 7–14), is at the same time matter of obedience to God's command (2. 7, 8, and 3. 23). The two demands, therefore, cover

the same ground, for "love is the fulfilling of the law"; the same acts which in the language of the will, when regarded objectively and in relation to the order of the universe, are deeds of "righteousness," in the language of the heart and viewed in the light of their motive, as matters of character and temper, are deeds of "love." Man's righteousness is loyalty to God, and consequent harmony with His nature; man's love is affinity to God, and consequent obedience to His will. In the Lord Jesus we see the perfect unity of these all-embracing virtues; in Him who said at the beginning, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," and at the end, "Greater love hath no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (Matt. 3. 15, John 15. 13). Their combination in this text corrects the one-sidedness into which we are apt to fall. Firm and strong men are so often harsh; tender, sympathetic men, so often weak. Conscience and heart, duty and affection, strictness and gentleness, are the right foot and the left foot of Christian progress, and must keep equal step. So righteousness and love mount to heaven, while wrong and hate march down to hell.

Righteousness had its due in the previous section of the letter; the rest of what the writer has here to say concerns *love*, along with *hate*, its deadly counterpart. Through the whole passage love and hatred alternate like day and night; the Apostle's thought swings to and fro between them. Let us untwine his interlaced sentences, and pursue love to the end of this section, then taking up hate in turn.

I. Verses 11, 14, 16 stand out in the sunshine; they speak for the nature and offices of Christian love.

1. Love is, to begin with, *the burden of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. This was introduced in chap. 2. 7, 8, as the "commandment, old and new," which "you had from the beginning" (see Chap. XI); now it appears as "*the message which you heard from the beginning.*" For love is both the sum of all God would have us do, and the end of all He would have us know. That men

should "love one another"—that God meant this in the original shaping of human life, and aimed at this in the mission of His Son and the work of redemption—was news to the world, "glad tidings of great joy." When the angels sang at Bethlehem of "peace on earth," they sounded the note of this message "from the beginning." Commencing his letter, St John wrote, "This is the message, that God is light" (1. 5); but now, "This is the message, that we should love one another"—the first an announcement of the supreme certainty, the second an announcement of the sovereign duty. The two *thats* of chapter 1. 5 and 3. 11 are grammatically different—*ἔστι* and *ἵνα*. They signify respectively the content and the purport of the Divine message, the chief fact and the chief effect of revelation; they show us what God is, and what consequently men should be. The sum of the Gospel of Christ, in its intention and its issue, is comprised in this, "that we should love one another"—this is the message! The verb for "love" (*ἀγαπῶμεν*) is, to be sure, the characteristic New Testament word which fills this letter, denoting a spiritual, godlike affection; and it stands, as did the verb for "sin" throughout verses 6–9, in the Greek continuous present tense, for it signifies the habit and rule of life—"that we should be lovers one of another."

Now this "message," ever sounding in the Gospel, has not fallen upon deaf ears, and the "new commandment" is no expression of a high-flown unpractical ideal: the design of God's grace is realized in the experience of writer and readers. "As for us"—in contrast with the Cain-like world that is ignorant of our secret—"we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (ver. 14). The mutual love which bound together the first Christian communities and marked them off conspicuously from surrounding society, proved that a new life was born amongst them. Such love was the light and the atmosphere of St John's existence. Unkindled by this flame, which the Apostle had caught from the breast

of his Master and conveyed to so many souls, the human spirit lies dormant and is dead while it seems to live: "he that loveth not, abideth in death" (ver. 14). As one recovered from drowning or from the numbness of frost, or as Lazarus waking up in his tomb when his heart began to beat and the warm blood swelled his veins and his body felt once more its kinship with the breathing world, so the Christian heart knows itself alive by the sense of a spiritual love. *Cogito, ergo sum*, is the axiom of philosophical reason; *Diligo, ergo sum*, is the axiom of the Christian consciousness. Love proves life. The witness of the Spirit to which St Paul appealed (Rom. 8. 14-17), speaks to the same effect. "In this we know," St John writes in chap. 4. 13, "that we abide in Him [in God], and He in us, in that He hath given us of His Spirit"; and a glance at the foregoing sentence shows that the Apostle means by "His Spirit" the Spirit of a God-like love.

We must consider well how high and pure an emotion is "love" in Christian speech, how free from the turbidness of passion and the sordidness of self-interest. We must understand, besides, that its object is "the brethren"—not those of my own sect or set, my particular coterie or party in the Church, those who accept "our views" or attend "our meetings," but the children of God that are scattered abroad, the lovers and friends of my Lord Jesus Christ, all whom He in any wise owns and who bear marks of His image. To turn zeal for God into bigotry and to spoil piety by the sour leaven of censoriousness, is the familiar device of Satan. "Ye know not what spirit ye are of," says Christ to the angry and contemptuous vindicators of the gospel of charity, who make bitter words their arrows and whet their tongue like a sharp sword in the fight of faith; to the stiff, unreasoning maintainers of prejudice; to the ready suspects of their opponents, and denouncers of those who "follow not us." Against such combatants St Paul, most stalwart of Christ's good soldiers, protested: "The servant of the Lord must not fight; but

must be gentle toward all, apt to teach, ready to endure evil, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves" (2 Tim. 2. 24, 25).

2. In the next place, love has *its pattern in Jesus Christ*.

The Authorized Version has misread ver. 16,—“Hereby know we *the love of God*.” That is St John’s point in chap. 4. 7–14: what he means to say just now is, “Herein we have got to know *love*”; we have learnt what love is—its reach and capability, its very self discovered in Jesus Christ. Other notions of love and attainments in the way of love are meagre compared to this, and hardly deserve the name. Robert Browning speaks somewhere of the present life as man’s “one chance of learning love”: that chance had come to the writer and his friends in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and they had seized it. They had found the life of life, the thing for which “if a man would give all the substance of his house, it would be utterly contemned.” Love’s mystery lies open to them, brought from the bosom of the eternal Father and wrought into His own life and death by Him who said, “Greater love hath none than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15. 13).

For all this, the Apostle’s downright inference, in verse 16, brings a certain surprise. The sacrificial death of Jesus was solitary and all-sufficing. He is the “one” who “died for all,”—the Holy “Lamb of God” carrying alone upon His innocent shoulders and in His mighty heart “the sin of the world” (John 1. 29, 2 Cor. 5. 14, Heb. 2. 9). God forbid that we should even ourselves to Him, who “by Himself bare our sins in His body upon the tree”; as “the Lamb that hath been slain,” Jesus Christ shares for ever the blessing and honour and glory and dominion of “Him that sitteth upon the throne” (Rev. 5. 12, 7. 10). St John would be the last to imagine that his own death or sufferings partook in any degree of the expiatory virtue that attaches to the one sacrifice for sins. “*He,*”

the Apostle declared, "is the propitiation for our sins, and for the whole world" (chap. 2. 2). Nevertheless the "one sacrifice" has its moral sequel in many sacrifices, that seal and supplement it: "We too ought to lay down our lives (*or* souls, ψυχάς) for the brethren." Unique in its merit and redemptive effect, our Lord's death was as far as possible from being isolated in its causes or in the spirit in which it was undertaken and endured. The Apostle Paul regarded his whole Christian life as a "being conformed to" his Master's "death" (Phil. 3. 10); this is the noblest ambition of every Christian man. The cross is stamped on that "image of God's Son" to which the "many brethren" of "the Firstborn" are "conformed" (Rom. 8. 29). Hard as it is to bear the cross after Christ, His yoke grows easy and His burden light to those who "know love." The imitation is complete in him who daily "offers his body," under the constraint of God's mercies, "a living sacrifice" upon the altar that God's will and man's need are ever building for him (Rom. 12. 1).

In the first days the duty stated in this passage was no ideal requirement, no stretch of an heroic fancy. Every Christian held himself at the disposal of the community. At any time martyrdom might be called for; already many a dear life had been laid down for the brethren's sake. When we excuse ourselves from demands that involve the surrender of cherished earthly good, or when Christ's service in dangerous lands calls for reinforcements that are not sent, the Church is holding back what belongs to Him and shows herself unworthy of the Lord that bought her, and untrue to her own history. We are condemned by the love to which we owe ourselves, if we are not such as can hazard their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus, if we have not the heart to die for those whom Christ purchased by His blood.

3. Further, St John insists that brotherly love finds *its practical test in things of common need.* Verse 17



speaks bluntly to this effect. Too easily, in dreaming of unrequired heroisms, one misses the humble sacrifices of ease and luxury, of self-will and social pride, awaiting him in the daily occasions of life. In many a Church the man is found singing with unction,

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small!”

for whose shrunken soul the smallest coin out of a full purse proves large enough to meet Christ's loud appeal. St John aggravates the case supposed by the verb he uses in describing the unfeeling Christian; he “*beholds* his brother having need,—beholds as a spectacle on which he causes his eyes to rest” (Westcott); he sees the need in its distressful circumstances—and then deliberately bars his heart against its entreaty and turns away without a sign of sympathy. You say with St John, “How dwelleth the love of God in him?” St James' words on the same subject (2. 16) show that such conduct was not unheard of in the Apostolic Church. And when alms were lavishly given, this might be done from ostentation or with the notion of earning merit (see Matt. 6. 2-4, 1 Cor. 13. 3), out of a cold and self-engrossed heart.

Christian charity was then new in the world; and habits of neglect and callousness, especially when they have become engrained and traditional, are slowly overcome. The beneficence so renowned in the early Church was the outcome of an acquired disposition, that did not spring into activity at once as the immediate consequence of the new love to God felt by Christian men. Like all practical virtues, the grace of charity required inculcation, discipline, habituation, to bring it to proper exercise; the spirit of brotherly love grew by use into the temper of brotherly love and the aptitude for its expression. To this end much of the ethical teaching of the New Testament is devoted. St John must perforce reiterate and insist

upon it, though it be a thing so plain, "that he who loves God should love also his brother" (4. 21). The Apostle's last word here, in verse 18, warns his readers against making philanthropic talk and social theory a substitute for personal deeds of compassion. "My little children," he says—pleading with those whom he loves and values as true-born Christians, but in whom this fruit of Christ's Spirit is still unripe—"let us not love in word nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth."

II. Hate throws its gloom across the light of Christ's love newly shining in the world. *Cain* afforded the pattern upon this side, as Jesus upon that—each a representative "son of man" and firstborn among many brethren. Cain is the model and the forerunner of enviers and destroyers, as Jesus is of lovers of their kind. "We are not," the Apostle writes, "as Cain, who slew his brother."

1. The evil and good mingled in Adam, the earthly progenitor, were parcelled out in the two elder-born sons which the sacred story assigns to him. Cain was the eldest of the Devil's brood amongst mankind. The Palestinian Targum on Genesis ascribes Cain's conception to the influence of Samael, the Angel of Death, while Abel is described as Adam's proper son. Whether this representation was current in St John's time, we do not know; it gave a legendary expression to the Jewish idea of the Cainite nature, of which he makes use. A radical divergence of character showed itself in the bosom of the first human family; and this contrast, engendering strife and death, pervades the history of our race. "The way of Cain" alluded to in Jude 11, takes there a wider range, including rebellion against God in any form.

Cain is still slaying Abel, and Abel's blood is crying to God from the ground, in every act of unscrupulous rivalry and extortion from the necessity of others, in every encroachment of strong nations upon the weak, in every advantage gained by cunning over honesty, in every angry blow and slanderous word. All

such sins are murderous, preying upon life itself; they weaken and impoverish human existence, and when finished bring forth death. "He *slaughtered* him," says St John of Cain's homicide, as a man cuts the throat of an ox. The gladiators of the platform and the Press, and the purveyors of intemperance and vice, display in many instances as little feeling for their victims.

2. And why? "Because his works were evil, but his brother's righteous." Reason enough, as the world goes!

This is the standing quarrel between the children of God and the children of the Devil: "They loved darkness rather than light," said Christ of His traducers, "because their deeds were evil" (John 3. 19). Men scorn and vilify the goodness that condemns them. We may detect this diabolic spirit in ourselves, if there starts in our mind a misliking toward those whose greater zeal and success, or whose stricter walk and loftier tone, reprove our own behaviour. Since such wicked enmity showed itself in the world's beginning, then "marvel not, my brethren," cries the Apostle, "if the world hates you." This is an old fashion—a war pursued incessantly from the day that sin entered into the world. The strife of the primeval brothers had but just now culminated in the tragedy of Calvary. Expecting this end, Jesus said to His disciples concerning the Jewish world, "They have hated me before you" (John 15. 18–20, Matt. 10. 24, 25). His servants must count on faring like their Master; they should not expect nor wish to be popular with such as do not love God nor honour His laws. If that world admires and likes them, they may be sure that it sees something in them of itself: "the world loves its own." The war between the kingdoms of God and Satan is internecine.

No compromise or arrangement of terms is possible: "the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4. 4). The grey of the twilight merges into sunrise or black night; it is that of morning, or of evening. But, for the sons of God, "the night is far spent"; Christ's heralds descry the dawn of a universal

and everlasting day: "The darkness is passing," our Apostle has reported, "and the true light already shines; the world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (2. 8, 17). Cain belongs to the bygone times; the future is with Jesus, the true "woman's seed" and Son of man.

3. The climax of hatred is in *murder*; and the crowning murder was the slaying of "the Prince of life." Hate is the principle of death, as love is the principle of life. The Rabbinical story of Cain's genesis, fathering him upon the Angel of Death, contained a true parable. "You know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (ver. 15): the destroyer acts after his kind; he kills, because death is in him. And though no lethal act be committed, the venom and animus are there in the malignant soul. As the lustful look counts in God's sight for adultery, so the malicious thought counts for homicide. "Every one that hates his brother, is a murderer": put the weapon in his hand, promise immunity, and he would kill him! At that rate, many a manslayer walks the streets unaccused,—guiltier perchance before the great Judge than that other who expiates his crime upon the scaffold.

Nor is positive and active hatred alone in this condemnation. The absence of love tends to the same issue, for "he that loveth not abideth in death" (ver. 14). Indifference to our fellows is, in truth, impossible. Selfishness, cynicism, lovelessness, however dull and apathetic, are never merely negative. There is a sullen, brooding misanthropy worse than explosive violence; it is the reservoir of hate stored in the breast, ready when the occasion comes to burst in Satanic fury. Moroseness, ill-will, contempt towards our kind, may be more evil than concentrated hatred. Such passions nurse themselves, hiding and festering in those recesses of the mind which are "the depths of Satan," till they make the soul one mass of resentment and antipathies. They grow with a frightful embitterment, into imaginings like that of the tyrant who wished that mankind

had a single neck for his axe to strike! This cruel spirit exists more widely, under the smooth surface of civilized life, than one likes to think; it is the standing menace of society.

He who loves Christ, cannot hate men. He who has not "known love" as Christ teaches it, may go far in hatred. Most of us have to do with some persons whom we are liable to hate, if we do not love them for God's sake. These are the test of our genuine temper,—the people who thwart us, irritate us, despise us. "Love ye your enemies," said Jesus; the very brutes can love their friends.



## CHRISTIAN HEART ASSURANCE

Probing of the Uneasy Conscience—Double Ground of Re-assurance—  
Love, Faith's Saviour—Love, the Touchstone of Knowledge—" We shall  
persuade our Hearts"—The Scrutiny of God—Assurance by the Spirit's  
Witness—Peril of Mysticism—Grammatical Ambiguity in verses 19, 20  
—The Apostle warning, not soothing—Grounds for Self-reproach—  
Christian Assurance and Prevailing Prayer—God's Favour toward Lovers  
of their Brethren.

“ Herein we shall know that we are of the truth,  
And before Him shall assure our hearts ;  
Because, if our heart condemn us—because God is greater than our  
heart, and knoweth all !  
Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have confidence toward God,  
And whatsoever we may ask, we receive from Him ;  
Because we keep His commands, and do the things pleasing in  
His sight.  
And this is His command :  
That we believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ,  
And love one another as He gave us command.  
And he that keepeth His commands, dwelleth in Him, and He in him.  
And herein we know that He dwelleth in us,—from the Spirit that  
He gave us.”

1 JOHN 3. 19-24.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### CHRISTIAN HEART ASSURANCE

THE test laid down in verse 17 above was such as to show whether a man's Christianity is matter of talk and sentiment or of heart-reality; whether he "loves in word and tongue" or "in deed and truth" (ver. 18). Having thus set his readers on self-examination, the Apostle knows that misgivings will arise in the minds of some of them—a suspicion as to the truth and depth of their life in Christ, that is not altogether ungrounded. He goes on to probe the uneasy conscience, framing his words in verses 19–24 in a manner calculated at once to encourage the self-distrustful whose heart could not accuse them of callousness, and to alarm the vain and self-complacent (such as the Laodiceans sternly rebuked in the Apocalypse), who were wrapped up in their wealth of knowledge and of material goods, while in miserable destitution of the true riches. *The grounds of Christian assurance* form, therefore, the topic of this section of the Epistle. While stating the grounds of assurance in the first and last clauses of the paragraph (vers. 19, 24b), St John points out to the Christian man *the bearing on his relations to God of the absence or presence of heart assurance*; the effect of the former is intimated in verse 20, and that of the latter is more largely dwelt upon in verses 21–24a.

I. It is St John's manner to strike the key-note at the outset, and to resume it in some altered and

enriched form at the conclusion of each passage. The "Herein" (ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν) of verse 24b, accordingly, takes up the "Herein" of verse 19 (ἐν τούτῳ γνωσόμεθα):<sup>1</sup> here lies the double basis of the settled believer's confidence towards God. This is found (1) in *the consciousness of an unfeigned brotherly love shown in generous self-forgetting acts*—the former ἐν τούτῳ gathering up the sense of verses 16-18; and (2) in *the well-remembered and abiding gift of the Holy Spirit*—the latter ἐν τούτῳ being explained by the definition which follows, "from the Spirit that He gave us." Our Apostle thus affirms the essential two-fold fact of the Christian consciousness, that inner conviction of the child of God concerning his sonship which the Apostle Paul described in the classic words of Romans 8. 15: "The Spirit Himself beareth joint witness with our spirit, that we are children of God." St John puts the two testimonies in the reverse order, proceeding from the outward to the inward, from the ethical to the spiritual, from effect to cause and fruit to seed (comp. ver. 9 above). First, the practical and human evidence of loving deeds; next there is discovered, lying behind this activity, the mystical and Divine evidence supplied by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.

1. There is in the loyal believer *a reassuring discernment of his own state of heart*, the honest self-consciousness of Christian love.

"Lord, thou knowest all things—thou knowest that I love thee": thus the chastened and sore heart of Peter "assured" itself beneath the searching eye and under the testing challenge of his Lord (John 21. 17). In some matters St Peter's self-knowledge had been woefully at fault; but he was sure of this as of his own existence, that he loved Jesus Christ, and he was sure that the Lord knew it. There was comfort and restoration in the fact that Jesus questioned him on this, and not on other points where his answer must

<sup>1</sup> Comp. the almost identical repetition in verses 3 and 5b of chap. 2.

have been that of silence or bitter shame. So every Christian man who faithfully loves Christ and His people and lays himself out for their service, may gather a store of arguments against doubt, a fund of cheerful satisfaction in his faith, which no intellectual furnishing will supply.

“Love never faileth”—never makes shipwreck of the faith that embarks on her adventures. When after years of Christian profession scepticism takes hold of a believer, it will often be found that his heart had grown cold to his brethren; he has forsaken their assemblies, he has turned his eyes away from their needs; he has been oblivious of the claims of his Church and his human fellows. If he “loveth not the brother whom he hath seen, he cannot love God whom he hath not seen” (4. 20); and he has probably ceased to *love* God, before he ceased with assurance to believe in Him. When the reason is harassed with doubt or the conscience troubled for old sin now seen in its darker meaning, it is time for the heart to go out afresh in works of pity toward the needy and “to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” Let the distressed man strengthen and draw closer the ties that link him to his kind, and his heart will come home to itself fraught with a new joy and peace in believing.

Of the difficulties of the Christian intellect it may often be said, *Solvitur amando*. “We know that we are *of the truth*,” not because we have struck down in the sword-play of debate the weapons of unbelief, or entrenched ourselves behind the artillery of a powerful dogmatism or within the bulwarks of an infallible Church, but when we “love in deed and truth.” A true love will scarcely spring from a false faith. If faith *works* by love, it lives! There may be a degree of error, of confusion of thought, defect of knowledge, infirmity of character attending such a faith; it may know little how to assert itself in argument, how to conceive and express itself in terms of reason, but if it loves much there is the core and heart of truth in it,

The Church's martyrdoms and charities have been at all times and everywhere the practical evidence of her Divine character, and the clearest mark of her unity underlying so many divisions; they supply a legitimate and needed reassurance to herself. The Apostle writes "*We shall know*,"—setting up his fortress against the future assaults of doubt in the continued fight of faith.

This line of evidence was calculated to bring comfort to many of the first readers. False prophets were abroad amongst them, men who boasted a greater knowledge and a finer spiritual insight than themselves (chap. 4. 1). They raised subtle questions of religious philosophy, baffling to simple-minded folk. They threw doubt on the ordinary assumptions of faith; they insinuated distrust of the Apostle's competence to guide the movements and the researches on which the Church was called to enter by the progress of the times (see 4. 6, 2 John 9; and Chaps. XI, XIX). It required, they said, profounder reasoning and a larger intellectual grasp than most Christians had imagined, to understand God and the world and to "know" indeed that one is "of the truth." New prophets had been raised up for the new age; "knowledge," and not "faith," is the watchword of the future; the simple Gospel of Peter and John must be wedded to the metaphysic of the great thinkers and restated in terms of pure reason, if it is to satisfy man's higher nature and to command universal homage.

All this, pronounced by men of philosophic garb and prestige, who yet named the name of Christ and posed as interpreters of His doctrine and mission, was calculated to make a powerful impression upon Greek Christianity. Already rival Gnostic communities were in existence outside the Apostolic Church (2. 19), which claimed to hold the rational theory of Christianity and to represent the true mind of the Lord. The prophets of this movement found their hearers amongst catholic believers, and strove incessantly to "draw away the disciples after them."

St John's apologetic runs upon the lines of St Paul's retort to the intellectualists of Corinth: "You say, 'We have knowledge'? Very possibly: knowledge puffs up; it is *love* that builds up. If any man presumes on his *knowledge* in the things of God, he shows his ignorance; he has everything to learn. But if he *loves God*, God knows him for His own" (1 Cor. 8. 1-3). From the same standpoint St John writes: "Every one that loves is begotten of God, and knows God. . . . He that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (4. 7, 16). The emphasis with which the Apostle applies this criterion and the manner in which from beginning to end he rings the changes upon this one idea, in the light of the polemical and defensive aim of the letter, can only be understood on the assumption that the class of teachers whom he opposes were wanting in Christian qualities of heart, while they abounded in dialectical ability and theosophical speculation (see p. 63). It was an alien spirit and ethos that they would have brought into the Church; their temper vitiated equally their doctrine and their life. This St John will proceed to show in the subsequent section of the Epistle, chapter 4. 1-6.

The expression "that we are *of the truth*" (ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας), St John had used in chap. 2. 20, 21, saying that those who "have the anointing from the Holy One" (see Chap. XIV) and "know the truth," know also that "no lie is of the truth." *Truth*—not lies—is the offspring of truth. Real love to God and man in us—for "*in this* we know that we are of the truth"—is the product of its reality in God; its genuineness of character proves its legitimacy of birth. Behind this wondrous new creation of human kindness and tenderness, of unbounded self-surrender and unwearied service to humanity, which the Apostolic Churches exhibited, there is a *vera causa*. Only the recognition of a true Father-God, so loving men and making sacrifice for them as the Gospel declares, could account for the moral phenomenon to which the

Apostle points and of which the readers themselves form a living part. The love that had awakened and sustained in hearts once cold, selfish, impure, a response so powerful, is no illusion. This response should prove, even to those who had not directly heard the summons of the Gospel, the existence of the Voice of grace to which it made reply.

The grand example of this phrase is the declaration of Jesus before Pilate: "Every one that is of *the truth* heareth my voice" (John 18. 37). As much as to say, "The true heart knows its King when He speaks." There was something deep in the heart of Pilate, though he stifled it, that answered to this challenge; it would hardly have been given to a man wholly callous and unsusceptible. The two tests of true-heartedness—John's test and his Master's—coincide; to love our brethren, and to honour and trust the Lord Jesus Christ, are things concomitant: nowhere is such love to men found as in the circle of Christ's obedience. Behind both lies *the truth*—the true being of the Father who sent His Son to win our faith, and who gives the Spirit of whom souls are born into the love of God and man. "This," St John writes at the end, to crown his witness,—“this is the true God and eternal life” (5. 20).

The Christian certainty, as it faces hostile speculation, is a conviction of the truth of God revealed in the message and person of Jesus Christ; but it has another side and aspect. Looking inward, it confronts conscience and the accusations of past sin. True love can meet the scrutiny of God, as well as the questionings of men. Turning this way, St John adds: "And we shall assure our hearts before Him (before God)"—*καὶ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πείσομεν τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν*. The rendering of this sentence has been disputed; but the conflict of interpretation is now fairly decided. The verb *πείθω* has usually for its object some clause stating the fact, or belief, of which one is persuaded. Such an object is wanting here; for "that God is greater than

our hearts" (the clause which follows, verse 20), is not a truth brought home to us by loving our brethren and relieving their wants (vers. 16-18). There is nothing in that to prove God's superiority to "our hearts,"—nor is this a fact that needs proof. The *ὅτι* of verse 20 is the *because* of reason, not *that* of statement; verse 20 does not supply the content or matter of persuasion, but gives the reason why such persuasion (or assurance) of the heart is needful. The words "we shall persuade our heart," in this connexion, contain a complete sense by themselves; or, to put the same thing in other words, the object of *the thing* required by *πείσομεν* is implicit and goes without saying—it is suggested by the words *ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ* (before Him), which bring the soul trembling into the presence of the Searcher of hearts: "We shall, on each occasion when the heart is assailed by accusing thoughts, convince ourselves on this ground that we are approved in His sight; thus we shall overcome our fears, and approach God with the lowly confidence of children accepted in His Son." The *παρρησία* with which faithful and loving Christians will meet Christ at His future coming (see 2. 28, 4. 17), may be entertained now before God the ever-present Judge; the one confidence is cherished on the same ground as the other, and is in effect identical with it. Such a "persuasion" the Apostle Paul argues in Romans 5. 1, 2, 8. 14-17, and Ephesians 3. 12, when he seeks to inspire Christians with filial trust toward God and urges them to "boldness of access" in coming to the Father's presence.

The above-defined elliptical use of *πείθω*, with the meaning "soothe" or "reassure," is rare but well-established in Greek literature. An instance parallel to this occurs in Matthew 28. 14: the Jewish rulers say to the soldiers who had watched at the grave of Jesus and dreaded the consequences of His escape, "If this come to the Governor's ears, *we will persuade (satisfy) him (scil. that you are not to blame), and rid you of care.*" St John's mind is dwelling not on the last

judgement, but on the constant scrutiny of the heart by the Omniscient (ὁ θεὸς . . . γινώσκει πάντα), before whom our sin testifies against us; thinking of His perfect knowledge and unerring judgement, each man is compelled in shame and fear to say, "My sin is ever before me." "Love out of a pure heart" makes reply to this accusing voice, and restores to us "a good conscience" in the sight of God (comp. 1 Tim. 1. 5). In this consciousness the Apostle Paul could write to the Philippians, living habitually as he did in the light of the Judgement-throne: "God is my witness, how I long after you all in the yearnings of Christ Jesus" (1. 8). The man who could thus speak, who lived daily under the constraint of the love of Christ, needed no other proof that he is in Christ. Doubt of this would never cross his mind, any more than one doubts from waking to sleeping whether one is alive.

2. But the confidence toward God cherished by the believer who walks in love, is not self-generated nor acquired by any process of reflexion. The facts on which it rests had a beginning external to the soul. The "well of water springing up" within the Christian heart and the Christian Church and pouring out in so many streams of mercy and good fruits, has a source of replenishment lying deeper than man's own nature. The Apostle completes the Christian assurance, and traces it to its spring in the testimony of the Holy Spirit, when he adds: "And in this we know that He (God) dwells in us, *from the Spirit which He gave us*" (ver. 24). Since the Holy Spirit is of God, and is God indeed, to have Him in the heart is to have *God* dwelling in us—the Spirit is God immanent (μένει ἐν ἡμῖν); and to possess Him is surely to "*know that God dwells in us,*" forasmuch as "*the Spirit witnesseth,*" as the Apostles Paul and John both say (5. 6 f., Rom. 8. 15 f.). He is no abstract influence or effluence from God,—a voiceless Breath; but He "*searches the deeps of God*" (1 Cor. 2. 10), and the deeps of the heart that He visits. He "*teaches,*" He "*declares*" things present and to



come—the things of Christ and the things of the conscience (John 14. 26, 15. 26, 16. 13); He “speaketh expressly” (1 Tim. 4. 1); He “testifies” as He finds and knows. “The Spirit that is of God” knows whence He comes and whither He goes, and He witnesseth of each to the other: He “cries” sometimes (as St Paul experienced) “in groanings unspeakable,” yet heard by the Heart-searcher, from the depths of the soul to God (Rom. 8. 26, 27). But before such crying, by Himself entering and tenanting the heart He makes it known that God is there.

The abstract statement of the former ground of assurance, “we are of the truth”—a form of assertion common to all schools of thought claiming philosophic or religious certainty—is now exchanged for a more specific conception, by which *truth* translates itself into *life*: “we know that God dwells in us.” Thus intellectual conviction unfolds into a personal appropriation of the Divine by the human. The two make acquaintance and hold communion in the recesses of the heart, where God finds man and man knows God; for the believer in Jesus Christ and lover of his kind “dwells in God, and God in him” (vers. 23, 24).

St John affirms in this connexion once more the disciplinary element in Christian experience; he never allows us, for many paragraphs, to get away from the plain ethical conditions of fellowship with God: “he *that keeps His commandments* (comp. 2. 3–5, 7 ff., 29; 3. 4 ff.; 5. 2 f., 18), dwells in God and God in him.” Union between God and the creature is possible only on terms of the latter’s *obedience*; and the path of obedience is marked by the fence of “the commandments.” St John knew the perils of mysticism; his own temperament would put him on his guard against this. Here lay, to many minds, the fascination of the Gnostic theory: this system promised an absorption in the Divine, to be gained otherwise than in the hard way of self-denial and practical service and by attention to the troublesome details of “the commandments.” The latter were

identified by the new teaching with a coarse Judaism, with the realm of perishing matter and "the carpenter God" of the Hebrew Scriptures and the superseded covenant of works. Men who held themselves, as those emancipated by knowledge and enjoying the freedom of sons of God, to be above the level of commandment-keeping, fell far below it into carnal sin; and the raptures of a mystic love were not unfrequently associated with antinomian licence. Such symptoms were marks, to St John's mind, not of the Spirit of truth that God gave His people through Jesus Christ, who is a "spirit of discipline" (2 Tim. 1. 7), but of "the spirit of Antichrist" and "error" (4. 3, 6). This spirit the Apostle detected in the pseudo-prophecies and immoral propaganda of Gnosticism.

"From the Spirit" (ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος) that God "gave us"—rather than by the Spirit" (τῷ πνεύματι: so in Rom. 8. 13 f., Gal. 5. 16, 18)—"we know" all this, as St John puts it; for the assurance of the Christian believer rises from this source and begins from this time. Its origin was on the day of Pentecost. In the case of Christ's first disciples, the gift could be traced, more exactly, to the hour when at His first appearance after the resurrection the Lord Jesus "breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20. 22). In writing ἔδωκεν ("He gave"), the Apostle points to the definitive bestowment of the Holy Spirit on the Church (comp. Luke 24. 49, Acts 2. 33, 38, 15. 8 f., 19. 2 ff.; Gal. 3. 2 f., &c.), the birth-hour of Christendom; he does not say δίδωσιν ("gives"), as though describing a continuous gift (comp. John 3. 34, 1 Thess. 4. 8). It was then that the exalted Christ "baptized" His people "in the Holy Spirit and fire." This was the nativity of the Christian consciousness; and it can have no repetition, since the life then originated knows no decease. It is rehearsed whenever any man or people is "baptized into Christ Jesus." The Lord repeats in dispatching His disciples, one or many, on their life-mission the command, "Receive the

Holy Spirit: as the Father hath sent me, I also send you."

Such a specific new birth, such a "giving" and "receiving" of the Holy Spirit, takes place in every instance of spiritual life, whether the occurrence be distinctly realized or not. From this moment onwards, "the Spirit witnesseth along with our spirit"—each witness living for and in the other. The Holy Spirit constitutes the universal consciousness of the sons of God. Our sense of the Divine indwelling, and all the assuring signs and works of grace, issue from Him who is the supreme gift of the Father, crowning the gift of His grace in the Son; and the Spirit's fruit is known in every gracious temper and kindly act and patient endurance of a Christian life.

II. The central part of the paragraph in verses 20–23, lying between the two grounds of assurance we have considered, remains to be discussed. It presents the contrasted cases arising under St John's doctrine of assurance: "if our heart be condemning us" (ver. 20),—the contingency of *self-accusation*; and "if our heart be not condemning us" (ver. 21),—the contingency of *self-acquittal*. The consequences of each condition are drawn out—in the former instance in broken and obscure words, by way of hint rather than clear statement (ver. 20); on the other hand, the happy effects of a good conscience toward God are freely set forth in the language of verses 21–23.

1. The connexion of verses 19 and 20 affords one of the few grammatical ambiguities of this Epistle. It is an open question as to whether the first  $\delta\tau\iota$  of verse 20 is the conjunction *that* or *because* (*for* A.V.), or is the relative pronoun, neuter of  $\delta\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$  ( $\delta\tau\iota$ ), complemented by  $\epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu$  (*for*  $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ ) of contingency<sup>1</sup> ( $\delta\tau\iota \epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu =$  *whereinsoever* R.V.); and whether the verses should be divided, respectively, by a full stop as in the Authorized Version,

<sup>1</sup> Comp.  $\delta \epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu \alpha\iota\tau\omega\mu\epsilon\nu$  in ver. 22 below, and  $\alpha\iota\tau\acute{\omega}\mu\epsilon\theta\alpha$  in 5. 15;  $\delta \epsilon\acute{\alpha}\nu \epsilon\rho\gamma\acute{\alpha}\sigma\eta$  in 3 John 5;  $\delta\tau\iota \acute{\alpha}\nu \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\eta \upsilon\mu\acute{\iota}\nu$ , John 2. 5;  $\delta\tau\iota \acute{\alpha}\nu \alpha\iota\tau\acute{\eta}\sigma\eta\tau\epsilon$ , 14. 13, &c.

or by a comma as in the Revised. This as to the point of verbal form. In point of matter, the question is: Does the Apostle say "God is greater than our heart and knows all" by way of *warning* to the over-confident and self-excusing, to those tempted to disregard their secret misgivings; or by way of *comfort* to the over-scrupulous and self-tormenting, to those tempted to brood over and magnify their misgivings? This is a nice problem of exegesis; and the displacement of the first of these alternatives by the second (R.V.) without a recognition of the other view in the margin, does not represent the balance of critical opinion. We retain the construction adopted by the older translators, without much hesitation. The stumbling-block of this interpretation is the second  $\delta\tau\iota$ , which on this view is grammatically superfluous (and is accordingly ignored by the A.V.); there is no occasion to repeat the particle after so short an interval.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while other conjunctions are apt to be resumptively doubled in a complex sentence, no other example is forthcoming of such repetition in the case of  $\delta\tau\iota$  ("that" or "because"). If this has actually happened here, it must be supposed that the duplication of  $\delta\tau\iota$  (*because* God is greater, &c.) is due either to a primitive error of the copyists lying behind the oldest text, or to an inadvertence of the author, who thus betrays the mental perturbation caused by the painful supposition he is making. In writing, as in speaking, it happens now and then that under the weight of some solemn or anxious thought the pen hesitates, and a word is unintentionally repeated in the pause and reluctance with which the sentence is delivered.

On the other hand it must be insisted, as against the construction adopted by the Revisers, that the grammatical subordination of verse 20 to verse 19 makes up an involved sentence, awkward in itself

<sup>1</sup> The case is different in 1 Thess. 4. 1, for example, where  $\textit{\iota}\nu\alpha$  (in the true text) is reinserted to pick up the thread of the main sentence, after the long parenthesis extending from the first  $\textit{\kappa}\alpha\theta\acute{\omega}\varsigma$  to  $\textit{\pi}\epsilon\rho\textit{\iota}\textit{\pi}\alpha\textit{\tau}\epsilon\textit{\iota}\tau\epsilon$ .

and of a type unusual with the writer; a sentence, too, that leaves much to be read between the lines in order to bring a connected sense out of its entanglements. The fact of God's superiority to the heart and His perfect knowledge thereof does not, on the face of it, explain why love to the brethren should reassure the anxious Christian against self-accusation. Westcott's paraphrase, in quoting which we will bracket the words read into St John's text (upon the Revised construction), shows how lamely the writer (*ex hypothesi*) has expressed his meaning, and that he has left the essential points to be supplied by the interpreter: "The sense within us of a sincere love of the brethren, which is the sign of God's presence within us, will enable us to stay the accusations of our conscience, whatever they may be, because God [who gives us this love, and so blesses us with His fellowship] is greater than our heart; [and He], having perfect knowledge, [forgives all on which our heart sadly dwells]." This exposition is subtle, and contains a precious truth. But a real peril lies in the method of self-assurance which the Apostle is thus supposed to suggest—the tendency to set sentiment against conscience. One may say: "I know I have done wrong. This act of deceit, this bitter temper or unholy imagination, my heart condemns. But I have many good and kind feelings, that surely come from God. My sin is but a drop in the ocean of His mercy, which I feel flowing into my heart. Why should I vex myself about these faults of a weak nature, which God, who knows the worst, compassionates and pardons!" The danger of extracting this anodyne from the text is one that, if it existed, the Apostle must have felt at once, and would have been careful in the context to guard against.

On the other view, when we identify the two *ὄρι's* and separate the first from *ἐάν*, the grammatical construction is simple and obvious and the connexion of ideas sufficiently clear. The *ἐάν καταγινώσκη* of verse

20 and the *ἐὰν μὴ καταγινώσκῃ* of verse 21 present, precisely in St John's manner,<sup>1</sup> the two opposite hypotheses involved in the situation—that of *our heart condemning or not condemning* us in respect of love to the brethren. The former of these suppositions St John was bound to make very seriously. The case he supposed in verses 17, 18, above, that of a pretender to the love of God wanting in human compassion, was not imaginary (see 4. 20; comp. 1. 6). In several places the Apostle shows himself apprehensive of a vain assurance in some of his readers that would reconcile the heart with sin, of a light and superficial satisfying of the conscience. That any one should "persuade his heart" in *this* way, is the last thing he would desire or permit. At each step he balances encouragement with caution; he cheers and humbles alternately. The condition of the Church indicated by the Epistle, is a troubled one; we see love and hatred, light and darkness, in conflict even within its pale. Real ground existed for self-condemnation on the part of some amongst St John's little children, while there was ground for rejoicing in most of them.

And when he supposes "our heart condemning us," the *tense* of the verb (*ἐὰν καταγινώσκῃ*) makes the supposition the more alarming: it is put in the Greek *present* of continuity, and implies not a passing cloud but a persistent shadow, a repeated or sustained protest of conscience. This is no mere misgiving of a sensitive nature jealous of itself, to be justly dispelled by the reassuring consciousness of a cordial love to the brethren. Nay, it is the opposite of such assurance; it is condemnation upon the vital, testing point. The man aimed at in verse 20, if we read the passage aright, is one who does not "know" by St John's token that he is "of the truth"; his heart cannot give him such testimony, but "keeps accusing" him on this very account. He knows that he has

<sup>1</sup> Comp. the double *ἐὰν*-clauses of 1. 6, 7, and again of vers. 8-10; similarly in John 15. 4, 6, 7, &c.

“loved in word and tongue” more than “in deed and truth” (ver. 18) and “shut up his compassions” from brethren in distress (ver. 17), if he has not positively indulged the hate which brands men as murderers in the sight of God (ver. 15). Since his own ignorant and partial heart condemns him, let him consider what must be the verdict of the all-searching and all-holy Judge. The argument is a *minori ad majus*, from the echo to the voice echoed, from the forebodings of conscience to the Supreme Tribunal and the sentence of the Great Day. Even when a man’s heart absolves him, he may not for this reason presume on God’s approval: “I know nothing against myself,” writes St Paul, “yet not on this ground am I justified. But He that trieth me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4. 4). How much more must one fear, when conscience holds him guilty! Little or nothing is read into the passage, when it is thus construed under the light of the foregoing context. The stern discrimination made in verses 15–18 between the lover of his brethren who has passed into life and the hater who abides in death, was bound to come to a head in some such conclusion as this, by which the latter is virtually cited to God’s judgement-seat. The principle applied is that set forth by our Lord Himself in the great Judgement-scene of Matthew 25,—viz. that deeds of true human charity warrant the hope of admittance into God’s eternal kingdom, while the absence of them awakens the darkest fears.

2. The relief with which St John passes from the supposition “if our heart condemn us” to its opposite, is shown by the compellation “Beloved” (used before in chaps. 2. 7, 3. 2: both passages of high feeling), with which he turns to address the body of his readers. The sentence “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not,” marks the glad escape from the thought of condemnation clouding verse 20; we pass from shadow into sunlight. After the brief warning in verse 20 against a false peace—against soothing and doctoring the

conscience, when it warns us that our hearts are not right with our brethren—the Apostle returns with emphasis to the reassuring strain of verse 19, to expand it into the exultant testimony of verses 21 and 22. In almost any other writer the transition would have been marked by the conjunction *δέ* (*but*); to St John the Hebrew idiom is more natural, which simply apposes its contrasts without link-words.<sup>1</sup>

While self-reproach for heartlessness toward men raises fear of God's displeasure, self-acquittal on this ground, if justified, reflects in the heart God's approving smile. This approval, the logical complement of "If our heart condemn us not," is stated, not directly but by its two manifest consequences, in verses 21b, 22a: "We have confidence (*or* freedom) toward God, and whatsoever we ask we receive from Him." The reasons given in verse 22b for this confidence and assurance of answers to prayer, recall us to the great condition of commandment-keeping, on which St John loses no opportunity of insisting; they lie in the fact that "we keep His commandments, and do the things pleasing in His sight." The loyal, loving heart is sensible of God's approbation, and has experience of His gracious response to its petitions. Once more, the commandments are summarized in brotherly love (ver. 23; comp. 2. 1-11); but to this is prefixed the duty, in the fulfilment of which love to one's brethren has its beginning and best incentive: "that we should believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as He gave us commandment." We thus find a *twofold sign* of God's favour toward the true Christian man (vers. 21b, 22a), and a *twofold ground* for this continued favour in the man himself (ver. 23).

(1) There accrues to the heart that loves its brethren an habitual *παρησία πρὸς τὸν θεόν*,<sup>2</sup> the earnest of that which the faithful servant of Christ will realize at His glorious coming (2. 28). This "confidence toward God"

<sup>1</sup> See e.g., chaps. 1. 8-10, 3. 2, 13 f., 4. 4-6, &c.; but *δέ* in 1. 6 f., 2. 10 f.

<sup>2</sup> For *παρησία*, see the references on p. 235.



is the reflexion from the soul of God's abiding peace (comp. Rom. 5. 1 f.), the "freedom" of happy children who have access always to the Father, speaking to Him with a trustful heart and no longer checked and chided in His presence.

(2) Here lies the secret of *successful prayer*,<sup>1</sup> which was revealed by our Lord to His disciples (John 15. 7) : "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, whatever you will, ask, and it will be done for you." The prayers are always heard of those who have the mind of Christ, who love the Lord's work and are one with Him in spirit. They ask the things He means to give (see p. 401). The Spirit of Christ prays in them ; they cannot ask amiss or fruitlessly. They plead truly in Christ's "name" (comp. John 15. 16),—in His character and on His behalf, who has no interests but those prompted by God's good-will to men.

"The secret of Jehovah," the Old Testament said, "is with them that fear Him." St John had discovered that this secret also rests with those who love their brethren. No veil hangs between them and the Father's face. Their prayers are prophecies of what God will do ; for "every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God" (4. 7). "Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him"—the Apostle is not formulating a theological principle, but telling his experience—"because we keep His commands and do the things *pleasing before Him*." Now there is nothing which better pleases God, who is love, than to see His children live in love toward each other. And nothing more quickly clouds one's acceptance with the Father, and more effectually hinders his prayers, than churl-

<sup>1</sup> The immediate connexion, which lies in the nature of things, and is directly asserted in John 15. 7, between *confident address* to God and *successful petition*, is destroyed by the stop interposed in the English Version (A.V. or R.V.) between verses 21 and 22. The division of verses makes an unreal interruption of sense. The double *ὅτι* clause of verse 22b ("because we keep . . . and do," &c.,) goes to support *both* the above sentences together—*παρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ ὃ ἐὰν αἰτῶμεν λαμβάνομεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ*.

ishness and strife. When our hearts condemn us on this score (ver. 20), we have much to fear from God; when they condemn us not, we have everything to hope. "The Father Himself loveth you," said Jesus once to His disciples, "because you have loved me and have believed that I came out from the Father" (John 16. 27). The terms on which the Apostle guarantees to his readers God's abiding favour—viz. faith in Christ's name, and mutual love,—are tantamount to the above; for true love to Christ, and love to His own in the world, are the same affection; He and His Church are one to the love born of faith, as they are one to the hate born of unbelief (John 15. 18-25).

In laying down the ἐντολαί of God, the keeping of which keeps us in the way of His good pleasure, St John gives to the idea of "commandment" a surprising turn, anticipated in the bold saying of John 6. 29: "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He sent." Can faith then be *commanded*? is this, after all, a *work of law*? In St Paul's theology, "faith" and "works" are radically opposed, and serve to represent the true and false ways of salvation. Right and just "work" or "works," as he views the matter, are the consequence of faith and by no means identical with it (1 Thess. 1. 3, 2 Thess. 1. 11, Tit. 3. 8). St Paul's thought was ruled by the antithesis of the legalist controversy, in which "works" done under command meant self-wrought and would-be meritorious human doings. For St John this contention is past; indeed he had never made it his own, as the Apostle of the Gentiles was compelled to do.

That God *requires* men to believe was a commonplace with both Apostles; St John's ἐντολή (*command*) is not essentially different from St Paul's κλήσις (*calling*),—the summons sent to mankind in the Gospel, demanding from all nations the "*obedience of faith*" (Rom. 1. 5). With this imperative the Lord Jesus opened His commission, when He "came into Galilee preaching the good news of God, and saying, Repent,

and believe in the good news." Faith cannot be commanded as a mechanical work, a thing of constraint; it is commanded as the dutiful response of man's will to the appeal of God's truth and love. Hence "the commandments" resolve themselves into "the commandment" (*αἱ ἐντολαί* of verse 22=*ἡ ἐντολή*, verse 23: two in one), "that we believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another." The phrase is not "believe in," or "on, the name" (*εἰς, ἐν, ἐπί*), as commonly, but "believe *the name*":<sup>1</sup> the Name has something to say; it bespeaks the nature and claims of Him who bears it, and utters God's testimony concerning His Son. God asks our credence for the record that is affirmed when He designates Jesus Christ "My Son." He bids all men yield assent to the royal titles of Jesus and set His name above every other in their esteem and confidence. Such faith in the Lord Jesus Christ always works by love, and carries with it of necessity the result already described—the specific matter of Christian law: "that we love one another, as He gave us command" (see John 13. 34, &c.).

The verbs "believe" and "love" are here, according to the preferable reading<sup>2</sup> (*πιστεύσωμεν, ἀγαπῶμεν*), in different tenses—the former in the aorist pointing to an event, the latter in the present tense signifying a practice. As Westcott puts it, "The decisive act of faith is the foundation of the abiding work of love." The keeping of this double law, of faith and love, ensures that mutual indwelling of God and the soul which is the essence of religion, for "The man that keeps His command dwells in God, and God in him" (ver. 24a). Faith, as Christ and all His Apostles teach, is the channel of this intercourse; it forms the link of an eternal attachment between the soul and its Maker.

<sup>1</sup> *Πιστεύω* takes a dative of the *person* believed; *τὸ ὄνομα* is virtually personified by the use of this construction.

*Πιστεύωμεν* is, however, the reading of some good MSS. and editors.



## THE TRIAL OF THE SPIRITS

False Spirits Abroad in the World—A Critical Epoch—Spurious Inspiration—Some Popular Prophets—The Criteria of True and False Christianity—The Doctrinal Test: the Person of Christ—St Paul's Confessional Watchword, and St John's—The Practical Test: the *Consensus* of Believers—The Historical Test: the Authority of the Apostles—Papal Claims *versus* the New Testament—Modernism on its Trial.

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God ;

Because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Herein discern the Spirit of God :

Every spirit which confesseth Jesus Christ as come in flesh, is of God ;  
And every spirit which doth not confess Jesus, is not of God.

And this is the spirit of Antichrist,

Of which you have heard that it is coming, and it is now in the world already.

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them ;  
Because He that is in you, is greater than he that is in the world.

They are of the world ;

Therefore speak they from the world, and the world heareth them.

We are of God :

He that knoweth God, heareth us ;

He that is not of God, heareth us not.

From this we discern the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”

1 JOHN 4. 1-6.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE TRIAL OF THE SPIRITS

ST JOHN has just laid down, in chap. 3. 23, the basis of a true sonship to God and the ultimate ground of a Christian man's assurance, as consisting in two things—*faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and mutual love such as He enjoined.* Verses 1-6 of chapter 4 serve to set forth and guard the first of these foundation principles, and verses 7-21 to enforce the second.

In the last sentence of chapter 3 the faith and love which make a Christian were traced to "the Spirit which" God "gave us."<sup>1</sup> From this reference the paragraph before us takes its start: "I have said, beloved, that we are assured of our sonship towards God through the Spirit He has given us. But you are not to believe every spirit. There are false as well as true spirits—spirits from above and from beneath; *put them all to proof.*"

To identify the supernatural and the Divine is a perilous mistake. It seems that in this world there is no truth without its counterfeit, nor good wheat of God unmixed with tares. Christ is mimicked by Antichrist; the Spirit of God is mocked by lying spirits, and the prophets of truth are counter-worked by "many false prophets" which "have gone out into the world." Indeed, the more active is religious thought at any given period, so much the more

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. XVIII.

numerous and plausible are likely to be the forms of heretical error. We are tempted to think that in our own days amid the storm of conflicting voices, when every principle of revealed religion is challenged, the difficulties of faith are unprecedented, and that religious certainty is hardly consistent with an open-minded intelligence. But we are under much the same conditions with believers of the early times. In vain we should sigh for "the ages of faith," for the time when the dogma of a Church Council or the letter of a Bible text was enough to silence controversy. The fact is that we have great illusions about those halcyon days; the differences amongst Christians in former centuries were often deeper, and the contentions far more bitter, than those of the present, except indeed when freedom of thought was stifled by arbitrary power. But for that stifling, many questions which vex us still might have been fought out and disposed of long ago. Already in St John's time and before the Apostolic age had passed, "many false prophets" had arisen in the Church, and Christian faith was distracted by a swarm of troublesome speculations.

The writer returns in this paragraph to the subject of chap. 2. 18-27, which formed a chief motive of his letter, viz. the rise of false prophecy, the spread of religious delusions affecting Christian people. This phenomenon was viewed in chapter 2 as evidence of the coming of a crisis—possibly a final crisis—in the progress of God's kingdom, in the age-long warfare between "the darkness" and "the light"; the advent of Antichrist in this shape signaled the long-predicted "last hour."<sup>1</sup> Here the question is approached from the more practical side, and treated in a more personal sense (comp. p. 231); the warring spirits are severally described. St John regards the struggle as an inevitable development of the antagonism between God and the world; it is the reaction arising within

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. XIV.



the Church of the worldly mind and temper against the spirit of Jesus. The two sections are closely parallel: in both paragraphs the conflict is represented as a test of the genuine and the pretended Christianity, resulting in the expulsion of the latter element; in both the safeguard of the Church is found in the indwelling "Spirit of truth," whose "anointing" received "from the Holy One" gives an insight that pierces the mask of falsehood; in both passages the person of Christ supplies the decisive touchstone.

St Paul had met with an opposition at Corinth of a nature approaching to that here implied, and attended by prophetic manifestations contradictory to Apostolic teaching. With reference to this he speaks, in 1 Corinthians 12. 10, of the "discerning," or "judication, of spirits"—the power to distinguish the real from the unreal inspiration—as a supernatural grace bestowed upon certain members of the Church. On the same point he wrote to the Thessalonians earlier (1 Thess. 5. 19, 20): "Quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesyings; but test everything." From this carefully balanced warning we gather that the false fire mingled with the true caused the more sceptical minds in the Pauline Churches to distrust prophetic gifts, while the ardent and credulous fell into the opposite mistake,—the uncritical acceptance of anything that looked like prophecy. Our Lord foretold the coming of "false Christs and false prophets," specious enough to deceive "the elect," at the time of the approaching judgement (Matt. 24. 11, 24). His predictions St John had seen fulfilled in the last days of Jerusalem; now he witnesses a further accomplishment of them at the close of the Apostolic era. "The false prophet" figures side by side with "the wild beast" in the visions of the Apocalypse, representing, as it would seem, religious imposture abetting a cruel and persecuting world-power. Elymas, the Jewish sorcerer at Paphos, was a specimen of this kind of trader in the supernatural (Acts 13. 6-8).

In the later Old Testament times such upstarts had been numerous—men claiming to speak in Jehovah's name (in some cases, doubtless, believing themselves inspired), who brought a more popular message than the true prophets and flattered rulers and people to their ruin.

This last feature reappears in St John's false prophets: "they are of the world"—animated by its spirit and tastes; "therefore speak they from the world"—uttering what it prompts and reflecting its notions and imaginings; "and the world listens to them." For, as Jesus said, the world loves its own—the world described in chap. 2. 16 as governed by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life." It appears from this that the Antichristian teachers who "had gone out from" the Johannine Churches (2. 19; comp. 4. 4), were enjoying much popularity. They were winning probably, for the time, more converts from heathenism than the orthodox Church; their doctrine, accommodated as it was to the philosophical taste of the age and blending Pagan with Christian ideas, supplied an agreeable substitute for the simple and severe Apostolic faith.

Along with their worldly and self-seeking temper, it was false doctrine, rather than spurious miracles or lying predictions, that furnished the chief mark of the class of men denounced by our Apostle. Their errors sprang from, or ran up into, an erroneous conception of Jesus Christ. For He is central to His religion; the view that men take of Him, and the attitude they assume towards Him, determine the trend of their faith and life. The question that our Lord put to the Jewish Rabbis, "What think ye of the Christ?" He has been propounding to every school of religious thought from that day forwards; by his response each answerer gives judgement on himself. So the Person of Christ becomes the "stone of stumbling and rock of offence," or the "sure foundation-stone," to one generation after another. As the tenor of this Epistle shows—particularly the language of chap. 2. 18-27 (comp.

p. 219)—the pivot of the controversy then shaking the Churches of Asia Minor and which was to disturb them for a hundred years to come, was found in *the nature of Jesus Christ*—in His relationship to God and His place in the order of being, in the compatibility of His bodily life with His birth from God, and in the mode of His redemption as determined by His nature. The authoritative answer to these questions the Apostle John is able to give, partly through his conversance with the Lord in the days of His flesh (1. 1–3), but partly also through the illumination of the Spirit of God, in which all those participate who have received the Apostolic message concerning Him (1. 3; 2. 20, 21, 27; 3. 24; 4. 6, 13; 5. 6). Whatever contradicts “the Spirit of truth” operating in this testimony, the Apostle ascribes to “the spirit of Antichrist” (ver. 3).

St John deals in a simple, plain-spoken way with these profound problems (comp. p. 52). Subterfuge and compromise are alien from his nature. His intercourse with Christ, and his observation of the working of Christ's Spirit amongst men, have given him positive facts and definite experiences to stand upon; and he will not have these great actualities dissolved in the mists of Gnostical theory. To him “the Spirit of truth” and “the spirit of error” stand out sharply opposed as day and night. Christ and Antichrist, “He who is in” the Church of God and “He who is in the world,” form oppugnant forces which admit of no mixture or middle term; white and black must not be allowed to shade off into each other and melt into a neutral tint. Christ—the whole, undivided Christ of the united Apostolic confession—or nothing, is St John's alternative.

1. The crucial test of Christian belief lies, then, in *the true confession of Christ Himself*. “By this” the Apostle bids his readers “know <sup>1</sup> the Spirit of God: every spirit

<sup>1</sup> Γινώσκετε must be read as imperative in verse 2, in the strain of verse 1. The Apostle is not appealing to what his readers do know, but supplying a test by which they may or should know the true Spirit of God.

which confesseth Jesus Christ come in flesh, is of God and every spirit which confesseth not <sup>1</sup> Jesus, is not of God."

Examining the content of this terse confession, we observe, first, that the participle "come" stands in the Greek perfect (ἐληλυθότα), signifying determinate position or character: "confesseth . . . as One who came in flesh and who is what He is in virtue of His so coming." The phrase conveys the notion of a decisive, constitutive advent—a coming that marks an era and a settled order of things. In the second place, the predicate "come in flesh" speaks of One who has entered man's life from elsewhere, who arrives from a spiritual sphere outside

<sup>1</sup> The Latin rendering *qui solvit Jesum, which dissolveth (destroyeth) Jesus*, presents a critical problem of extreme interest, both in textual and doctrinal history. Though ὁ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ stands in all the extant Greek codices, earlier and later, ὁ λύει τὸν Ἰησοῦν is vouched for by Irenæus and Origen (in Latin translations), by Tertullian, Lucifer, and Augustine. The patristic Socrates, in his *Hist. Ecclesiæ*, vii. 32, approves the reading λύει, stating that "it had been so written in the old copies," and argues from it against the Nestorians; he even asserts, on the testimony of "the old interpreters," that the disappearance of λύει from the current text was due to its depravation by heretics! This is strong evidence for the actuality of the Greek reading λύει; the other witnesses might be all of them, possibly, accounted for by the Latin Version; but a Greek Father like Socrates—dealing, moreover, with an Eastern heresy—would hardly have spoken in the terms quoted, as Westcott suggests, about what he supposed to be a mere Latin rendering. Nor is it likely that the first Latin translators would have introduced this bold variant on their own account. Its internal character bespeaks for the reading in question an Eastern origin, on the battlefield of the Gnostic controversy. On the other hand, its un-Johannine turn of expression and the incongruity of the verb *dissolve* with the single name *Jesus (Jesus Christ, or Christ Jesus)*, were "dissolved" by Gnostics into two beings), together with the array of external evidence for ὁ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ, sufficiently condemn the reading of Socrates, which is in reality a typical "Western" paraphrase or gloss of the second century. It becomes more and more clear that the so-called "Western" text was Eastern in its provenance. The addition of the clause "come in flesh" to the negative sentence (so in T.R. and A.V.) is not strongly attested; this is an obvious completion of the parallelism. The article τὸν before Ἰησοῦν is well-established, and gives point to the shorter reading: "Every spirit which does not confess *the Jesus*" in question—the Jesus of the Church's faith and the Apostle's testimony.

of "flesh" to participate in physical experience (comp. Gal. 4. 4), One who—to use His own words as given in John 16. 28 (comp. 3. 13, 6. 33, &c.)—"came down from the Father, and is come into the world." Other men do not "*come in flesh*," they are "begotten of flesh" (John 3. 6), and are, therefore, "of earth, earthy," while He is "from heaven" (1 Cor. 15. 47).

But further, the participial clause of this testing declaration does not supply its whole predicate, and "Jesus" stands alone as the subject of confession in the complementary negative clause. To say that "Jesus Christ is come in flesh," merging the title in the proper name, would be to designate the Lord as "Jesus Christ" before His coming<sup>1</sup>—a theological anachronism which St John would not have committed; rather, He is "Jesus Christ" now that He has come and *because* He has come. Our Lord's official designation had not by this date so far coalesced with His personal name, that it would be natural to read the two as a single subject of definition; it was still matter of controversy whether, and in what sense, "Jesus" is "Christ." The words "Jesus Christ," as here collocated, form a condensed confession by themselves—no longer in the primary sense of John 9. 22 (where "confessing Him as *Christ*" meant acknowledging the Jewish Messiahship of Jesus), but in the deeper signification now attaching to "Christ," upon which the Gnostic controversies turned, as a term connoting Divine status or relationship synonymous with "the Word" and "the Son of God." Accordingly, to confess or deny "that Jesus is the Christ," or is "Christ come in flesh," was tantamount, for St John and his

<sup>1</sup> Verses 10 and 14, like Gal. 4. 4, represent "God," or "the Father," as "sending *the Son*"; in John 1. 1-18 it is "the Word," or "Only-begotten," who "became flesh." In the prayer of John 17. 1 "Jesus" indeed recalls His preincarnate "glory" and claims from the Father its restoration, but in the character of "thy Son"; and when in verse 3 "Jesus Christ" appears—a combination exceptional and indeed anomalous in the Gospels—this expression describes Him whom the Father "has sent," who acquired this name by His *mission*, as in the passage above by His *coming*.

opponents, to confessing or denying that Jesus is "the Son," "the Son of God" (for the equivalence, comp. with this passage 2. 18 and 22, 23, also 5. 5). "Jesus," as we take it, is the grammatical subject of the formula of confession, "Christ" and "come in flesh" being its successive appositional predicates: each word must be read with its distinct accent and emphasis—"Every spirit that confesses *Jésus Christ côme in flésh*"—that acknowledges the Divine origin and rights of Jesus, and His advent in this capacity into human bodily life—"is of God." In the negative counter-statement (ver. 3), the entire creed is reduced to the word "Jesus" (comp. Rom. 3. 26, R.V.)—*i.e.* according to the best reading, "*the Jesus*" who has just been described.

The gloss put upon verse 3 by second-century readers—"dissolves" for "confesses not" (p. 316)—was a just paraphrase of St John's dictum as against the Gnostic *χωριζομετες* (*dividers*), who parted "Jesus Christ" into two beings—the earthly son of Mary and the heavenly essence joined to Him for a while, which, as many supposed, came upon Jesus spiritually at His baptism to quit Him on the cross. But "the Jesus" whom St John had known, was one from first to last—the Son of God born into the human state, who returned to the Father and lives for ever as the Lord Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day.

St Paul's confessional watchword—*κύριος Ἰησοῦς*, *Jesus is Lord* (see 1 Cor. 12. 3)—belonged to the primary stage of conflict with the original Jewish unbelief. As the Nazarene was proclaimed God's Messiah, the spirit of evil cried out—and St Paul was often thus interrupted when preaching in the Synagogue—"Jesus is *anathema*,—He is accursed of God, and was justly crucified; He is the abhorred, and not the elect of Israel!" This was to repeat the fearful shout of Calvary, "Away with Him!" It was a more developed and subtle kind of error, partly bred within the Church, that St John stigmatizes. In his Ephesian circle the Messianic attributes of Jesus are hardly in question;

He would readily be acknowledged as the heir of prophecy and the king of Israel;<sup>1</sup> but His relations to the Godhead and His rank in the spiritual realm are in dispute. "Jesus" and "Christ" were being separated anew, by metaphysical analysis instead of historical distinction. The prophets of Antichrist recoiled not from a crucified Messiah, but from a *humanized God*. St John's touchstone applies specifically to the current misbelief of his own sphere—to the spirit of Gnostical speculation—as St Paul's criterion was addressed to the spirit of Jewish contumacy.

In both cases, Jesus Christ is the storm-centre; the battle sways this way and that about the person of the King. Now at one point, now at another, "the spirit of error" assails His many-sided being. Every kind of antipathy that Christianity excites, in the modern as in the ancient world, impinges on our Lord's name and person; its shafts strike on the great shield of the Captain of Salvation, from whatever quarter they are aimed. Behind other problems of life and religion, since Christ has stepped into the arena, there always emerges this: "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" This is our Lord's accost to the world, and to each soul He meets; He gives this challenge distinctly to the age in which we live. It is a question that searches the inmost of the mind, and probes each man to the quick. As one thinks of Jesus Christ and feels towards Him, so in his very self he is.

"Herein," says St John, "you may know the Spirit of God." Sound knowledge in matters of this kind is based upon spiritual facts and acquired by a spiritual perception. One may repeat the creed with reasoned assent, and yet come short of "confessing Jesus Christ." The apprehension of a person, not the acknowledge-

<sup>1</sup> The testimony of John the Baptist had been adopted at an early date in a small Jewish community of Ephesus (Acts 19. 2-7); there is evidence of the persistence of this group of followers of the Baptist into Post-apostolic times.

ment of a dogma, is in requisition. To reach and lay hold of Christ in His living personality, requires an aid above intellect and nature. "No man can say *Jesus is Lord*," declared the other theological Apostle, "except in the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12. 3). "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah," exclaimed Jesus to His first confessor; "flesh and blood did not reveal it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16. 17). The adoring, self-surrendering faith in Jesus Christ, which cries out in His presence, "My Lord and my God!" is an inspiration, never a mere attainment; it is the gift of God, meeting the soul's effort and yearning toward its Redeemer. To this confession the individual witness, along with the whole living Body of Christ, is enabled and compelled by the Spirit "which we have from God." That Spirit is in fact the Supreme Confessor; and the proof of the Saviourship and Godhead of Jesus rests essentially upon the testimony of the Holy Ghost to the consciousness of the Church, and through the Church to the world at its successive epochs. "He shall testify of me," said our Lord concerning the coming Paraclete, "and you also shall testify" (John 15. 26, 27).

2. There are two further and supplementary tests applied by St John in his trial of the spirits. The first of these—a criterion arising immediately from the witness of the Holy Spirit—is found in *the general consent of Christian believers*. The teaching the Apostle denounces was repudiated by the Church, while it found large acceptance outside—"the world heareth them" (the false prophets). The seductions of the spirit of Antichrist are "overcome" by the Apostle's "little children," children though they be, because they are born "of God"; in them resides a Spirit "greater than" that which "is in the world." Plausible as the new doctrine was, and powerful through its accord with the currents of the time, the readers of this letter, as a body, have already rejected it (comp. p. 223). They felt that it could not be true. They had broken through the network of error cast about them, and had flung



it aside. The stronger spirit in themselves is proof against its strong delusions. They had received an "anointing from the Holy One," in virtue of which they "know the truth"; and they detect as by an instinctive sense the "lie" that counterfeits it (2. 20).

This test, one must admit, is difficult to apply. The orthodoxy dominant in a particular Church, or at a given moment, may be something widely removed from the orthodoxy of the Holy Ghost. One must survey a sufficiently large area to get the consensus of Christian faith; and one must limit the Apostle's maxim to the central and primary truths of the Gospel, to the sort of principles that he had in view; it is illegitimate to extend it to questions such as that of "the three orders" in Church government or the refinements of the Quinquarticular controversy. As regards St John's particular criterion, it is remarkable that the catholic doctrine of the Redeemer's Person shaped itself from the earliest times into authoritative form, and has been accepted by the Church in its several branches with overwhelming unanimity ever since. Here, above all, the concert of Christian testimony is clear and full; each succeeding generation has made its acknowledgement of God in Christ; and we can anticipate the acclamation which the Seer of the Apocalypse heard arising from all created things,—

"Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb,  
Be the blessing and the honour, and the glory and the dominion,  
For ever and ever!"

3. Verse 6 adds to the two previous tests of the true and the false spirits a third, in which they are combined, viz. that of *agreement with the Apostolic testimony*. "You are of God," St John asserted about his readers in verse 4, while "they are of the world" (ver. 5); now he continues, speaking for himself and his brother witnesses, who had "seen and handled the word of life" (1. 1-3), "*We are of God, and men are shown to be of God or not of God by the fact of their hearing or refusing us.*"

This was an immense assumption to make—a piece of boundless arrogance, if it were not simple truth. Lofty as it is, the assumption has now the endorsement of eighteen centuries behind it. Men could hardly say less for themselves to whom the Son of God had testified, “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me.”

The claim which John the Apostle makes in verse 6, has been appropriated by the Roman Pope, who asserts himself the successor of the Apostles as being the occupier of St Peter’s Chair. Of its pronouncements, therefore, the Papacy dares to say, “He that is of God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth us not. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” The history of the Roman decrees and anathemas, and the comparison of them with the word of God in Scripture, sufficiently expose this enormous pretension. The collection of the Bulls of the Bishops of Rome, along with some noble passages, furnishes a melancholy exhibition of human ignorance, pride, and passion. Others beside the Romanists wrest to the attestation of their distinctive creeds this canon, which belongs only to the Apostolic word, and thus narrow the Church of Christ to the limit of their party-walls. Pointing to Conciliar decrees and patristic texts, or to the historical Confessions, they say, “*Hereby* know we the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error!” In guarding against such intolerance in others, one needs to beware lest the schismatic and anti-catholic temper be provoked in himself. Men have denounced bigotry with equal bigotry and matched shibboleth against shibboleth, till Christ has been pitifully divided and His seamless robe torn into shreds to serve for the ensigns of contending sects.

“He that knows God,” in the language of verse 6 (ὁ γινώσκων τὸν θεόν), is strictly “He who is *getting to know* God”—the learner about God, the true disciple. Is it not to the teaching of the New Testament that such men, all the world over, are irresistibly drawn, when

it comes within their knowledge? They follow its sound, they listen to the Gospels and the Epistles, as the eye follows the dawning light and the intent ear the breaking of sweet music and the famished appetite the scent of wholesome food. The soul that seeks God, from whatever distance, knows, when it hears the word of this salvation, that its quest is not in vain; it is getting what it wants! The self-styled "Vicar of Jesus Christ" calls Christ's flock to obedience, deeming himself the universal bishop of souls, and men "flee from him" on all hands as freedom and intelligence advance; his Allocutions sound as "the voice of a stranger," without the shepherd's accent. But they will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, and of those in whom the Spirit of His love and wisdom speaks. Peter and John and Paul may still say, to this modern age of vastly increased knowledge and keen research, "He that is of God heareth us!" We have found out nothing truer or deeper about God than that which these men have taught us; still "no other name is given amongst men, whereby we must be saved," than the Name which they preached to mankind. Reverence for Jesus Christ's Apostles is to-day the common badge of earnest and religious souls.

"From this," then, "we know,"—starting from this test; for the other criteria are reduced and traced up to this. Here is found their historical spring and practical resort. The Church's confession of her Lord, and the faith that carries this confession to victory within the heart and intellect of the individual believer, both of them originate from the witness given to their fellows by the chosen disciples of Jesus Christ, which has been set down for all time in the record of Scripture. We believe on *Him*, as Jesus said, through *their* word (John 17. 20). The spiritual consciousness of the Church is inseparable from its historical ground in the New Testament.

The spirit of the present age is vaunting and overweening in its judgements; it has high qualities, and is

charged with mighty influences gathered from the past But it is mutable and fleeting, like the spirit of every age before it; there are things superior to its verdict, and that will not wither under its adverse breath. The Eternal Spirit spoke in the words of Jesus and His witnesses; the time-spirits, one after another, receive sentence from His mouth to whom all judgement is committed. The history of human thought is, in effect, a continued "trying of the spirits" as to "whether they are of God." The Gnosticism of St John's day, which attempted to weigh the Gospel and Christ and the Apostolic doctrine in its critical scales and to give the law to our Lord's Person, was in due time judged at His bar and passed into oblivion. Every subsequent encounter between the Spirit of Christ and of Anti-christ has had the like issue. Our Lord's incarnate Godhead is the test of every creed and system. His word is the stone of foundation on which "whoso falleth shall be broken to pieces," and that which is built standeth fast for ever.

## THE DIVINITY OF LOVE

Solidarity of Love in the Universe—Love *of*, not only *from* God—Love the “One Thing needful”—Lovelessness of Man—Love and other Attributes of the Godhead—The Incarnation the Outcome of God’s Fatherhood—Bethlehem consummated on Calvary—The Surrender of the Son by the Father for Man’s sake—The Conquests of God’s Father-love—Divine Love “perfected” in Good Men—Thwarted in Selfish Men.

“ Beloved, let us love one another ;  
For love is of God, and every one that loveth hath been begotten of God,  
and knoweth God.

He that doth not love, hath not known God ; for God is love.

Herein was manifested the love of God for us,—  
In that God hath sent His Son, the Only-begotten, into the world,  
To the end that we may live through Him.

Herein is love :

Not in that we loved God, but in that He loved us,  
And sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins.  
Beloved, if God so loved us, we too are bound to love one another.

God no one hath at any time beheld :  
If we love one another, God dwelleth in us,  
And His love, consummated, is in us.

Herein we know that we abide in Him, and He in us,—  
In that He hath given us of His Spirit ;  
And we have beheld, and do bear witness,  
That the Father hath sent the Son to be Saviour of the world.”

1 JOHN 4. 7-14.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE DIVINITY OF LOVE

ALL St John's arguments lead to one conclusion, all his appeals have one intent: "Beloved, let us love one another." Heaven and earth, nature and grace, the old times and the new, sound to his ears one strain: "Little children, love one another!" This is the gist of the Epistle, and formed the burden of the aged Apostle's ministry (see pp. 49, 195). Twice already has he enlarged on the command of love,—urging it in chap. 2. 7-11 as the law of a true life for man, and in chap. 3. 10-18 as the sign of a new birth from God.<sup>1</sup> He has now to ground these positions by showing that *love is of the essence of God Himself*. The pure affection glowing in human hearts comes from the bosom of the Father; the spark of brotherly love cherished under the chills and obstructions of earthly fellowship, has been kindled from the fires that burn everlastingly in the being of the All-holy. The solidarity of love—our love one with that dwelling in the infinite God, all love centring in one Divine communion and commonwealth: this thought possesses the writer's mind for the rest of chapter 4. He holds it up as a jewel to the sun; each turn of expression, like another facet, flashes out some new ray of heavenly light.

The paragraph before us is hortatory and ethical rather than theological. The Apostle is commending

<sup>1</sup> See Chaps. XI and XVII.

love, not defining or explaining God. To the three tests laid down in verses 1-6 of the true and false spirits abroad in the world, viz. the confession of the incarnate God in Christ, the verdict of the Christian consciousness, and the sentence of the Apostolic word (see Chap. XIX), a fourth is now virtually added. Faith in the incarnate, redeeming Son of God works by love, like no other power that has touched mankind; by this outcome Christian doctrine verifies itself and vindicates its origin. The spirit of love coincides with "the Spirit of truth" (ver. 6),—

"That mind and soul according well,  
May make one music."

Their identity constitutes the reality of life. Here the Apostle John's inmost convictions are rooted—in the experience of the life hid with Christ in God. "God is light" at once and "love"; "grace and truth came"—elements one and indivisible—"through Jesus Christ" (John 1. 17). The best is always the truest and surest. At the core of the universe, in the innermost substance of things, there is found a pure goodwill. Love furnishes, therefore, the practical guarantee of religious truth: "He that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (ver. 7). The two requirements that were prescribed to us in chap. 3. 23—"that we should believe the name of God's Son Jesus Christ" (in other words, should hold fast the truth about Him), and "should love another"—on which the fourth chapter turns, are complementary demands. The love of the Christian is born of and fed from his faith; his faith blossoms out and fructifies in his love.

Three main ideas respecting the love revealed in Christ emerge from this section of the letter: *love's source* in the nature of God, *love's manifestation* in the mission of Christ, and *love's consummation* in the Christian brotherhood. These steps of thought are marked by the three leading sentences, "God is love," "He sent His Son a propitiation," and "If we love



one another, His love hath been perfected in us." We trace, then, in the course of these verses the fountain, the stream, and the issue of redeeming love.

1. "Love is of God," "God is love" (vers. 7, 8). The former apophthegm bottoms itself upon the latter. They serve severally to justify the two assertions made about the lover of his brethren, "that he is begotten of God"—his new nature springs from the Eternal Fount of love; and that "he knows God"—since he knows love, and that is just what God is.

God sends us many blessings from outside Himself; "every good gift is from above" (James 1. 17). Health of body, friendship and natural kindness, rain and sunshine, flowers and springtide—these are *from* God, being His creatures bestowed on us. We cannot say, without a pantheistic confusion of ideas, that they are *of* God, for God's own nature is not in any or all of such bounties. Men enjoy them richly apart from the Bestower; they do not serve of themselves to bring God to the mind; it is by inference rather than intuition that we connect Him with them. It is otherwise with the "love" that St John describes—the spiritual gravitation drawing soul to soul, the profound emotion uniting the children of God which fills Christian assemblies and burns in the hearth-fires of the household of faith. This flame is fanned by the breath of the Holy Spirit; its heat and life are drawn from no other source than the heart of the Eternal.

"Herein is love": here is the sun which shines through all love's heavens, here the fountain-head from which its thousand streams derive; "herein have we known love" (3. 16). In this disclosure a clue to creation is given us; the secret mind of God toward His universe comes to light, in the revelation of the Father made by Jesus Christ; for, as the Apostle teaches elsewhere, "all things were made through" Christ, the eternal Word and Will of the Father. The discovery brings peace; it gives to our souls the rest vainly sought elsewhere. The heart craves affection, as the

understanding craves knowledge. The poetry of the human race, the romantic flights of fancy, the delights of home, the sacrifices of friendship and patriotism, all testify to this deep hunger which springs up afresh in every young soul, to the immense capacity for love in our common nature. In callousness men conceal, or beat down within them, this instinct; folly and depravity tempt them to slake the thirst at poisoned springs, or they "hew out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water." Their very sins point to the need and the capability for better things. At the bottom of our restless passions lies the aching of the human heart for the love of God. Through the weary generations the children of men have groped and famished for a perfect sympathy, for some enduring and adequate affection. It is found at last, and the Apostle shouts the great *eureka*, "Herein is love!"

St John argues by contrast; the lights of his picture are developed by deep shadows (comp. 3. 10-12). He reminds us where love is not, that we may better realize where indeed it is: "Not that we loved God"—if there be love between ourselves and the Creator, it did not begin with us. In human affections it is often hard to tell upon whose part the attraction commenced; there is no difficulty in deciding here. We ought to have loved God; we were made for this. We could love; many objects won and held our regard, while the heart was cold toward its Maker. We feared Him and worshipped Him from a distance—the Unknown and Undesired; we did not love Him. Thus many of St John's readers, then and now, must confess. The things we hankered for and dreamed over, the prizes that glittered in our eyes—alas, God was not in them; we desired, we admired everything, anything, rather than Him who is the centre and glory of all. From the Father of spirits love originates, not from His erring children. The heart of man—selfish, vain, impure—could never have given birth to aught that resembles the gospel of Jesus

Christ. God "loved us when we were dead in trespasses and sins," and "reconciled us to Himself when we were enemies" (Rom. 5. 8, 10). He loved us then, as Jesus saw; for His rain moistened our fields, His sun shone along our pathway; His Spirit gave strength to our frame and light to our reason, even while we used strength and reason against the Giver. On His part forbearance, pity, forgiveness, love—a goodness ever leading to repentance; on man's part coldness, pride, unbelief, rebellion—"the carnal mind" that "is enmity against God" (Rom. 8. 7).

We spoke just now of love as being a necessity for man, a demand supplied by the Gospel of Christ. But this is a one-sided view; such modes of statement put ourselves in the first place rather than God. The Gospel was in truth a necessity for God's own love. "God is love," and love must bless. It is a communicative principle, and looks for reciprocity; it consumes the heart till it finds vent. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is nothing else than God's love taking voice and shape, God's love rending the veil and looking forth. Long time had it refrained itself: now it will be held back no longer; it will stop at no sacrifice, and be affronted by no rejection; at any cost the Father's love must win back man's rebel heart and save the doomed race. One is overwhelmed to think of the infinite depth and force, the awful passion and the iron restraints, of that love for man in the being of the Almighty which sent His Son upon the work of redemption.

In asserting that "God is love," the Apostle does not mean that He is love and nothing more; this attribute does not make up the sum of the Infinite (see p. 98). Other predicates hold equally of Him; *God is reason, God is will, God is conscience, is righteousness*. When "Jesus Christ the righteous" was said, in dying, to have been "a propitiation for our sins" (ver. 10; 2. 2), this implied, unless St John has twisted the word *ἰλασμός* from its accepted meaning, a high and just resentment in God against transgression, beside the

love He bears to the transgressors (see pp. 120-129). But when we ascribe to the Supreme those other attributes, we do it with a certain reservation or even misgiving, and remembering that His thoughts are not our thoughts. We feel the danger of limiting the Godhead in the directions indicated, by our defective finite categories. When we say "God is love," we declare a truth the hardest of all to believe, but a truth that, once realized, can be believed utterly and brings with it none of the embarrassment attaching to other definitions. For love (*ἀγάπη*)—that is, self-devotion to other rational and moral beings, a pure good-will that goes out to all whom it can reach—is a notion simple and complete, and capable of indefinite expansion. It posits only a universe of personal being, and a mind that can embrace the whole. In love the contradictions of finite and infinite vanish. In its purity, love is the same in man and in God—in the drop and in the ocean; the compatibility of the Divine with the human in Jesus Christ raises no difficulty on this point. It is love that makes the union of the two natures in one person conceivable, and meets the problems of the incarnation. This, then, is the focus of the Christian revelation of God; around it all the lights play, all the forces work; about this centre the ideas and images of the New Testament group themselves and take their measure and complexion. When we are taught that "God is light" (1. 5), this of course means more than love; but it does signify love in the first instance. Love is the ground-colour of the New Testament picture of God; other attributes blend with this and melt themselves, as one may say, into love to make the perfect splendour of the Godhead.

2. This chief glory of God was veiled from men until Christ came: "In this *was manifested* the love of God—in that He sent His Son."

In our Lord's person there shone, according to St John's testimony, "the glory as of the Only-

begotten from the Father" (John 1. 14)—of One reflecting by immediate derivation and in unshared fulness the being of the Eternal; and love was the glory of His glory. No other religion gained more than glimpses of this mystery. Judaism was taught the *righteousness* of God; Greek thought apprehended Him as *wisdom*; modern science posits God as *force*; Jesus Christ displays Him as *love*—not denying nor ignoring other aspects of the Divine, but centring and co-ordinating them in this. The perfect glory of the invisible God is seen only where St Paul beheld it, "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4. 6).

There are three statements in this paragraph about the love of God which was displayed in the mission of Jesus Christ: first, "God has sent His Son, the Only-begotten, into the world, that we might live through Him"; secondly, "He sent His Son a propitiation for our sins"; thirdly, "the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world." The first sentence declares the design of Christ's incarnation; the second the fact of Christ's atonement. The second makes a climax to the first: in the sending of the Only-begotten love "was *manifested*" (ver. 9); but the Apostle writes "Herein *is* love," when he points to the sending of the Son as "a propitiation for our sins" (ver. 10). The broad and final issue of both, as acknowledged in the faith of the Church, is declared in verse 14, assuring us that not "we" alone, but "the world" is the object of the mission of the Son of God. The sacrifice of the Cross forms the crowning moment of the manifestation; "God was in Christ," wrote St Paul (2 Cor. 5. 19), "reconciling the world unto Himself." The entire scope of the manifestation—a human incarnation and a world-atonement—is embraced in the great saying of John 3. 16, "God so loved the world that He gave His Son, the Only-begotten, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

(1) Every syllable in verse 9 is charged with meaning.

*His Son* God has sent—no servant, or created angel—but the Only One, His perfect image, the object of His unmeasured love, His other self. *Hath sent* (ἀπέσταλκεν)—no transient, but a permanent commission; the coming of Christ is a historic fact, but it is also an enduring power, a fixed and effectual certainty; in going away, the Lord Jesus said, “Lo, I am with you always!” *Into the world*—that means, with St John, the present evil world, the enemy’s country ruled by “the prince of the world,” who sits in possession as a “strong man armed,” to be overpowered only at the cost of death (see Chap. XIII). *That we might live* (ζήσωμεν, *come to life*) *through Him*—for without Christ our life was mere guilt and death.

We must venture on the comparison which the Apostle’s words plainly imply—“*the Father sent the Son*”; our Lord taught us to read the paternal heart of God by the affections that move in ourselves, though evil, toward our children. We know perhaps what it costs a father or mother to let the heart’s child go at the call of duty and for the love of souls into some perilous climate, to a life of manifold hardship and disgust. Some parents refuse the sacrifice; they are not “imitators of God.” Are we not to understand that there was a real surrender and a parting, in some sense, on the side of God—an eclipse of “the brightness of the Father’s glory,” an impoverishment of heaven—when the Only-begotten “went into the world?” When the eternal Son took on Himself the nature of flesh and blood and shut Himself within its walls, when He submitted to the infirmities and temptations of frail, suffering humanity—when He thus “came forth from the Father and came into the world”—if words mean anything, and if it be permitted us to think in any positive way about the relations of the incarnate Son to the Godhead, there was a veritable yielding and putting Himself to cost on the part of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; He “spared not His own Son, but *gave Him up* for us all”

(Rom. 8. 32). To say this, is "anthropomorphism" if you like, it is speaking *κατ' ἀνθρώπων*; but the incarnation is itself a mighty utterance of God in human terms, and we cannot conceive of the Eternal to definite purpose in any other fashion, nor except on the assumption that our nature by all that is deepest and best in it mirrors the Divine.

(2) If this had been all and the sacrifice had stopped at the incarnation, how signal a proof of God's love to mankind, that "He has sent His only Son into the world" to give us life through Him! But there is more—wonder succeeding wonder, the birth in Bethlehem, the life at Nazareth, the three years of toil and teaching, followed by the death of Calvary—the incarnation culminating in the atonement: God "sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins." "*Herein is love,*" here the conclusive evidence that "God loved us" who "had not loved Him" (ver. 10). The Only-begotten of the Father steps down at the Father's behest from the throne of heaven to the life of an afflicted and despised man,—downward again at the same command to crucifixion and the grave (see His words in John 10. 18). The Divine Teacher and Master of men becomes their sin-bearer; "the Good Shepherd" must fulfil His shepherding by "giving His life for the sheep."

The Church makes much of the love of *Jesus* in all this. Perhaps she does not always please Him in the manner of her praise. Our gratitude should not stop short at Jesus Christ. He was jealous upon this point, wishful above everything that men should recognize *the love of the Father*. "I came," He always said, "not to do a will of mine, but the will of Him that sent me" (John 6. 38, &c.); Christ would not allow us to regard Him as our Saviour in distinction from God, but only as acting for God, with God the Father impelling and approving Him. Jesus Christ is the full and proportioned image of the invisible God. Our sins are no less intolerable to the Son than to the Father.

This repugnance caused the constant distress of His life; it gave the sting to His death, that He should be "numbered with the transgressors." On the other hand, the pity that the Lord Jesus felt for human suffering, and the delight He had in saving sinners, came from the bosom of the Father. His heart was full of the love that sent Him.

Shall we not think, then, with a trembling amazement of the love of God to our race, which carried out, as it had prepared, the awful sacrifice? The Father heard the Son of His love when He cried in agony, "If it be possible, let this cup pass"—and He did not take it away. The Almighty Father saw Him, the Well-beloved in whom there was no spot of blame, led as a lamb to the slaughter; saw Him stretched out with naked limbs and nailed upon His cross and lifted up before the mocking crowd, and hanging in His blood for those long hours, insulted, tortured, abandoned, till the Patient One must cry, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" and still no hand reached forth to save, no arrows of vengeance launched against the murderers of the Son of God; the dreadful scene went on undisturbed to its close, till the Sufferer Himself should say "It is finished." God would not save His Son, until that Son had saved us.

All this the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ witnessed and (must we not say?) endured; the whole event was, in fact, controlled by His determinate counsel and foreknowledge. God is not glorified by the crediting of Him with an infinite stoicism, an "impassivity" that makes no response to the delight or anguish of His universe. Not so does Jesus teach us, when he tells that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!" The love we ascribe to the Father as His highest praise would mean nothing intelligible to us, if we were to suppose that the experience of the Only-begotten left it unaffected, that the distress of our Lord cast no shadow on the bliss of heaven and sent no thrill



of sympathetic pain to the heart of the Divine, which is for ever one in Son and Father.

“God commendeth *His own love* to us,” says St Paul, “in that Christ died for us” (Rom. 5. 8). The proof lies in the cost of the sacrifice to Him who “spared not His own Son.” Granting Jesus Christ to be the very Son of God, here on the Father’s business and under His direction, no other explanation of the event of His death is possible. From love to men and with the purpose of redeeming them from sin, God sent His Son to suffer and die, and contemplated the sacrifice from eternity. Indeed, our Lord seems to say that God loved *Him* for this very reason—not for His own sake merely, but for His devotion to us: “Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life” (John 10. 17). St John, with St Paul, glories in nothing so much as in the cross of his Lord, because the propitiation that it makes for sin displays the love of God in its uttermost reach, and reveals a grace that overmatches man’s abounding guilt. When one knows this love, he knows God. The universe has no greater secret to tell him; heaven and eternity will be but the unfolding of “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now this manifestation has proved no idle display, no spectacle for mere wonder and delight, but a transforming energy—a light to lighten the nations, a leaven to leaven the lump of humanity. The revelation of God in Christ and His cross has prevailed against bitter estrangement and determined unbelief and rooted antipathy; it has reached the conscience of the world, it has gone to the heart of mankind. Witnesses to the long succession of the Gospel’s triumphs through the centuries since the Apostolic age, we adopt with a richer meaning than his own St John’s profession, “We have beheld, and do testify, that the Father hath sent the Son as Saviour of the world” (ver. 14). “I saw, and lo, a great multitude,” cries the Seer of the Apocalypse, “which none could

number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb ; and they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb !” (Rev. 7. 9, 10). What St John saw in the spirit of prophecy, is becoming accomplished fact. The manifestation of God’s love in the offering of Calvary will before long be visible to the whole world ; it will be recognized by the reverent and grateful spirit of mankind.

3. The unique thought of the paragraph lies, however, in verses 11 and 12, in the conception here given of the effect of God’s love upon men, culminating in the daring words, “His love hath been *perfected in us*,” or (to render the sentence more exactly) “exists in us,—a love made perfect.”

The Divine love, when first manifested, found us dead, for God “sent His Son into the world, that we might come to life through Him” (ver. 9) ; it found us *loveless*. When the Apostle goes on to say (in ver. 10), “It was not that we loved God,” there is a sad *litotés* here ; as St Paul puts it, “The mind of the flesh is enmity against God,” “we were living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another” (Rom. 8. 7, Tit. 3. 3) ; and St John has told us that to “love the brethren” is to “have passed out of death into life” (3. 14). Life, in the Christian sense, subsists by love and knows itself in the consciousness of love. Now the love Divine came in Jesus Christ to communicate itself, to form itself in us ; so, to use His own words, “He came that we might have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10. 10). St John and the people of his Churches by virtue of their abounding brotherly love are rich possessors of the new life which touched the world in Christ.

When the Apostle writes, “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,” what is his argument ? where does the obligation lie ? Does he mean, “We must pay the great Lover back in kind ; we must love the children for the Father’s sake” ? It is a loftier and

directer appeal that he really makes; the logic is that of imitation, not of bare gratitude: "Being God's children (3. 1) and knowing His love in Christ (see ver. 16), we must be like Him; the Father's own love to men beats in our breast; for He is in us, He has given us of His Spirit" (vers. 13, 16). We are reminded of the saying of Jesus, which extends this superhuman affection to infinite lengths, "Love ye your enemies, that ye may be children of your Father who is in heaven. Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5. 45-48); and of St Paul's injunction, "Be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ also loved us." "Who was I?" says St Peter in justifying before strait-laced Jewish believers his consorting with Gentiles in the house of Cornelius—"was I able to withstand God?" (Acts 11. 17). Since He has called these aliens into His household and bestowed on them His Spirit, "giving them the like gift as to us," His love to them may not be gainsaid; we must give it free course. This man or that may be antipathetic to myself, his temper averse from mine, his style and habits of mind uncongenial,—naturally, I should dislike and avoid him; but God loves and owns the man—how can I oppose His gracious will or despise what God esteems? This is the argument that beats down pride, and makes coldness of heart amongst Christians a mean and miserable thing.

But, in the Apostle's sense of the matter, there is something deeper than imitation in this conforming of human love to the Divine; God's own Father-love is in the brother-love of His children, and *is consummated in theirs*,—*τετελειωμένη ἐν ἡμῖν ἐστίν*. The eternal love that sent Christ on His errand, attains its full sway and development, and realizes itself to perfection, only when men love one another in Christ's fashion. "For God can do nothing greater in His love than to realize in us His innermost nature, which is love, and so to make within us His fixed dwelling-place" (B. Weiss). Till we are brought to this, till perfect love has cast

out in God's children all bitterness, meanness, self-will and self-seeking, the love of the Father finds itself wanting and imperfect, since it misses its due effect and full display, and is robbed of its crown of beauty. Despite its grand revelation in the person and the cross of Christ, the infinite love of God still manifests itself to the world a maimed and half-impotent thing, because of the sour spirit, the envious and contentious temper, of so many of those who represent it to their fellows. As Christ the Author of faith "could not do many mighty works" where unbelief stood in His way, so God the Father of love cannot be known in His proper character nor accomplish His perfect work, where His human instruments are flawed with sin and His witnesses by their lovelessness gainsay love's message sent through them.

"The name of God is blasphemed because of you," said St Paul to unworthy Jews (Rom. 2. 21); and "because of you the love of God is denied," he would have said to unlovely Christians. They thwart the love of the Almighty. They reduce it, so far as in them lies, to a broken force, a great endeavour that has failed to reach its mark. Happy is it for the man from whose heart and life all obstruction to the good pleasure of God's saving will has passed away; "in him verily is the love of God perfected."

## SALVATION BY LOVE

St John's Freshness in Repetition—God in Men that love Him—Men love Him for sending His Son—Chilling Effect of a Minimizing Christology—Faith reproduces the Love it apprehends—Love removes Fear of Judgement—Confidence of the Christ-like—Fear a Salutary Punishment—Learning Love from God—The Lie of loving God *alone*—Orthodoxy without Charity—God no Monopolist.

“ Whosoever should confess that Jesus is the Son of God,  
God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

And we have come to know, and have believed, the love that God hath  
in regard to us.

God is love;

And he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him.

Herein hath love been perfected in us, that we may have confidence in  
the day of judgement,

Because as That Other is, so we also are in this world.

There is no fear in love, but the perfect love driveth out fear;

Because fear hath punishment, but he that feareth hath not been  
perfected in love.

We love, because He first loved us.

If any one should say, “ I love God,” and hate his brother, he is a liar;

For he that doth not love his brother, whom he hath seen,

Cannot love God, whom he hath not seen.

And this commandment we have from Him,

That he who loveth God, should love also his brother.”

1 JOHN 4. 15-21.

## CHAPTER XXI

### SALVATION BY LOVE

**V**ERSES 7-21 of this chapter form the longest paragraph in the Epistle. There is no interruption in the current of thought, and our sectional division at this point may appear artificial. St John is pursuing the same theme—to him a never-ceasing wonder and entrancement—the thought of the eternal Father's love, that flows through Christ into human souls and draws them into blissful union with itself and with each other. To think that "God so loved the world!" We traced redeeming love, in verses 7-14, from its source in the being of God to its consummation in the brotherhood of the Church. It seems as though there were nothing more to be said upon this line; when the Apostle has shown that "the love of God has been perfected" in Christian men who are true to their calling (ver. 12), and that by such manifestation of God's goodness made in their lives they are assured of His indwelling (ver. 13) and verify to the world the truth of the Redeemer's mission (ver. 14), the Apostle has surely exhausted the subject; he has said the last possible word upon it. There is, in fact, scarcely a single new word, or new item of thought, in the last seven verses of the chapter. These sentences are for the most part a rehearsal of ideas that we have already met in the letter; but the combination gives them fresh import and significance. They are brought into relation with the love manifest in the character of Jesus,

where all Christian truth is focussed by St John; they are thus made to shine with new light, and to yield applications not apparent before.

The ideas of this section are accessory and supplemental to the governing conception of the last section; it is difficult to present them in a clear analysis. The teaching of verses 15-21 may be reduced, however, to the following topics: the connexion of Christian love and faith (vers. 15, 16), the relation of love to judgement (vers. 17, 18), the identity of love to God and love to men (vers. 19-21); in other words, *love lives by faith, love casts out fear, love unites God and man within one breast.*

1. The conception that we have just elicited from verses 15 and 16 is only apparent upon reading these sentences in the light of the earlier context. At the end of chapter 3, as we remember (pp. 306, 307), St John laid down two things as the tokens of a genuine Christianity—"that we should believe the name of the Son of God, and that we should love one another." The false teachers of the day were discredited upon both points: they did not believe what this *name* affirms—that *Jesus* and *Christ* are one, and that He is the Son of God; and they were wanting in brotherly love and practical benevolence. At the same time, the Gnostics assumed to be "dwelling in God," to be spiritually united with the Deity, in a manner beyond that of ordinary Christian believers, by virtue of their deeper knowledge of God's being. The Apostle, therefore, brought to bear upon their pretensions a two-fold test: in the first paragraph of chapter 4 (vers. 1-6) he applied to the spirit of error the touchstone of a sound faith in the person of Christ; and in the second paragraph, which we last discussed, he opposed to it the law of Divine love operative in the mission of Christ. Now he proceeds to draw these two principles together, and he finds that they are one. Verses 1-6 and verses 7-14 are fused together and brought to a single point in verses 15, 16. To say that "if any one confesses that



Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God dwells in him," is to reaffirm in experimental language what was declared more abstractly in verse 2, that "every spirit which confesseth Jesus Christ as come in flesh is of God"; the same criterion was given, for the detecting of Anti-christ, in chap. 2. 22, 23; once more this challenge will ring out (chap. 5. 1) in the words, "Every one that believes that Jesus is the Christ, has been begotten of God."

But why should the assertion of the Godhead of Christ be made just here? how does the confession of this determine God's dwelling in men? "That Jesus is the Son of God" is a theological dogma, a metaphysical article of the creed: what has this to do with ethical Christianity? Much every way. The great doctrinal affirmation of verse 15 comes in between the statements of experimental religion made in verses 14 and 16, and is the link connecting them; it supplies the key to them both. "*We* (*ἡμεῖς*)," the Apostle writes in verse 14, opposing himself and his readers to men who profess a different doctrine—"we have beheld and do bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son as Saviour of the world" (ver. 14); and again, with the same emphasis, "*We* (*ἡμεῖς*)"—not those others—"have known and have believed the love that God hath toward us." For it is those only who discern in Jesus the Son of God, who see in His coming the mission of *the Son* sent by *the Father* for the world's salvation, who apprehend the scope of the Christian redemption and can testify with effect thereto; to others it must seem a lesser and lower thing. Understanding as these do—as they alone can do—the transcendent greatness of the Saviour and His infinite preciousness to God, they realize the love of God which gave Him to the world. The man who gives this testimony is of the Father's mind concerning Christ; he has heard the Voice which said from heaven, "This is my Son, in whom I am well-pleased"; he is one with God in regard to Jesus Christ and the purposes of grace disclosed in Him. So "God dwells in"

the confessor of this truth and he "dwells in God," since the Father who sent His Son, and the believing soul that receives Him, have come to agreement about Him and are at peace in Him (p. 91). The acknowledgement of the Divinity of Christ is necessary for a proper sense of the love of God. It was no inferior messenger, no creature-angel, no effluence or emanation, or single ray of His glory out of many; it was the Only-begotten, "the fulness of the Godhead," the Word that was God with God in the beginning, whom "God sent into the world, that we might live through Him." By the Divine glory of Christ we estimate the love of the God who gave Him to our race. The largeness of His salvation is measured by the majesty of the Saviour's person.

Any theory, whether of the ancient Gnostic or the modern Unitarian type, which makes Christ's nature less than Divine, makes God's love less than perfect in the same proportion. The theology which robs Christ of His Godhead, robs God of the glory of His love, and robs man of the one belief that generates a perfect love within him. To weaken faith is to deaden love. Faith in the Divine Sonship and mission of Jesus Christ is the channel along which God's redeeming love is flowing into the world. Obstruct that channel, and you arrest the work of salvation; you impoverish the world of the love of God, which beats with all its strength in the hearts of those who know God's own Son for their Saviour.

Faith begets love in the children of God, because it is faith *in* love: "we have known and have believed the love<sup>1</sup> that God has in us." Faith's issue is love, for its

<sup>1</sup> Ἡμεῖς ἐγνώκαμεν καὶ πεπιστεύκαμεν τὴν ἀγάπην κ.τ.λ. (ver. 16). "The two verbs form a compound verb, in which the idea of *belief* qualifies and explains what is, in this case, the primary and predominant idea of *knowledge*" (Westcott), repeated from verse 14. This accounts for the *accusative* following πεπιστεύκαμεν, under the regimen of the dominant ἐγνώκαμεν; otherwise, πιστεύω with the accusative means to "entrust." The perfect tense indicates the settled, effective character of the faith signified. On the form ἐγνώκα, see p. 139. The expression "the love which God hath *in* us" (ἐν ἡμῖν)—not "for us," "toward us" (ἡμῖν, ὑπὲρ

object is love; it lays hold of the love that is in God, and reproduces that love in its own working. Faith is the channel by which God's love imparts itself and finds passage through the world, pouring from heart to heart. Faith is the gaze by which, as men look on the Divine glory in the face of Jesus Christ, they are "transformed into the same image" (2 Cor. 3. 18). We understand therefore how the Apostle can say in the two succeeding verses (15 and 16), using identical terms but reversing the order of the clauses, first, that "God dwells in him and he in God," who "confesses Jesus as God's Son"; then, that "he dwells in God and God in him," who "dwells in love." For thus to confess Jesus is to realize God's love to men; and he who realizes God's love in this way becomes possessed by it, and is thus, in effect, possessed by God Himself. He "dwells in love" as one surrounded by its atmosphere, bathed in its light—and so "dwells in God"; his soul is filled with its fragrance, inspired by its effluence, swayed by its motions—and so "God dwells in him."

For "God is love." A second time this equation is made; it is repeated in verse 16 from verse 8. This is the watchword of the Apostle John; it is not the whole message of his Gospel (see p. 331), but it is the distinctive note of it; in these three words lies all that he has most at heart to say. God the Father has put His very self into the gift of Jesus Christ, sending His Son from His bosom; and such a gift demonstrates, as no other boon could, that He is *love* toward man. Had the Eternal spent on saving man the whole finite creation, this would have cost little, and proved but little in the way of love, compared to the sacrifice of the Only-begotten. Thus in verses 15 and 16 the Apostle finds in the Divine Sonship of Jesus, the world's Saviour, the evidence that "God is love," as in verse 8 he found in the answering love of the believer the sign

ἡμῶν, or πρὸς or εἰς ἡμᾶς)—points to Christian believers as those in whom God's love is lodged, invested; in whom it finds its sphere and the object on which it rests; comp. verse 12 (pp. 339, 340).

that he has received this evidence and knows God as love. Jesus Christ, coming from the open heart of the Godhead, reveals the love that burns there; and men who catch the flame from Him, kindle its fire all through the world.

2. From the dwelling-place of the soul in God, the Apostle looks on toward "the day of judgement" and the fears that it excites (vers. 17, 18). More than once he has directed our thoughts this way. In chap. 2. 28 he urged the readers to "abide in God, that if Christ should be manifested, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." This anticipation lay behind the words of chap. 3. 3, "Every one who has this hope set on Him, purifies himself as He (Christ) is pure"; and of verse 19 in the same chapter, "Herein we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." In the self-accusation of the heart wanting in brotherly love, that was intimated in verses 20, 21 following the sentence last quoted, we felt a foreshadowing of the condemnation awaiting uncharitable Christian professors at their Master's judgement-seat (see vers. 14-18 of chap. 3, and Chap. XVIII above; comp. Matt. 25. 31-46).

It is incorrect to say that St John sets aside the Parousia and has no place in his doctrine for the Judgement-day, on which other New Testament teachers insist. To him, as truly as to St Matthew or St Paul, "the coming of the Lord" is the supreme crisis for the soul and for the Church. All human character and doings await the ultimate sentence of "that day"; in St John's eyes no faith and love are of any worth, which will not approve themselves in the final test. "Confidence<sup>1</sup> in the day of judgement" (ver. 17) is a mode in which St John realizes and conceives for himself the end of the Christian life; this is the future aspect and outcome of "perfect love"; it is the crown of blessing awaiting those who "are as Jesus is in this world" (comp. pp. 67, 68, and 231-235).

<sup>1</sup> For *παρησία*, the "confidence" already spoken of in chap. 2. 28 and again in 5. 14, see note to p. 235.

“Herein hath love been perfected *with us*”—that is, with those who hold the confession of Jesus Christ, who have this faith about Him and enter into the truth that He is the Son of God, allowing it to take effect upon them. St John did not see “love perfected” in other quarters; love gets full play and reaches its height only amongst those of whom he has spoken in the sentences foregoing,—the men who “love one another” in the consciousness that “God dwells in them” through the mediation of His Son, who see Christ in their fellows, and God in Christ. He assures his readers that the Divine love which has thus far attained its purpose and realized itself in their case, will bear them on to the final goal. “The love of God poured out in their hearts” and wrought out in their lives will sustain their hope (comp. Rom. 5. 5 ff.) and vindicate them before the Judgement-seat. The “confidence” thus inspired—the boldest and loftiest the human spirit can entertain—rests on a ground of present fact; it is no abstract theological inference, but is warranted by the change already effected in the life of Christian believers: “because as *He* † is, so also are we in this world.”

Now what is He?—“Jesus Christ the righteous” (2. 2, 3. 7), the “pure” (3. 3); “Jesus Christ come in flesh” (4. 2); “the Lamb of God that takes away the world’s sin,” in whom “there is no sin” (3. 5),—the clear, radiant embodiment of the love and holiness of God in human form. And the Apostle who wrote this knew, in all humility, that “in this world” which has “the Evil One” for its lord, with its “many antichrists,” amid a society full of unrighteousness, uncleanness, and lovelessness, he and his companions mirrored in themselves the glory of Christ who is the image of God; they reproduced the character of their Master, and maintained the Christian ideal unimpaired. Having this consciousness of unbroken fellowship with the Lord and unqualified loyalty to Him, it was impossible for him to feel any

† Ἐκεῖνος, *i.e.* the historical *Jesus*, comp. pp. 134, 249.

misgiving in regard to the coming judgement, or to dread the sentence which Christ's lips may then pronounce. *We* may falter in the appropriation of St John's joyous words; but we must not minimize the emphasis with which he used them. Till we can adopt this testimony, till our faith in Christ is so complete that it brings us a full revelation of the love of God and in consequence a full conformity thereto, till we possess

"A heart in every thought renewed,  
And full of love Divine,"

there must remain a lingering of condemnation, a remnant of fear; "he that feareth hath not been perfected in love"—his fear goes to prove this.

And this "fear,"<sup>1</sup> as St John puts it, "hath punishment." The premonition of judgement falling upon hearts that must condemn themselves for defects in love and for disobedience to the law of Christ (comp. 3. 18-21), the presentiment of the conscience that it may go ill with us on such accounts when we stand before our Lord at the last, is a chastening that should both humble and alarm the soul. This is no "torment" (as the older Version misrendered the Greek noun); it is a tender, gracious "punishment," under the infliction of which, as St Paul said in regard to a kindred matter, "we are chastened by the Lord, so that we may not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11. 32). St John's word for "punishment" in verse 18 (κόλασις) is found in the New Testament but once besides,—where our Lord speaks of the "eternal punishment" (κόλασις αἰώνιος) that is to fall at the end on those banished from "the kingdom prepared" for "the blessed children of His Father." *Heartlessness* is the crime that incurs this doom, according to Christ's prophetic words (Matt. 25.

<sup>1</sup> Ὁ φόβος, with the definite article, means "the fear" in question,—that which seizes a man when he remembers that "we must all appear before the judgement-seat of Christ." The article can scarcely have its generic force in this passage; St John is not speaking of fear at large, nor laying down abstract propositions, in verse 18.

34-40). "The fear" which St John associates with defects in Christian love points the same way; such quaking of heart is a salutary earnest of the fate that must overtake those who disregard Christ's need in His suffering members; it is a danger-signal, to be ignored at our peril—a punishment blest to the sufferer if it prove corrective, but growing into an "eternal punishment" when the heart hardens under it.

3. St John's thought moves on from the proof of the Supreme Love given in verses 14-16 to its working upon those who respond to it—first, as it operates *negatively* by casting out fear (vers. 17, 18), then as it works *positively* by fostering love in man to man (vers. 19-21). This last is the mark at which the Apostle's reasonings and appeals are always aimed.

The Apostle has reaffirmed that "God is love"; he dares to connect human love directly with the eternal and Divine: "*We* <sup>1</sup> love, because *He* first loved us." He does not say "*We* love *Him*" (that is the copyist's mistake); but "*we* love"—we have caught the spirit, we have learnt the art of love from God's love to ourselves in Christ (comp. p. 279). It is the same love, existing in manifold forms, which glows in the heart of the child of God toward the Father and toward the brethren; the Apostle is thinking of the source and quality, not of the particular object of Christian love, when he writes as he does in verse 19. The sense of God's forgiving love, of His adopting grace—so pitiful, so benignant, so self-devoting and self-imparting, and so undeserved—smites the heart into tenderness and gratitude, opening in it springs of emotion, depths of holy passion, of which heretofore it knew nothing. "Behold," cried the Apostle, "what manner of love the Father bestowed upon us, that we should be called

<sup>1</sup> Again the emphatic *we* (ἡμεῖς), which we noted in verses 14 and 16 (see p. 345). In a loveless age, a world full of men "hateful and hating one another," St John sees in the Christian brotherhood alone the light of love shining; within the home of the Church a warm and clear hearth-fire is burning, outside is darkness and cold hatred (2. 10, 11, 3. 13).

children of God"! (3. 1). Who can behold this sight and hear in his heart the witness of the Spirit bidding him call God "Father," without a heaven of love and joy being born within him? All his sensibilities are touched and elevated; the whole range of his feelings is enlarged and his moral nature charged with new potentialities, when the love of God comes into his soul. It is not God alone that he learns to love; all his loves and sympathies, every relationship in which he stands to his fellow-men and to the creatures about him, is penetrated by the new influence. He has learnt, for the first time, to *love* with heart and mind, with soul and strength, to pour himself out in affection and service upon others. He casts from himself, with the old fear, the old self-seeking and the old pride.

The fountain of love is in God—"He *first* loved us." The initiative in the great reconciliation and affiance lay entirely with Him, as the Apostle said in verse 10 (see p. 330): "It was not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son a propitiation for our sins." The love *began* there—no affection worthy of the name existed upon our part; love was dead in many hearts, fevered and spotted with corruption in many others. A fresh stream of life and love must be poured from the primal source into the shrunken veins and disordered frame of humanity, that it might know health and joy again. And this renewal has come to the world in the coming of the Son of God. God "*first* loved us"; after that, we learn to love Him and each other.

The exchange of love began with Him; but it does not *end* there. The love which the Father spends on us, does not merely return to Him: the sun's light shining on each planet is reflected not to the source alone, but to every space around the reflector where there are eyes to catch it. If the light and fire of heaven burn in one heart, every other heart within its range is touched by the glow; the radiance of the indwelling Godhead by its mere presence radiates from the life



that holds it. If one has God's love, one cannot help but return it; and in the nature of things, one cannot return it to Himself alone. There is no stopping at the First Commandment of Jesus—one must needs go on to keep the Second; when the heart is in the full course and stream of the love of God that pours upon the world in Christ, it is borne along through all the channels of service and affection. The very momentum of the current, the whole bent of the Divine love and the eternal Will which supply its impetus, carry him whom it has caught into the work of human salvation and involve him in the countless obligations of brotherly love; these demands he has no moral right, and should have no will or desire, to escape.

Such is the logic of redeeming love, which lies behind the Apostle's denunciation in verse 20—the warmth of expression shows that he has actual hypocrites of the sort indicated in his view: "Should a man say I love God, while he hates his brother, he is a liar." The form of expression recalls vers. 6, 8, and 10 of chap. 1 (see p. 104). Here is another of the things which men *say*, but which can never be,—sayings in which the essence of sin's deceitfulness is contained, and which reveal a deep falsity of character, a rent running through the whole tissue of life. There is but one way by which our love to God can be tested and certified. If it be *God* that a man really loves, he will love His image in other men. Our Lord said to those who assailed Him, "If God were your Father, you would love me" (John 8. 42). The Jewish Scribes feared and despised the Nazarene; they saw in Him what was most contrary and condemning to their own disposition—it was the Spirit of God in Him against which they fought; the mind and purposes of God expressed in Jesus, roused the evil in them and brought out the sin of their hearts in furious antagonism. "They have both seen and hated both me and my Father" (John 15. 21-24): such was His final verdict against His people.

St John's accusation turns upon the same argument:

“For he who loves not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” There is something of God to be seen in every child of God, in every “brother” of the household of faith; if seeing that specimen of God, the “seed” of the Divine (3. 9) within the man, you do not love him for it, then it is plain you do not love God, however much you may say or think so. “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father,” said Jesus to Philip (John 14. 8, 9), and what was to be seen perfectly in Jesus Christ is visible less perfectly, but no less truly, in all who “are as He is in this world” (ver. 17). God is manifest in good men. Infirm and faulty men they may be, “broken lights” of the Father’s glory and far from being full of grace and truth—those “brothers whom you have seen”—but they are the one object in which God is manifest before your eyes on earth. His image shines there for every man to behold, who has a sense for the Divine; and those who will not recognize it, fail to see God. If you do not like the visible sample, it is idle to say that you approve the invisible bulk. Orthodoxy without charity, religious zeal barren of human affection, a love to God which leaves a man bitter and cynical or cold and full of selfish calculation toward his brethren, is amongst the most false and baneful things that can exist, amongst the things most blighting to faith and goodness and most hateful in the sight of God. This is the cardinal hypocrisy, the *feigning* of love toward God.

The mind of God has been plainly shown in this all-important matter. The duty is not left to inference; nor does it stand on bare grounds of reason and propriety; it is put into solemn and distinct injunction: “This *commandment* we have from Him, that he who loves God should love also his brother.” This is the sum of “the commandments,” that was illustrated by the perfect life of Jesus (2. 4–6), the “old and new commandment” (2. 7–11) which governs God’s whole will for men from first to last; it is the

command which attends the movements of faith at every step (3. 23, 24); it is enforced by every obligation under which we are placed to God, and every relationship that associates us with our brethren in the Church of Christ. God forbids us to love Him, unless we love our brethren: all narrower love He rejects as spurious and vain. The Father will not give His love to unbrotherly any more than to unfilial men. The Head of the Church spurns the affection that pretends to be fixed upon Himself, and does not seek His lowly brethren. To offer God an exclusive love is to impute our own selfishness to Him and to make Him a monopolist within His universe,—the Father whose name is Love and whose nature it is to “give liberally unto all without upbraiding.” Clearly, the man who proffers this sort of homage to his Maker, “has not seen Him nor known Him” (3. 6).

As Rothe finely says upon this passage, “Just because God is love, He would not absorb the love of His creatures, nor thrust His children aside in the claims He makes upon us. All love to Him He will have divided and shared with men. But this division is only a division in appearance.” God is so truly one with mankind in Christ, that there is no room for opposing claims and divided interests in love’s empire. To impute to the Father jealousy of the love we cherish toward His children, is to belittle and to wrong Him strangely. Every new access of love to God deepens the heart and makes it more capable of generous and pure affection to our own kind.



## THE CONQUERING FAITH

St John's Life-span—The World of his Time—The Long Campaign—  
The Centre of the Battle—Ancient Docketism—Modern Humanism—  
A Real Incarnation and Atonement—Love and Discipline—Loving the  
Begetter in the Begotten—Depth and Breadth of Christian Love—  
The Anvil of Character—Failure of Undisciplined Churches—"His  
Commandments not grievous."

“ Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is begotten of God ;  
And whosoever loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten  
of Him.

In this we perceive that we love the children of God,—

When we love God and do His commandments ;

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments ;

And His commandments are not grievous !

For whatsoever is begotten of God, overcometh the world ;

And this is the victory that hath overcome the world,—even our faith :

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus  
is the Son of God ? ”

1 JOHN 5. 1-5.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE CONQUERING FAITH

ST JOHN writes as a veteran leader in Christ's wars, standing now on the verge of the Apostolic age. The sixty years of his ministry have witnessed all that God had wrought by St Peter and St Paul, for Jew and Gentile; they have been illuminated by the judgement-fires of Jerusalem's overthrow and the martyr-fires of Nero's persecution. The Christian faith has encountered, under one shape or other, most of the world-powers hostile to it. By this time the Church is firmly planted in the cities of the Mediterranean shores; Christ's fishers have spread their nets and are plying their craft along all the currents of life that flow through the Roman Empire. Looking back on his Christian course so nearly finished, remembering the triumph of the Captain of Salvation which has been repeated by His followers in life and death upon so many fields and looking forward with the eye of prophecy to the advent of the new heaven and earth, the old Apostle is able to say, in no presumptuous assurance, "This is the victory which hath overcome the world,—it is our faith!"

It was a dismal world St John surveyed—the world which had Domitian for its emperor, Juvenal for its poet, and Tacitus for its historian. In all directions men lay crushed beneath the tyrannies and evils of the age. He and his comrades alone upon that wide arena stand erect and free; nowhere but in the

Christian camp are there found confidence and resourcefulness: "Who is he that overcometh the world," the Apostle cries, "save he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" *Victory* is the word in which, at this threatening hour, the last of the Apostles sums up his personal experience (ἡ νίκη ἡ νικήσασα) and records the issue of the first grand campaign of Christ's kingdom, during which its future course and history had been rehearsed. He sees "the darkness passing away, and the true light already shining." So Jesus had been bold to say, with Gethsemane and Calvary awaiting Him, "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world!" (John 16. 33.)

St John thus celebrates the end of the first century. We have witnessed the end of the nineteenth; and still the fight goes on,—a weary warfare! As one crisis after another passes, the war of the ages opens into larger proportions; it sweeps over a wider area and draws into its compass more completely the forces of humanity,—this immense combat between the sin of man and the grace of God in Christ. The end is not yet. The powers of evil recover from defeat; one and another of the heads of "the wild beast" are "smitten unto death," and "his death-stroke is healed, and the whole earth wonders after" him again (Rev. 13. 3). The advance of Christ's kingdom calls into the field at every stage new opposers; treasons and schisms, and collusions and compromises with the enemy, have caused innumerable repulses and indefinite delays in the subjugation of the world to the rule of Christ, which seemed imminent to the fervent hope of His early followers. Still their faith remains—our faith—after this long testing, the rallying centre of the spiritual forces, the fountain of hope and refreshment for all that is best in mankind. Everything else has changed; empires, civilizations, social systems, religions and philosophies, have gone down into the gates of Hades; but the Church of Jesus Christ survives and spreads, the imperishable institu-



tion of our race. Still the Gospel shines out over the storm-swept shores, the one lighthouse for the labouring ship of human destiny. The Christian faith, as St John proclaimed and held it, is the most vital thing in the world, the most active and ameliorative factor of modern history. "Neither is there salvation in any other"; up to this date, "no other name has been given under heaven amongst men, whereby we must be saved." Nothing since its coming has touched human nature to the like saving effect; nothing else at the present time takes hold of it so freshly, and with an influence so powerful for good, and for good so manifold, as the doctrine which St John calls "our faith."

The struggle in which John the Apostle was engaged as a foremost combatant, while it has swelled into world-wide dimensions, has assumed features outwardly far different from those of his times. But the identity of principle is profound. And the conflict of faith in the twentieth century, in some of its conditions, repeats the experience of the first century more closely than has been the case at any intervening epoch. Now, as then, the contest centres in the primary facts of the Gospel-record, and in the nature and authority of Jesus Christ as thereby authenticated; other issues are brushed aside. Once more we "have the same conflict which" we "saw to be in" St Paul and St John. Present-day discussions are going to the root of things in Christianity; and Christians may rejoice in the fact, since a conflict so radical should be the more decisive. The testimony of the Apostles to Jesus Christ the Son of God, and the living work of His Spirit amongst men: these two demonstrations, just as at the beginning, supply the ground on which faith and unbelief are now contending. Here lie the burning questions of the hour; other debates, momentous as they have been and still may be—concerning the authority of Church or Bible, the validity of Orders and Sacraments, or the doctrines of Election and Free

Will—have fallen into abeyance in comparison of these. *Who was Jesus Christ? Does He live and work in the world, since His death on Calvary? and if so, where and how?* This is what men are wanting to know; and who of those that have known Him can tell us better, with more intimate knowledge and transparent sincerity, than His servant John?

Let us endeavour to get behind the Apostle's words in this passage, asking from them two things: First, what was the specific object of the world-conquering faith, as St John held it and witnessed its early triumphs? and in the second place, what were its characteristic marks and the methods of its working?

I. The answer to our first inquiry lies close at hand. "Every one who believes *that Jesus is the Christ*, is begotten of God; . . . and whatever is begotten of God, overcomes the world." Again, "Who is it that overcomes the world, but he that believes *that Jesus is the Son of God?*" A little further down (vers. 9, 10) we read: "This is the witness of God, viz. that He has borne witness *about His Son*. . . . He that does not believe God, has made Him a liar, in that he has not believed in the witness that God has borne *about His Son*." Further back, in chap. 4. 14, 15: "We have beheld and do bear witness, that *the Father has sent the Son* as Saviour of the world. Whoso confesses *that Jesus is the Son of God*, God dwells in him and he in God." The assertion of the Divine Sonship of Jesus was the Apostle John's battle-cry. It is enunciated not as the stereotyped and conventional article of a long-accepted creed, but as the utterance of a passionate conviction, the condensed record of a profound and vivid life-experience,—a belief shared by the writer with numerous companions, which had proved no less fruitful in the salvation of others than it was real and commanding to the consciousness of the first confessors. That "Jesus is the 'Son of God,'" that "the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses from sin,"—these facts were the life of life to the fellowship which the

old Apostle had gathered round him; in these two certainties lay the kernel and essence of the faith which the testimony of the Church has sustained in the world until now.

The Apostle, in making these emphatic and repeated statements about his Master, is *denying* as well as affirming. By the time that he wrote this letter, it is likely that most intelligent and candid men who had acquainted themselves with the facts were persuaded that Jesus was in some sense a Saviour and Divine. But then differences began. To people of philosophical training and ways of thinking, the Godhead appeared so remote from material nature that to accept Jesus of Nazareth as being, in any proper sense, "the Son of God" was for them extremely difficult; it ran counter to all their accepted principles. To think of a Divine person being born of a woman and subject to the mean and offensive conditions of physical existence—this was monstrous! The idea revolted their sensibilities; it was an outrage upon reason, to be classed with the Pagan myths of the birth of Athena or Dionysos. For the visible data of the history of Jesus Christ His disciples were competent witnesses, and should be listened to respectfully; but the *interpretation* was a different matter, and required a philosophy beyond the fishermen of Galilee. Faith must be wedded to reason, the revelation of Christ adapted to the mind of the age.

With this purpose of rationalizing Christianity on a Hellenistic theosophic basis, and of reconciling the incompatible attributes of Deity and manhood in the Redeemer, the Doketists (the "men of seeming") broached their theory, probably before the close of the first century. This hypothesis explained our Lord's human and earthly career as being phenomenal, an illusion of the senses, an edifying spectacle and parable, a kind of Divine play-acting, behind which there lay a spiritual reality wholly different from the ostensible and carnal (comp. pp. 88, 318); to this

deeper content of the Gospel, hidden from a vulgar "faith," the men of advanced "knowledge" (comp. 2 John 9; also 1 Tim. 6. 20) held the clue. The writer traverses the Dokeretic doctrine specifically in chap. 4. 2 ff.: "In this perceive the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses *Jesus Christ come in flesh*, is of God; every spirit that confesses not Jesus, is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist" (comp. 2 John 7; John 1. 14, &c.; also 1 Cor. 12. 3). The emergence of the controversy so early shows how strict and high a doctrine of the Godhead of Jesus Christ was held in the primitive Church; this doctrine is its datum and background.

To a humanistic and positive age like the present, the offence of the Person of Jesus Christ lies on the other side. Our aversion is to the transcendental. We are sure that Jesus Christ was man; how can He have been at the same time the very God? The problem of our Dokeretism is to explain His seeming Deity. It has become the fashion to say that Jesus Christ "*has the value of God for us*"—a subtle phrase capable of more meanings than one, but which serves in the case of many who use it to eliminate from the God-man all real Godhead. Let us begin to suspect that Jesus Christ is God simply in human estimate, and we have ceased to esteem Him so. If the face-value of our Lord's name has no solid ascertainable capital behind it, the Christian currency is indefinitely depreciated; all the contents of our faith are depleted, and the entire stock becomes a nominal asset. To say that our Lord has "the value of God" though He is not God, is to take from Him all distinctive value.

Other Gnostic theorists of St John's later days would have it that Jesus Christ consisted of two persons temporarily allied or amalgamated: their views we have stated in Chaps. X and XIX (see especially pp. 219, 220). The notion of a double personality in the Lord Jesus Christ, worked out with numberless variations in detail, was a general tenet of early Christian Gnosticism. The Apostle gives in this letter to all such evasions a point-

blank contradiction : "Jesus *is* the Christ—Jesus *is* the Son of God.—God loved us, and sent His Son a propitiation for our sins.—The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from every sin." As much as to say, "Jesus Christ is not two persons but *One*—the God-man, the sinless Sin-bearer ! We have a real incarnation, a real atonement ; and not a system of phantasms and dissolving views, of make-believes and value-judgements."

By delivering this witness—"the testimony of God," the Apostle calls it, "concerning His Son"—St John has preserved Christianity from dissolution in the mists of Gnostical speculation. He has kept for us the faith which saves men universally and subdues the world—"to wit," as St Paul put it, "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5. 19). Our human nature is a paltry thing enough, in many of its aspects ; but when one sees how it has required, and how all over the world it responds to, the manifestation of God in Christ, it becomes a grand and awful thing to consider. Nothing less, it seems, than the very God made man suffices to fill and satisfy, and thoroughly to save, the soul of a man ; no cheaper blood than that of "Jesus, God's Son," would avail to wash out the turpitude of man's offence and to cleanse his conscience from dead works for service to the living God. These assertions of the New Testament anticipated the experience of nineteen Christian centuries. To say that the old controversies about the nature of Christ, or the modern discussions in which they are revived, are metaphysical subtleties of no importance for practical life, is to say a thing about as mistaken and superficial as could be put into words. By so much as any one has subtracted from the human reality of the character and life of Jesus Christ on the one hand, or from His Divine glory and authority upon the other, by so much he has diminished the efficiency of the Gospel, its power to win and awe the general spirit of mankind and to save the people from their sins.

If Jesus Christ be in point of fact what His Apostles

said, if the infinite God has in Him stooped to our flesh and lodged Himself there for our salvation, then the grace of God and the nearness of God to men are brought home to us indeed. Let me grasp for myself the fact that "God so loved the world," that the man who lived the life of Jesus and died the atoning death upon the cross, is one with the Almighty and is His own and only-begotten Son, the effect on my nature is instantaneous and immense; life and the world are changed to me from that hour. This faith becomes, in those who truly have it, a spring of moral energy such as rises from no other source, a fountain of hope and resolution which nothing can overpower; its source is "the bosom of the Father" (John 1. 18). To have such inward life is, in St John's sense, to be "begotten of God"; it is to become the child of God through faith in His Son's name.

II. The second question, as to the distinctive marks of the conquering faith and the methods of its working, is not answered here so categorically as the former; but its answer is implicitly contained in these verses and occupies a great part of the Epistle. The answer turns on the two main points of feeling and doing, of temper and conduct. The conquering faith, the faith that will meet human nature and needs, that takes effectual hold both of the individual man and of society, must teach us first how to love and then how to behave. Now, faith in the Son of God incarnate does these two things, like no other principle. It inculcates *love and discipline*; it kindles a holy fire in the heart, it puts a strong yoke about the neck. The Christian faith, where it is truly and rightly held, teaches men *to work by love and to walk by rule*.

1. For the former of these two marks verse 19 of chapter 4 has spoken: "*We love*, because He first loved us." Love is the primary fruit and palmary evidence of the Spirit of Christ (comp. Gal. 5. 22). "Herein," says our Apostle, "have we come to know love, in that He (Jesus, the Son of God) for us laid down His life"

(3. 16); it was as if the world had never known love before. Alike in quality and quantity, love has wonderfully grown amongst mankind since the Christian era; it is reinforced, like some feeble stream that was dwindling in the sands, by a new and vast reservoir gathered high in the mountains of God. In its noblest, tenderest, and most fruitful manifestations the love that prevails in the world can be traced back to the coming of the Son of God and dates historically from the Incarnation.

That God the Father should have the love of our whole being, was "the first and great commandment" of Jesus; His gospel secures the keeping of this law. Let any man believe in his soul that God was in Christ, let him behold, as Saul of Tarsus did on the way to Damascus, the glory of God shining on the face of Jesus, and a boundless love is awakened in his heart towards the Great Being who has thus sought his salvation. He begins from this time to serve God as a beloved and trustful child obeys the father; he counts himself a son amongst the many brethren of whom Jesus is the firstborn. That faith in Jesus as the Son of God generates an adoring devotion to the Father who sent Him, the Apostle assumes as a matter of course, and of every-day experience amongst his little children.

It is the further consequence, touching the second law of Jesus, that St John is at pains to insist upon; he returns to this subject again and again (2. 6-11, 3. 10-24, 4. 7-21). For it was here that the difficulty was found in the working of the new faith, as our Lord had predicted (see, *e.g.*, Matt. 24. 10-12). Just upon this point the victory within the Christian heart, and within the Church, was stubbornly disputed; and for the same reason the conquering faith has suffered most of its rebuffs and the long delays of its march through the world. The love toward God to which faith in Christ gives birth, is calculated to give rise to all sorts and forms of beneficent love to men. Thus it was to yield its

manifold remedial fruit; from this spring were destined to flow the streams of mercy and bounty that should renovate human society and turn the barren earth into the garden of the Lord.

The Incarnation is the basis of the loftiest and most powerful human affections. Love to God and to man are, according to St John, identical passions; they are the same love toward kindred natures—kindred, however distant, since they are one in the person of the Son of God and since men are made sons of God through Him; for “whosoever loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (ver. 1; comp. p. 354). It is the nature of *God* that one loves in His children; and if one does not love that nature here, one does not love it there. The pious man who is not brotherly, is a gross self-contradiction. St John is very short with people of this class: “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar!” (4. 20; see Chap. XXI). Either he is a hypocrite, wilfully deceiving others; or else he still more completely deceives himself. “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen”: there is something of God in every good man, and if one does not see and love that something, it is because the eyes of love are wanting. It is not in reality the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that the selfish and suspicious Christian professor loves, but a theological figment of his own brain. According to the doctrine St John has just taught in the closing verses of chapter 4, one cannot love God truly without embracing in the same love men who are His image.

On the same principle of the solidarity of God with men in Jesus Christ, one cannot love men rightly without loving God who is their original: such is the argument contained in verse 2. If love to men proves the truth of our love to God, love to God proves the worth of our love to men. Love to God is impossible without love to man; love to man is possible indeed, but imperfect and unsure without love to God. While



the human affection reveals the existence and employs the energy of the Divine, the Divine affection guards the purity and sustains the constancy of the human. There are those, indeed, who love their fellow-men without any manifest regard to God—amiable, generous, philanthropic men who are not religious. But if the Apostle John was right, there is a grave anomaly, there is some great mistake or misunderstanding, in such instances as these. Some men have more religion than they will admit, or are fairly aware of, as others certainly have very much less. “Herein,” St John writes, “we know that we love the children of God, *when we love God* and do His commandments.”

We must, to be sure, take the word “love” in its Christian sense. We have nothing to do here with the love which is animal passion; nor with the love that is corporate selfishness—the devotion of a man to his family, his friends, his clan, which is consistent with harshness and injustice towards those outside of the narrow circle,—a love without humanity. There is, again, much humane affection which looks to the physical well-being of its objects, but without thought for the true ends and the inner wealth of human life. The higher love includes this lower, which touches bodily need and natural welfare (*τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου*, chap. 3. 17; comp. James 2. 15–17); but the lower is often found without the higher—a philanthropy that sees in the man only the more sensitive and necessitous animal, and knows nothing of his hunger for the bread which came down from heaven. That love alone is worthy of a human being which embraces his whole nature, and strives to reach through the flesh the depths of his spirit, as the compassions of Jesus did. The charity which supplies the body’s needs must be instinct with a sense of that which lies behind them in the sufferer’s soul, or it degrades instead of blessing. When we love in our offspring not our own so much as God’s children, we love them wisely and well. When it is not their wealth nor their wit, nor the charms of person and

manner, for which we prize our friends and cleave to them, but character—purity, courage, reverence, goodness, the God-given and God-born; when it is this, in man or woman, that our affection seizes on and that we treasure as great spoil, then we “love in deed and in truth”; then we know what this great word means, for “we love the children of God.”

All deep human love strikes down somewhere into the Divine, though it may strike darkly and with a dim feeling after Him who is not far from any one. “Every good gift and perfect boon cometh down from the Father”: love is the best of all His gifts; coming from Him, it leads to Him. If that leading be resisted, both God is missed and love is lost. It is a daring word of our Apostle, but we may trust it, if we esteem love worthily: “Love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. . . . He that abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him” (4. 7, 16).

Here lies the secret of “the victory which hath overcome the world.” Love is ever conqueror. There is no refuge for the heart, no fortress in temptation but this. There is nothing that so lifts a man above the sordid and base, which so arms him for the battle of life, as a pure and noble passion of the heart. Where kindled and fed from above, it burns through life a steady fire, consuming lust and vanity and the evil self in us, melting out earth’s dross from heaven’s pure gold. Of all such love working through the world’s mighty frame, the love of God the Father who created and redeemed mankind in His eternal Son, is the central pulse; and the Christian faith creates the main channels and arteries by which it is to reach mankind.

2. To the first characteristic of “our faith,” viewed in its operative force, we have to add a second—the *discipline* into which the Divine love translates itself: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (ver. 3).

In Jesus the Son of God mankind has found its Master. We have in Him a King to obey, a law to

fulfil, a pattern to follow, a work to do, a Church, which is His body, to serve as its limbs and organs. Discipleship spells discipline. Antinomianism is the most shocking and deadly of heresies. Free Churches in which the adjective of their proud title overshadows the substantive, where combativeness and self-assertion have free play and men will not "submit themselves one to another in fear of Christ," are doomed to sterility and disintegration. Without rules and bounds, love spends itself in emotional effusion, it exhales in vapid sentiment. Let the stream be banked and channelled along the natural lines of its course, and it turns a thousand busy wheels, and spreads health, fruitfulness, beauty over the plain which, if left unbridled and unguided, it converts into a stagnant marsh. There is nothing that sustains and deepens true feeling like wise restraint and the harness of well-ordered labour. What becomes of the love of man and woman without the Seventh Commandment? of the endearments of home without toil for daily bread, without household laws and the bonds of mutual duty? Where those once touched with the love of God and the fire of the new life are not taught, or refuse to learn, the right ways of the Lord, where they will not endure "for the Lord's sake ordinances of men" and the "hardship" that makes good soldiers (1 Peter 2. 13; Rom. 13. 1-7; 2 Tim. 2. 3-5), their religious zeal proves evanescent or turns to a wild and hurtful fanaticism. Wholesome, honest love always means *commandment-keeping*.

"The world" on which the commandments of Love's law directly bear is the sphere of each man's personal lot, the homely, circumstantial world of his daily calling. There "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life—all that is in the world" (2. 16)—beset him in continual siege. In that small arena, watched closely by the eyes of God, and perhaps of two or three besides, is waged the unceasing conflict with appetite and pride and passion, with mean circumstances and petty provocations and saddening

disappointments, with languor and indecision, with restlessness and discontent. On this secret battlefield character stroke by stroke is beaten into shape, through the hourly choice and acting out of good or ill amid the countless forgotten details of home relationship and business avocation. There the crown of life is lost or won. Of this near and more intimate κόσμος St John was thinking, rather than of the great world of history and of empires, when he assured his readers of victory; for it was in their personal habits, in the family system and social environment of the times, that the field of their severest struggles lay.

Any achievements gained, whether by the individual Christian or the Church collectively, in the greater world outside depend upon success here in the first place, on the trained fidelity of Christ's servants in their private walks of life. Practised in that gymnasium—in the household, in the school, in the punctual and honourable discharge of daily business—Christian men will know how to behave themselves in the Church of God, how to “walk in rank” (στοιχῶμεν) as men “led by the Spirit” and “living by the Spirit” (Gal. 5. 18, 25), keeping step and time with their fellows. That love of order, that instinct for unity of feeling and action, will possess them which our Lord prayed for in His disciples when he asked “that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee” (John 17. 21).

But where professedly religious men are undisciplined and self-indulgent in their private habits, loose in talk amongst men of the world, unscrupulous in business, irregular in worship both at home and Church, ready to turn their shoulder from the heavier burdens of Christ's service, no one can wonder that discords break up Christian communion or that “our Gospel is hid” and “our faith” in many quarters is flouted by the world, since it is so cruelly wounded in the house of its friends. It is hard to say whether poverty of love or neglect of discipline forms the greater occasion of

stumbling and cause of delay in the Church's advance to conquest. In these defects it is certain our hindrances lie, far more than in any intellectual difficulties or sceptical prepossessions of the time. This is our Master's first and last complaint, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"

To the Apostle John's experience, love and discipline were one, as love to God and to men are one. Love, in practice, is keeping the commandments; obedience, in spirit, is simply love. "But the law of Christ," some one says, "is stern and strict; it requires a righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees." Certainly it does.—"I must be always giving and forgiving, always bearing and forbearing." Indeed you must; who could think of following Jesus in any other way?—This reluctance means simply a cold heart towards Christ. Do our soldiers think it a monstrous thing that they must bear rigid discipline and bitter hardship, that they must shed their blood for King and country? The cruel thing would be to prevent them doing it. Or does the mother count it hard to stint herself for the babe at her breast? If mothers once began to reason thus, the race would perish. "*His* commandments are not grievous," says the heart which knows the love that God hath toward us, "*because they are His*—because I love Him and His lightest word is law to me."

After all, the God-man is the Master of men; His "spirit of power and love and discipline" is bound to prevail with those who bear His name. However long a task it may prove, as men count time, the Lord Jesus will yet have His yoke fitted to the world's neck; and the Father's will shall be done on earth as in heaven. He must reign.



## THE THREE WITNESSES, AND THE ONE TESTIMONY

Transcendental and Experimental in St John—His Gospel an Autobiography—The Three Heavenly Witnesses—*One* Jesus Christ—“Through Water *and* Blood”—The Lord’s Baptism and Crucifixion—Crises of St John’s Faith—The Testimony of Pentecost—Three Witnesses merged in One—“Making *God* a Liar”—Witness of the Christian Consciousness.

**“This is He who came by the way of water and blood,—Jesus Christ:  
Not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood,  
And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the  
truth.**

**For three are they that bear witness—  
The Spirit, and the water, and the blood;  
And the three amount to the one.**

**If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater;  
For the witness of God is this,—that He hath borne witness concern-  
ing His Son.**

**He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in him;**

**He that believeth not God, hath made Him a liar,**

**Because he hath not believed the witness that God hath witnessed  
concerning His Son.**

**And the witness is this,—**

**That God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son:**

**He that hath the Son, hath the life; and he that hath not the Son of  
God, hath not the life.”**

**1 JOHN 5. 6-12.**



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE THREE WITNESSES, AND THE ONE TESTIMONY

ST JOHN'S Gospel is at once the transcendental and the experimental Gospel. *Volat avis sine meta*; but as the eagle bears you with him, you feel the measured beat of his pinions and the warm pulse of his heart. In his loftiest soarings his eye is still upon the earth. There is nothing rapt and overwrought, nothing occult or mythopœic, about the writer of the Fourth Gospel. Not for a moment does he lose himself, or wander off into the allegorizing, Gnostical abstractions so common in his time. Whatever he writes—in Gospel or Epistle—is written by way of "witness," with the verified facts of experience and the necessities of the situation held steadily in view. While his writings are comparatively sparing in description and personal detail, and the Apostle John ranks among the most metaphysical and absorbed of thinkers, closer acquaintance with him shows a mind observant no less than introspective, that for all its stillness of attitude is quite alive to its surroundings, and which reflects in a peculiarly sensitive and delicate way the influences playing upon it (comp. pp. 52, 53). The Apostle rises on the wings of the spirit above the world of sense, but it is to survey that world with more penetrating gaze; and he notices a hundred things which others overlook—the singular turns of the conversation with the woman of Samaria, the "lad" with the five barley loaves and

two fishes among the famished multitude reported by Andrew, Mary's "sitting in the house" when Martha's quick ear and busy foot brought her to meet the Lord as He approached Bethany, the "prophecy" in which Caiaphas determined on the death of Jesus, the "blood and water" issuing at the soldier's spear-thrust from the Saviour's side, the share of Nicodemus in the burying of Jesus and the mixture and weight of the spices brought by him for embalming His body, the meaning of the grave-clothes left in the tomb of Jesus and their careful folding. Such particulars, trivial as they might seem to a hasty reader, arrest St John's attention and linger in his mind, to reveal afterwards their significance.<sup>1</sup>

These and many circumstantials in his narrative show in St John a minutely attentive and selective eye, a memory on which scene and incident, and feature of character and turn of phrase that had once impressed it, photographed themselves with sharp distinctness. Hence, while it is a work of supreme theological value, St John's Gospel is also of primary historical moment. It has supplied the chronological framework of the ministry of Jesus; and it corrects and supplements repeatedly, sometimes designedly, the inferences otherwise drawn from the more loosely framed Synoptic narrative. The opening words of this Epistle ("That which was from the beginning: which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, &c.") indicate the double character of this Apostle's mind—its union of speculation and simplicity, its sublime mysticism and its open-eyed practical sense, its perfect fusion of the temporal and the eternal. In this combination of qualities apparently disparate lies the unique gift of the author of the Fourth Gospel, his power to see and to represent God manifest in the flesh.<sup>2</sup>

This twofold sensibility, equally true to the natural

<sup>1</sup> See John 4. 4-26; 6. 8, 9; 11. 20, 49-53; 19. 31-37, 39; 20. 6-8.

<sup>2</sup> See further, on St John's idiosyncrasy, Chap. V.

and spiritual, which in some form or other distinguishes all the greatest and sanest minds, is the key to the symbolism which pervades St John's writings. His imaginative method differed essentially from the popular allegorism of the day; it is more poetical than philosophical in nature, and was the expression of the writer's genius and cast of mind, rather than of any prevalent school, Alexandrian or Palestinian.

The Gospel of John is in effect, though unconsciously for the most part, a spiritual autobiography. The writer discloses himself silently, in the most naïve and intimate manner possible, as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." After he has told the story of the first miracle, he writes, "This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him" (John 2. 11); and at the end (chap. 20. 30) he sums up all he has recorded as "the signs which Jesus did *in the presence of His disciples.*" As we read and re-read his Gospel, we become gradually aware that we are retracing a great inward experience; we are following the drama of a soul's awakening, the growth of a mighty faith and love in the heart of the man who wrote this tale. The Fourth Gospel is the record of St John's saving acquaintance with Jesus. While this book has a commanding objective unity, and is the history of Christ's self-revelation, of the Father's revelation in Him to the world, moving on to its climax through the contrasted developments of faith and unbelief amongst men, it has no less an interior unity lying in the breast of the author, as it relates the rise and progress of his knowledge of the Son of God. It is the story of the manifestation of the life eternal through the Incarnate Word to the soul of St John. The movements and crises of the narrative, as he unfolds it, were points of vital moment and of crisis in his own discipleship; these supplied him with a mirror to reflect and a key to unlock the mystery of the relations of Jesus to the world. Of this personal and

subjective aspect of his record, of its autobiographical nature, the Apostle indeed advertized us, when he said in referring to his testimony about Christ, "The life was manifested, and *we have seen it*; and we bear witness and report to you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and *was manifested to us*" (1 John 1. 2).

We dismiss, without misgiving or regret, the clause respecting the heavenly Trinity from verses 7 and 8 of the received text. The rejected sentence is a striking statement of the Trinitarian creed of the early Church, to which St John might have subscribed in due place and form; but it is irrelevant to this context, and foreign to the Apostle's mode of conception. What the writer here asserts and seeks to vindicate against the world (5. 1-5), is the Church's victorious faith in the Son of God. To invoke witnesses for this "in heaven" would be nothing to the purpose. The contrast present to his thought is not that between "heaven" and "earth" as spheres of testimony, but only between the various elements of the testimony itself (6-10).<sup>1</sup> The passage of the Three Heavenly Witnesses is now on all hands admitted to be a theological gloss. It first appears in two obscure Latin writings of the fifth century, and made its way probably from the margin into the text of the Latin Version; no Greek codex of the New Testament exhibits it earlier than the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

"This," the Apostle writes in verse 6—this "Son of God," as we hold Jesus to be (ver. 5)—"is He that came through water and blood,—Jesus Christ." By this time "Jesus Christ" and "Jesus the Son of God" had become terms synonymous in Christian speech (see pp. 317, 318 above). The great Church controversy of the age turned

<sup>1</sup> For this manner of *combining* witnesses, comp. John 5. 31-47; 8. 13-18; 10. 25-38; 14. 8-13; 15. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Notes on Select Readings*, pp. 103-105, in Vol. II of Westcott and Hort's *New Testament in Greek*; or Tischendorf's *Novum Testamentum Græce* (8va editio major), *ad loc.*

upon their association (see Chaps. XIV, XIX). St John insists at every turn upon the oneness of Jesus Christ; the belief that "Jesus is the Christ" he makes the test of a genuine Christianity (5. 1; comp. 2. 22; 3. 23; 4. 2, 3, 15). The name thus appended to verse 6 is no idle repetition; it is a solemn reassertion and summation of the Christian creed in two words—*Jesus Christ*.

And He is Jesus Christ, inasmuch as He "came through water and blood—not in the water only." This passage brings to a point the polemical aim towards which the whole Epistle, in one way or other, has been directed (see pp. 61–64, 363): "These things I have written," St John explained in chap. 2. 26, "concerning those that lead you into error"—viz. the "antichrists" and "false prophets" of chaps. 2. 18–26 and 4. 1–6. The heretics whom the Apostle opposes allowed, and maintained in their own way, that Jesus Christ "came by water,"<sup>1</sup> when He received His Messianic anointing at John's baptism and the man Jesus thus became the Christ; but the "coming *through blood*" they abhorred. They regarded the death of the cross, befalling the human Jesus, as a punishment of shame inflicted on the flesh, in which the Divine or Deiform Christ could have no part. Upon this Cerinthian view, the Christ who "came through water," *went away* rather than *came* "through blood"; the Doketists saw

<sup>1</sup> Is it possible that the expression "came *through* water" was borrowed from St John's opponents, and that he adds to it "and blood" so as to traverse its Gnostic use? This might account for what seems otherwise a forced and awkward phrasing. Διά with the genitive is rare in St John (chap. 4. 9 gives the only other example in this Epistle; comp. Heb. 9. 12), whereas the ἐν with dative substituted for this in the next sentence, is exceedingly frequent and characteristic. In such uses of διά the *instrumental* is grafted on a *quasi-local* force; see Winer-Moulton's *Grammar of N.T. Greek*, pp. 473–475. There may be a reminiscence, at the same time, of Psalm 66 (65, LXX) 12: διήλθομεν διὰ πυρός και ὕδατος κ.τ.λ., "We came through fire and water; and thou broughtest us out into abundance" (εἰς ἀναψυχήν, LXX, "unto refreshing"). Psalm 66 is Messianic, as it relates Israel's triumph won through affliction and deep distress. Verses 16–19 of this Psalm seem to be recalled, along with Psalm 22, in Heb. 2. 12 and 5. 7; and verse 18 is certainly echoed in John 9. 31.

in the death upon the cross nothing that witnessed of the Godhead in Jesus Christ, nothing that spoke of Divine forgiveness and cleansing (see 1. 7, 9), but an eclipse and abandonment by God, a surrender of the earthly Jesus to the powers of darkness. This error revived in a new form what the Apostle Paul had called "the scandal of the cross." As the crucifixion had seemed to him, in his Jewish unbelief, a disproof of the Messiahship of Jesus, so to these later misbelievers it was evidence that Jesus, who had been one with the Christ, was a helpless, forsaken man. But St John had found in the shedding of His blood a grander evidence of His Sonship to God, the demonstration of His perfect harmony with and understanding of the Divine will and love to men (4. 9, 10).

The simple words "that came" are of marked significance in this context; for "the coming One"<sup>1</sup> was a standing name for the Messiah, now recognized as the Son of God. "He that came," therefore, signifies "He who appeared on earth as the Divine Messiah"; and St John declares that in thus appearing Jesus Christ disclosed Himself through the *two* signs of blood and water. These emblems signalize two great stages in the Messianic path of Jesus: the baptism of *water* at the hands of John, who proclaimed Him the Lamb of God bearing the world's sin and at the same time the Son of God (John 1. 29-34), while the descent of the Holy Spirit and the Father's voice heard from heaven designated Him in this double character of Christhood and Sonship; and the baptism of *blood* (see Luke 12. 49, 50)—His own blood—which instead of contradicting consummated the water-baptism. For in this blood-shedding Jesus Christ fulfilled His noblest office, He accomplished the universal expiation (ch. 2. 1; Rev. 1. 5, 5. 9, 7. 14). So through the dark gateway of Calvary and the grave He passed to the throne of universal Lordship, and by this passage "came" to His Church

<sup>1</sup> Ὁ ἐρχόμενος, Matt. 11. 3; John 1. 15, 27; 11. 27; Heb. 10. 37; Rev. 1. 4. 8, &c.

in the sovereign power of the Spirit bestowed as the fruit of His redeeming death (see John 14. 18, 7. 39, 13. 31, 32; Luke 24. 26).

Thus the inauguration and consummation of our Lord's ministry were marked by the two supreme manifestations of His Messiahship; of both events this Apostle had been a near and deeply interested witness. Under the sign of "the water" he gathers up all the testimony to Jesus Christ, from man and from God, that attended His baptism; under the sign of the "blood," all that centres in the cross. When he speaks of the Lord as "coming *through* (traversing) water and blood," these are viewed historically as steps in His march of humiliation, suffering, and victory, as signal epochs in the continuous disclosure of Himself to men and crises in His past relations to the world; when he says "*in* the water and *in* the blood," they are apprehended as abiding facts, each making its distinct and living appeal to our faith and together serving to mark out the ground upon which Christianity stands.

In the above interpretation of verse 6 the opinions of the best expositors concur. And this is precisely the line of thought which corresponds to St John's personal experience, and harmonizes with the tenor and spirit of the Fourth Gospel. The Evangelist was a pupil of the Baptist John. It was the testimony of his former master, and the words and scenes connected with the baptism of Jesus, that led this young and ardent disciple to the knowledge of Christ; so first he was taught—imperfectly at the beginning, and more clearly as the course of events threw light on his first experiences—to discern in Jesus the Christ and Son of God (John 1. 19–51). There followed three years of education in this truth under the Master Himself; then another crisis, which for the moment discomfited, but in the end reinforced and perfected, his faith, when, standing at the foot of the cross, the disciple whom Jesus loved watched his Lord die a death of blood and horror. The witness of "the blood" which was to the world's eyes,

as it was designed by His Jewish judges to be, a complete disproof of the claims of Jesus, had in God's amazing wisdom and mercy become the means of enhancing those claims in the highest degree and of giving them eternal validity (Rev. 1. 5, 6; 5. 9-14). As He said, so it had proved, that His blood was "shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26. 28). Through the virtue of His cross Christ Jesus, as His Spirit and Church together testified, had "come and preached peace to the far off and peace to the nigh," granting "access to both in one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2. 16-18). The offence of the cross had shown itself already in many lands God's power unto salvation; and St John's triumphant saying, "Not in the water only, but in the water *and in<sup>1</sup> the blood!*" echoes St Paul's exclamation, "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (Gal. 6. 14).

The Apostle John, standing beneath the cross and waiting for a sign of its meaning, had seen the blood and water together stream from the pierced heart of Jesus at the thrust of the soldier's spear (John 19. 34, 35); the union became in his eyes emblematic of the double efficacy of Christ's salvation. It united the beginning and the end in the testimony of Jesus, the new birth of water and Spirit and the redemption through blood experienced by His people (John 3. 5; Rev. 1. 5, 7. 14)—the water of purification and consecration, enriched and vitalized by the blood of propitiation. So the whole mission of Jesus was summed up, and expressed itself, in that strange mingled current, which gushed from the heart of the slain Christ to give life and cleansing to the world.

This verse stands in much the same relation to the Christian Sacraments as the related teaching of chaps.

<sup>1</sup> Observe the repeated *ἐν* of the critical text. For the emphasis of this double *ἐν*, comp. chap. 2. 8; and for the force of *ἐν* with a verb of *coming*, where it denotes the defective accompaniment—that which makes the coming valid and authentic—comp. Luke 1. 17; Rom. 15. 19; Heb. 9. 25.



3 and 6 in the Fourth Gospel. Neither here nor there is any direct allusion made upon the writer's part to the ritual ordinances; in both instances there is a clear analogy of meaning, such as could hardly fail to be present to the thoughts of the Apostle and his first readers. The two sacraments symbolize the facts and truths assumed by St John in this place. Observing them in the obedience of faith, we associate ourselves visibly with "the water and the blood,"—with Christ baptized and crucified, living and dying for us. But to see in those observances the veritable *water* and *blood* that were here intended—to make the Apostle mean that the water of Baptism and the cup of the Lord's Supper are the primary witnesses to Him and the essential instruments of salvation, and that the former sacrament is unavailing without the addition of the latter (as though he had written "Not in Baptism only, but also in the Eucharist")—is to trifle with his declaration and to empty out its historical content. The sacramentarian paraphrase substitutes the signs for the things signified, and puts the sacraments into the place which belongs to Christ alone.<sup>1</sup>

Nearer to St John's thought lies the inference that Christ is our anointed Priest as well as Prophet, making sacrifice for our sin while He is our guide and light of life. To the virtue of His life and teaching must be added the virtue of His passion and death. Had He come "in the water" only, had Jesus Christ stopped short of Calvary and drawn back from the blood-baptism, there had been no cleansing from sin for us, no witness to the chief function of His Christhood. "The man who thinks to find Him *in the water*

<sup>1</sup> As Th. Zahn points out in his *Einleitung in das N.T.*, § 70, Anm. 7, the Sacramental interpretation would require *ὁ ἐρχόμενος* instead of *ὁ ἐλθών*, to describe "a repeated coming in the Sacraments," whereas the aorist can only signify the historical "coming" of the Redeemer along His appointed path. Zahn takes *ἐρχεσθαι διὰ* in this passage to be equivalent to *διέρχεσθαι*, with the sense *to go through, experience, submit to*; but lexical support is wanting for such a rendering of the combination.

alone 'has not the Son,' and therefore 'has neither the Father,' nor 'the life'" (ver. 12; 2. 23: so Th. Zahn). The Lord Jesus was "straitened till" His final "baptism was accomplished," for His mission up to that point remained unfulfilled (Luke 12. 50); the "fire" that He "came to cast on the earth" was kindled from the flame which rose heaven-high upon the altar of Calvary.

A third crisis came in St John's experience as a Christian believer with the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. How much this event imported to him is manifest from the length at which he relates our Lord's preparatory words on the matter in his Gospel. This third manifestation of the Son of God—the baptism *of the Spirit* following on that *of water* and *of blood*, a baptism in which Jesus Christ was agent and no longer subject—verified and made good the other two. "And the Spirit," he says, "is that which beareth witness" (τὸ μαρτυροῦν, "*the witnessing power*")<sup>1</sup>: the water and the blood, though they have so much to say, must have spoken in vain and become mere voices of past history but for this abiding Witness and Advocate (see John 14. 16, 15. 26, 16. 7-15). "He shall testify concerning me," said Jesus; "He, the Spirit of truth, shall glorify me, for He will receive of what is mine, and declare it to you." "The Spirit," whose witness comes last in the order of distinct manifestation, is first in principle; His breath animated the whole testimony; hence He takes the lead in the final enumeration of verse 8. The witness of the water had the Spirit's attestation by act, in place of word; the Baptist "testified, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon Him. And I had not known Him; but He who sent me to baptize

<sup>1</sup> In the next verse the witnesses are personified: "Three they are that bear witness" (τρεις εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες, τὸ πνεῦμα, κ.τ.λ.). For the definite article with participial predicate, indicating that the activity in question is the proper function of those concerned, comp. John 5. 32, 39; 14. 21; Rom. 8. 33; Phil. 2. 13.

in water, He said to me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon Him, that is He that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit" (John 1. 32, 33). The first human witness to Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1. 15); his first public attestation was sealed by the Spirit. The three witnesses of this passage are all latent in the testimony of St John's earlier master: the Baptist declared, "I baptize you in water, He shall baptize you in the Holy Ghost and fire" (the *first* and *third* witness); he said again, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world" (the *second* witness—of "the blood"). The testimony of the Holy Spirit, which on the day of Pentecost burst forth in flame cast down to the earth, shoots its hidden fires through the entire historical gospel; and it is that same gospel—the record of the life and death of Jesus—which the Holy Spirit perpetually "takes and declares" to men (John 16. 15). He transfuses it with His life and heat, and age after age burns it anew into the conscience and spirit of mankind.

"It is the Spirit," therefore, "that bears witness"; in all true witness He is operative, and there is no testifying without Him. "For the Spirit is truth," is "*the truth*"—Jesus called Him repeatedly "the Spirit of the truth."† Truth in its substance and vital power is lodged with Him; in this element He works; this effluence He ever breathes forth: He is "the truth," as Christ for whom He speaks is "the truth" (John 14. 9). "The truth" is the sole object and content of genuine witness-bearing. The testimony which men give to Christian verities, however formally correct in historical fact or theoretical doctrine, is untrue for themselves and unconvincing to others—unless the indwelling Spirit of Christ animates it and testifies through them. Practically, "*the Spirit is the truth*"; whatever is stated in Christian matters without His attestation, is something less or other than the truth. A still larger

† See John 14. 17; 15. 26; 1 John 4. 6; comp. John 4. 23, 24.

meaning is implicit in St John's apophthegm: the full and perfect "truth" lies in the realm of "the Spirit," in the region of the eternal, the Divine, behind all the things of time and sense (comp. Heb. 11. 1, 3; 2 Cor. 4. 18; 1 Cor. 13. 12, 13).

Such, then, are the "three witnesses" which were gathered "into one" in the Apostle John's experience, as testifying to the truth about Christ and His salvation: "the three," he says, "agree in one,"<sup>1</sup> or more strictly, "amount to the one thing" (καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν, ver. 8); they converge to this single point. The Jordan banks, Calvary, the upper chamber in Jerusalem; the beginning, the end of Jesus Christ's earthly course, and the new beginning which knows no end; His Divine life and words and works, His propitiatory death, the promised and perpetual gift of the Spirit to His Church—these three cohere into one solid, imperishable witness, which is the demonstration alike of history and personal experience and the Spirit of God. They have one outcome, as they have one purpose; and it is this—viz. "that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (ver. 11). The revelation of Jesus as the Son of God is complete from the day of Pentecost onwards; and the Church from that day repeats unfalteringly the witness of the Baptist and the Evangelist, with an ever-multiplying concert of voices, through the whole earth: "I have seen, we have seen, and borne witness that this is the Son of God, that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (John 1. 34, 1 John 4. 14).

The Apostle has told us in verses 6–8 what are, to his mind, the proofs of the testimony of Jesus—evidences that must in the end convince and "overcome the world" (ver. 5). So far as the general cause of Christianity is concerned, this is enough. But it con-

<sup>1</sup> "The idea is not that of simple unanimity in the witness; but of their *focussing* (so to speak) on the one gospel of Christ come in the flesh, to know which is eternal life" (Westcott). For εἰς with this sense, comp. John 11 52, 17. 23.

cerns each man to whom this evidence comes to realize for himself the weight and seriousness of the testimony meeting him. St John points with solemn emphasis in verses 9 and 10 to the *Author* of the threefold manifestation. "If we receive the witness of men"—if credible human testimony wins our ready assent—"the witness of *God* is greater." The declaration of the Gospel brings every man that hears it face to face with *God* (comp. 1 Thess. 2. 13). And of all subjects on which God might speak to men, of all revelations that He has made or might conceivably make, this, St John feels, is the supreme and critical matter—"the testimony of God, viz. the fact that He has testified<sup>1</sup> concerning *His Son*." The Gospel is, in St Paul's words, "God's good news about His Son" (Rom. 1. 2, 3). God *insists* upon our believing this witness; it is that in which He is supremely concerned, which He asserts and commends to men above all else. Concerning this God the Father spoke audibly from heaven, saying at the anointing and again at the transfiguration of Jesus, "This is my Son, the beloved: hear Him." St John had listened to those mysterious voices, and they had taught him the infinite importance of a true faith in the Sonship of Jesus. His resurrection was a crowning vindication of Jesus by the Eternal Father, who thus declared by act and deed that in spite of—nay, because of—His death, He was more than ever the Son of His good pleasure (Acts 13. 32–35, Rom. 1. 4). And finally, the descent of the Holy Spirit, bestowed at the request of the exalted Jesus (John 14. 16, Luke 24. 49), was a glorious and demonstrative witness of God's mind concerning His Son Jesus, as St. Peter forthwith argued on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2. 32–36).

Let the man, therefore, who with this evidence before him remains unbelieving, understand what he is about; let him know *whom* he is rejecting and contradicting. "He has made God a liar"—he has given the lie to

<sup>1</sup> Observe the *Greek perfect* tenses in the verbs of verses 9 and 10, implying a decisive and settled fact.

the All-holy and Almighty One, the Lord God of truth. This Apostle said the same terrible thing about the impenitent denier of his own sin (chap. 1. 10); the two denials are cognate, and run up into the same condition of defiance toward God. "He that honoureth not the Son," Jesus said, "honoureth not the Father who sent Him"; "they have both seen and hated both me and my Father" (John 5. 23, 15. 23). Such, the Apostle urges, is the consequence of disbelief in Jesus Christ; it brings men into diametrical opposition to God, and that upon the point which touches most nearly the Divine truth and honour, viz. the witness that He has given to His own Son.

On the other hand, "he who believes on<sup>1</sup> *the Son of God*," "who has heard from the Father, and comes" to Christ accordingly (John 6. 45), finds "within himself" the confirmation of the witness he received (ver. 10a). His inner consciousness and the fruits of faith in his life<sup>2</sup> verify the witness of God about Christ which he has accepted. The testimony of "the Spirit and the water and the blood" forms no mere historical, objective proof; it enters the man's own nature, and becomes the regnant principle, the creative factor of his new life.

The Apostle might have added the subjective confirmation affirmed in verses 10, 11 as a *fourth*, experimental witness to the other three; but, to his conception, the sense of inward life and power attained by Christian faith is itself the witness of the Spirit translated into terms of experience, realized and made operative in

<sup>1</sup> Here we note St John's favourite construction, ὁ πιστεύων εἰς. The Christian believer by giving credence to God's word concerning Christ, attaches himself to Christ and is united with Him; while the unbeliever (ὁ μὴ πιστεύων τῷ θεῷ) refuses to God's testimony about His Son that bare credence which men commonly give to the word of their fellows (ver. 9). There is the like graduation of meaning between πιστεύω with the dative and πιστεύω εἰς in John 6. 29, 30 and 8. 30, 31. See also for the dative, John 4. 21, 50; 5. 24, 46, 47; 10. 38; 14. 11; for εἰς and accusative, John 1. 12; 2. 11; 3. 16, 18; 6. 29, 35, 40; 7. 38, 39; 9. 35, 36; 11. 25, 26; 12. 36, 37; 14. 12; 16. 9, &c.

<sup>2</sup> See 2. 5; 3. 10, 19, 24; 4. 17; 5. 2, 4, 18; comp. John 7. 38, 14. 12.

personal consciousness. "The water that I will give," said Jesus, "will be within him a fountain of water, springing up unto life eternal" (John 4. 14). It is thus that the believer on the Son of God "puts his seal to it that God is true." His testimony is not to the general fact that there is life and truth in Christ; but "this is the witness that *God gave to us life eternal*, and this life is in his Son" (ver. 11). This witness of God concerning His Son is not merely a *truth* to be believed or denied, it is a *life* to be chosen or refused. On this choice turns the eternal life or death of all to whom Christ offers Himself: "He that hath the Son, hath life; he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life" (ver. 12).

"Life" appears everywhere in St John as a gift, not an acquisition. Faith accordingly is a grace rather than a virtue; it is a yielding to God's power, rather than the exerting of our own. It is not so much that we apprehend Christ; He apprehends us,—our souls are laid hold of and possessed by the truth concerning Him. Our part is but to receive God's bounty pressed upon us in Christ; it is merely to consent to the strong purpose of His love, to allow Him (as St Paul puts it) to "work in us to will and to work, on behalf of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2. 13). As this operation proceeds and the truth concerning Christ takes practical possession of our nature, the conviction that we have eternal life in Him becomes increasingly settled and firm. Rothe aptly says upon this passage: "Faith is not a mere witness on the man's part to the Object of his faith; it is a witness which the man receives from that Object. . . . In its first beginnings faith is, no doubt, mainly the acceptance of testimony from without; but the element of trust involved in this acceptance includes the beginning of an inner experience of that which is believed. This trust arises from the attraction which the Object of our faith has exercised upon us; it rests on the consciousness of a vital connexion between ourselves and that Object. In the

measure in which we accept the Divine witness, our inner susceptibility to its working increases, and thus there is formed in us a certainty of faith which rises unassailably above all scepticism."

The language of St John in this last chapter of his Epistle breathes the force of spiritual conviction raised to its highest potency. For him perfect love has now cast out fear, and perfect faith has banished every shadow of doubt. "Believing on the name of the Son of God," he "knows that he has eternal life" (ver. 13). With him the transcendental has become the experimental, and no breach is left any more between them.



## THE EPILOGUE

### CHAPTER V. 13-21

#### THE ETERNAL LIFE, AND THE SIN UNTO DEATH

Postscript to the Letter—Purpose of Gospel and Epistle—Faith and Assurance of Faith—The Certainty of Life Eternal—Practical Use of Christian Assurance—“Asking according to His Will”—The Possibilities of Intercessory Prayer—A Limit to Prayer—What is the “Sin unto Death”?—Mortal and Venial Sins—The Case of Jeremiah and his People—The Mystery of Inhibited Prayer.

“These things I have written unto you, that you may know that you have eternal life,—

Unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.

And this is the confidence which we have toward Him,

That if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us ;

And if we know that He heareth us in whatever we ask,

We know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

If any one see his brother sinning a sin not unto death,

He shall ask, and He will give him life, in the case of those who sin not unto death :

There is sin unto death ; not for that sin do I say that he should ask.

All unrighteousness is sin ;

And there is sin not unto death.”

1 JOHN 5. 13-17.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE ETERNAL LIFE, AND THE SIN UNTO DEATH

ST JOHN is now closing the Epistle. In verse 13 he appears to be dictating his last words. He glances over the course of the letter, and states its purpose in the *past* tense at the end, as he stated it in the *present* tense at the beginning (1. 4): then it was, "These things we write to you, that our joy may be made full,"—to satisfy our own hearts; now, "These things I have written to you, that you may know that you have eternal life,"—to fortify your faith. The retrospective "I have written" has thrice occurred before—in chap. 2. 13-14, 21, 26, where the Apostle was reflecting on the preceding context (see pp. 178-180); now his survey covers the whole writing. He set out to deliver once more the message of "the eternal life that was manifested" in Jesus Christ. He has unfolded the nature of that life, as it brings those receiving it into fellowship with God, as it moulds the spirit and character of men, and meets the reaction against it of the world's sin within the heart and within the Church. In all this St John knows that he is speaking to the experience of his children, that they recognize in what they read the things they have heard from the beginning; he is telling no new story, inculcating no new principles, but making clearer to them what they already hold, and arming them to repel the errors that perplex their understanding and tend to pervert their conscience and cloud the serenity of their faith. The letter has been written therefore, that those "who believe on the name

of the Son of God may know that eternal life" is theirs,—that their faith by its full apprehension of the truth concerning Christ may bring them a perfect assurance, a settled consciousness of their glorious possession in Him. The object of the First Epistle concurs with that of the Gospel of John, expressed at the end of the 20th chapter, where it concluded in the original draft: "These things are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, you may have life in His name."<sup>1</sup> The aim of the Gospel is more comprehensive, for this was designed both to convince unbelievers and to confirm and enrich the faith of believers. The Epistle is directed strictly to the latter purpose (comp. pp. 72, 73).

1. St John recognizes the difference, which every pastor knows who is exercised in the care of Christian souls, between faith and *the assurance of faith*. He has had it in mind all along. We met with the distinction in chap. 3. 19-24; that paragraph turned on the same practical point. "Herein," the Apostle wrote, "we shall know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before God,"—viz. in the consciousness of sincere love to our brethren; again, "Herein we know that God abideth in us,—from the Spirit which He gave us." On such grounds of heart assurance (see Chap. XVIII) he encouraged his little children to build. The whole letter is written to deepen the sense of security in the hearts of faithful Christian men, to promote the inward peace and firm confidence toward God which are essential to vigorous growth and sustained activity in the spiritual life. Such assurance belongs of right to all those "who believe on the name of the Son of God." But they do not all possess it. Writing to the intent his readers "may *know*<sup>2</sup> that

<sup>1</sup> The second purpose-clause of the T.R. and A.V. in 1 John 5. 13, "and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (*ἵνα πιστεύητε κ.τ.λ.*), probably crept in as a marginal gloss, suggested by John 20. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *ἵνα εἰδῆτε*: for the force of *οἶδα*, see p. 238, note <sup>3</sup>. It signifies an abiding conviction, resting on known facts; comp. *οἶδαμεν*, verses 18-20.

they have eternal life," he supposed that some of them, though they have eternal life in virtue of their faith, do not certainly know this: they are not sure of their salvation; they fail to realize their possessions in Christ, and entertain some needless misgiving or unworthy fear; they have a true faith, but not "the full assurance of faith." Theirs is a restless, disquieted faith, shadowed with doubt and disturbed by alarms, sensitive to the atmosphere of the unbelieving world around them. The case of doubting Thomas amongst the Apostles, in whom St John shows a peculiar interest in his Gospel, illustrates the turn of mind.

The condition the Apostle indicates is one familiar now as then; there is no better tonic for it than St John administers in the Epistle. Sanguine and buoyant natures mistake this hesitant disposition; *they* are always sure of themselves (whether right or wrong), and know exactly what they believe and intend. But St John has felt the flagging pulse of believers whose faith once beat high and strong; he has marked the downcast face and troubled look of men daunted by persecution or browbeaten by loud argument; he knows that some of his readers, in spite of themselves, are bewildered in the mazes of theosophy and the flashing sword-play of dialectic. We should be mistaken to suppose that the souls of the martyrs never quaked, that the confessors of Jesus in the first ages were always clear in their convictions and courageous in their testimony, and their reasonings at all times as simple and sure as those that in some classic instance have been transmitted to us. "Out of weakness they were made strong," and they "*waxed* valiant in the fight" on which they entered oftentimes with fearful hearts. Those who prove the bravest might confess to moods of despondency and moments when panic seized them; their worst battle had been with their own cowardice. The firmest believers may have been on occasion forgetful of things they well knew, and tempted to abandon positions of which, in their right

minds, they were perfectly assured. Such dangers were incessant amidst the turmoil and stress of the Church's warfare in the Apostolic times. How needful that it should hear, sounding on from one generation to another, the mighty cry of Jesus out of the midst of the struggle, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!"

Through the force of untoward circumstances, and for want of strong teaching like St John's, multitudes of Christian souls "go mourning all their days"; they dare not taste the freedom and joy of God's salvation, though they show by fruits of repentance, by a self-denial and strictness of conscience such as might put to shame many happier Christians, that Christ is formed in them. For these tender, self-distrustful spirits the Lord has a more abundant life and delight in store: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." But if we *have* eternal life, it is certainly well that we should *know* it; that is the normal and fitting experience of those who are in Christ. The zest and energy of the Christian life, and its power to influence others, depend on the certainty with which personal salvation is realized, on the confidence with which His servants follow the heavenly Master, as men walking in the sunshine of God's favour and having the joy of their Lord fulfilled in them. Such "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." The purpose of St John's Epistle—a chief purpose of all teaching addressed to Christian believers—is *the perfecting in them of the assurance of life eternal.*

Here then the Epistle fairly ends, for the writer's thought has come round in full circle to its starting-point; that the Church should be in conscious and satisfied possession through its faith of the eternal life revealed in Jesus Christ, has been the aim of the Apostle's labours and prayers through a protracted ministry. The two remaining paragraphs are a supplement, like chapter 21 added to John's Gospel, and come in by way of afterthought. Verses 14-17

we entitled, in the analysis made of the Epistle in Chap. VI, *the postscript*. Though an addendum to the letter and not a continuation of its main line of thought, these sentences are no superfluity; they arise out of the conclusion of the Epistle in verse 13. The "confidence toward God" which they describe is a consequence and a needful expression of the faith "on the name of the Son of God" of which the Apostle has just spoken, the faith that makes a Christian man. The confidence which inspires prevailing prayer (vers. 14-16), springs from the assurance of faith that St John has laboured all along to infuse into his readers; it presupposes the consciousness of eternal life in the soul (ver. 13). He who prays so as to win "life" for an erring brother, must have life in himself; he must possess such a knowledge of God and certainty of His good-will to men in Christ as will warrant the boldest intercession on behalf of sinners (ver. 16); this knowledge of the Father is eternal life (see John 17. 3). The postscript is closely attached to the letter, and needs no interval of time to account for its addition.

2. Verses 14 and 15 convey the second lesson of the paragraph, viz., that *Christian assurance takes effect in a life of prevailing prayer*: "the confidence" of the steadfast and instructed Christian is "that, if we be asking anything according to His will, God heareth us; and if we know that He heareth us, we know that we have the requests we have asked of Him" (ver. 14).

There is something deeply characteristic in the transition from verse 13 to the sequel, and of the greatest practical importance. It is so natural and easy to rest in the quiet assurance of salvation, to luxuriate in the comfort of a settled faith and a clear sense of the Divine grace in Christ. But the Apostle will not allow this. The Christian believer's confidence must be put to use and yoked to service; the strength of his faith must be applied to the tasks of inter-

cession. If indeed he be a restored son of God, standing in the light of His countenance, the duty of supplication for those outside the gate falls at once upon him; he must take part with the Advocate, "Jesus Christ the righteous," who has turned all His knowledge and authority and the Father's favour toward Him to account in pleading for sinners (chap. 2. 2; see pp. 117, 118). In chap. 3. 17 the Apostle rebuked the heartlessness of Christians who see the physical need of their brethren and have means at command, but make no sacrifice for its relief. They deserve no less reproach, who profess the enjoyment of God's favour and claim access to the throne of grace, and yet fail to exert themselves in prayer for the spiritual needs of others. Men are struggling and suffering all around them; they are battling with fierce temptation, enduring agonies of doubt; they are caught in the storms of passion, or lost in the mists of error: you see the light and know the will of God, you have access to the Father by the Spirit of His love and truth, then surely you will speak to Him on their behalf and your whole strength of faith will be put forth in sympathetic intercession; if you have indeed the mind of Christ and are "joined to the Lord in one Spirit," this work of the Mediator has become your occupation. Knowledge of God is power with God; and power with God is prevalency in prayer. Christian assurance, after all, is not an end in itself; it is just so much strength and liberty granted for believing prayer. The knowledge of eternal life translates itself into that confidence towards God which asks and receives for the Church, and for a sin-stricken world, the great gifts of redeeming grace.

St John is virtually repeating here the assurances once given by Jesus to His Church. He remembers the great promise, the charter of Christian prayer, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He recalls



more distinctly the specific pledges given by the Lord to His disciples at parting from them: "Whatsoever you ask in my name, that will I do"; and again, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatsoever you will, and it shall be done for you" (John 14. 13, 14; 15. 7). Abiding fellowship with Jesus Christ, as of "the branches" with "the Vine," was to bring His people into such a knowledge of God and accordance with His will, into such access to the springs of power in the being of the Godhead, that strength for Christ's service would never fail them; all they ask will be given, since they will ask nothing but what their Master's work requires, nothing but what is needed for His purposes and to carry out the commission He has laid upon them. Now such requests concern the objects dearest to God the Father, the end to which His great and precious promises look forward,—the establishment of the kingdom of His Son. Praying thus, those who know God "know that they are asking according to His will"; their prayers move in the line of God's own working and accord entirely with "the will of Him that sent His Son upon the errand of redemption,"<sup>1</sup> with the sovereign counsel of Grace that is behind the mission of Jesus Christ. "We know," if we know anything of God through Christ, that He is an interested listener to every petition offered in the interest of men's salvation through Christ, that such petitions are in tune with the Father's will and touch the matters He has most at heart.

To know all this, in making prayer to God, is surely to "know that we have the petitions we have asked from Him." For in so entreating, we are suing for the things which God designs to give, and is on the way to give. Prevailing prayers meet the purposes of God upon their march. They are inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Divine prompter of intercession<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See John 4. 34, 5. 30, 6. 38-40.

<sup>2</sup> See Rom. 8. 26, 27; Jude 20.

who "searches all things, even the depths of God (1 Cor. 2. 10). The supplications of men who "pray in the Holy Ghost" are virtual prophecies; those who utter them know that they are heard, as Jesus habitually did;<sup>1</sup> and the tone of their utterance not unfrequently brings this certainty to other minds. Petitioners enabled thus to ask, can leave their desires with God, satisfied "that they have the petitions they have asked of Him"—the claim of their faith is admitted, and the boon is already marked as theirs.

To "ask according to" the Father's "will" signifies the submission of the suitor's wish and judgement to the Giver's,—such submission as the Lord Jesus made when He said, in the anguish of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but thine be done." This is the beginning and the end of all prayer offered in filial confidence; boldness toward God untempered by humility, and without the sense of the ignorance and unworthiness cleaving to the petitions of sinful men addressed to the All-wise and All-holy, is a shocking presumption, sometimes a blasphemous dictation.

This is the fourth time that the Apostle has spoken in his letter of "confidence" under the word *παρρησία*,—the "free speech" of him who expresses his mind or presents himself to another without misgiving and embarrassment.<sup>2</sup> In chaps. 2. 28 and 4. 17 he was thinking of the expectancy with which faithful men await the coming of Christ in judgement; in chap. 3. 21, as in this place, of the expectancy with which they themselves come to God in intercession. In the last-named passage (3. 21, 22) he sets forth the subjective warrant of confidence in prayer, found in the consciousness of obedience to God's "commands"—the loyal man is sure of a hearing from the King; here its objective ground is seen, viz. the knowledge of the Divine will—the enlightened man is sure of God's assent to what he asks. His request falls in with the plans and ways of the Father, as these were revealed

<sup>1</sup> See John 11. 41, 42.

<sup>2</sup> Comp. note on p. 235.

in Christ. It is the same "confidence" of the sincere believer in Christ and the acknowledged child of God, which meets these different emergencies—which supports the soul in coming now to the throne of grace, and will support it hereafter in coming to the throne of judgement (2. 28). Christian assurance, with the peace and strength of heart it brings, is built on faith in the Son of God as Saviour from sin; it rests on the knowledge of God the Father, and is a filial trust. The confidence of hope in the Redeemer's coming has an earnest and test in the confidence of accepted prayer before the Father's footstool. Our daily prayers breathe the essence of our religion; their spirit is the spirit that shapes our character and determines the trend of our lives. As we pray now, so we are likely to appear at last in the day of the manifestation of the sons of God.

3. There is one special matter of prayer that weighs on the Apostle's mind; in it probably the motive of the postscript lies. *The case of erring brethren calls for the intervention of Christian prayer*: "If any one should see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask . . ." (ver. 16). "If any one sin," St John said at the beginning, "we have an Advocate with the Father" (chap. 2. 1; see Chap. IX); the powers and merit of the great Advocate are to be enlisted on his behalf. But Christ is not the only Advocate. He shares this office with His redeemed brethren; He has "loosed us from our sins, and made us priests to God, even His Father" (Rev. 1. 6). We are reminded of St Paul's direction in Galatians 6. 1: "If a man be overtaken in any trespass, you that are spiritual restore such an one." The restoration is in many cases effected rather by the pleading of intercession with God than by the pleading of expostulation with the offender. But the prayer must be definite and personal, prompted by what one has seen and actually feels about the given case, or it is not likely to carry weight.

This is to be the Christian man's resort, when he is disturbed by fault and wrong-doing that meet his eyes in the Church. "If any man see his brother sin"—what should he do? Is he to go round whispering about it and tale-bearing? or to rush with the story into print, and gird at the Churches in the newspapers or on the platform? These are not our instructions; but two plain directions are given us: first, by the Master, "Go, and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (Matt. 18. 15); then, by the beloved disciple, "Lay the trouble before God in prayer." This is the proper way to take up the case. By so acting the man concerned will not only win blessing for the offender, but he will come to see the offence in a different light, and will be saved from the heat and aggravation engendered by other modes of proceeding. Intercessory prayer is the antidote for scandal in the Church. St James, like St John, has a postscript to his Epistle on this painful topic; his observation supplements our Apostle's advice: "He that turneth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5. 20).

"He shall ask, and He (*or* he) will give him life, for those who sin not unto death." Grammatically, it is easier to understand the same subject with the two verbs "ask" and "give": so read, the sentence means that the praying man, by successful intercession, virtually "gives life" to the restored backslider (who, on that construction, is the "him" of the second clause). There is, to be sure, a truth expressed by this rendering, which has been adopted in the margin of the Revised Version and by many interpreters. But the other construction is surely that which St John intended: God is the great Life-giver,—He who "gave us eternal life in His Son."† "Ask, and it shall be given you," is the promise of Jesus made in the Father's name, which this text recalls to every one's

† Verse 11; comp. John 5. 21, 6. 32-35, 10. 28.

mind, and in the last verse the writer described the offerer of prayer as one who "knows that he has the petitions he has asked of *Him*." God "gives" at the supplication of the distressed and interceding brother—that is to say, "gives to him" (to his request: on this view, the "him" of the second clause is the accepted intercessor)—"life for those who sin." Spiritual death is averted, miracles of resurrection are wrought, through the virtue of intercessory prayer. What our Lord accomplished upon the dead body of His friend Lazarus, when "He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou heardest me" (John 11. 41), is realized again and again in answer to the entreaty of Christian men, who are God's priests, for souls dead in trespasses and sins. "When Jesus saw *their* faith," the faith of those who brought to Him, with desperate earnestness of effort, the paralytic of the story of Mark 2. 3-12, "He saith to the sick of the palsy, Child, thy sins are forgiven thee." In a thousand ways faith works vicariously for blessing; none of us can tell how much of the life that is his in Christ has come through the channel of his own faith, and how much he owes to the intercession of others. There is a profound solidarity in the co-operation of believing prayer; this communion is of the inmost life and mystery of the Body of Christ.

4. A limitation is, however, set by the Apostle to the possibilities of intercessory prayer: "*There is sin unto death; I do not say that he should pray for that.*" St John cannot encourage his readers to "ask life" in such case.

This awful exception has been discussed, with extreme solicitude and care, from the earliest times, but with little approach to unanimity. Amongst the Fathers who have treated of the passage, some found the fatal sin in wickedness of a gross and extreme nature, such as blasphemy, murder, adultery—in one or more of those that came to be called in later times "the seven deadly sins"; others identified it with hatred

and bitter antipathy to the Church, with sin directed against Christ in His "body." Some, again, defined it as obstinate, impenitent sin, by reading the phrase "sin unto death" as meaning sin persisted in *till* death; while others saw in it not so much a moral offence, as unbelief in its darkest form of wilful and total rejection of Christ, amounting to the "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," which he who commits "hath never forgiveness," being "guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3. 29). The deadly offence against which the writer to the Hebrews gave warning, in chap. 6. 4-6 of his Epistle—where he speaks of apostates who "crucify for themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to open shame"—appears to be kindred to this last. It is possible that in some instances the heretical denial of the Lord which St John encountered, went to the like degree of malignity. Cold-heartedness toward their brethren, and disbelief in the Divine-human person of Jesus Christ, are the two associated forms of evil (see pp. 63, 64) stigmatized by St John in the Antichrists who infested the Churches of his province. These men he has condemned with unsparing severity: <sup>1</sup> there were those amongst them whom he regarded as withered branches, quite severed from "the true Vine."

If a definite reply must be given to the question, What is the "sin unto death" of this passage? the answer should be sought in the above direction. Jesus warned His impugnors, "For judgement I came into this world," and again, "If you believe not that I am (of God), you will die in your sins" (John 8. 24, 9. 39); it is probably St John's paraphrase of such sayings of our Lord that we find in chap. 3. 18, 19 of his Gospel: "He that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only-begotten Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light hath come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil." Upon certain of his opponents and the deniers

<sup>1</sup> See chap. 2. 22, 23; 4. 1-6; comp. 2 John 7, 3 John 10.

of Christian truth, men of bitter spirit and evil life, the holy Apostle was compelled to pronounce in the way of unqualified and hopeless condemnation. The whole New Testament implies that full and deliberate unbelief in Jesus Christ, due to moral antipathy, is fatal to the soul. Such unbelief Christ Himself has called "sin,"—where the sin of our nature concentrates itself into this antagonism and comes to a head in its resistance of Him: "The Holy Spirit," He promised, shall "convict the world of sin, because they believe not on me" (John 16. 8, 9).

Intrinsically, and as regards its nature and tendency, all sin is "unto death;" it looks and makes that way, being a disease of the soul and a deviation from the true end of man's life; any and every sin, so far as it goes and so long as it lasts, severs the committer from fellowship with God in whom our life is hid. According to the saying of James 1. 15, Sin is the daughter of Lust and the mother of Death. "Sin and death" are bound in one as cause and effect, as bud and fruit, by a universal and immutable law.<sup>1</sup> The Apostle is not setting up the perilous distinction between "mortal" and "venial sins,"<sup>2</sup> when he writes of a "sin unto death" and a "sin not unto death." The "sin not unto death" is that for which, in answer to the supplication of a Christian brother, God "will give life"; and the "sin unto death" is that for which He will not do so; for which, therefore, St John cannot bid any one to pray. The difference is defined by the result; the malady proves remediable in the one case, fatal in the other. So far as the indications of the passage go, there is no material for diagnosis other than in the issue; the grounds of discrimination lie in the deep of God's judgements.

When the Apostle says, "All unrighteousness is sin"

<sup>1</sup> See Rom. 5. 12, 8. 2; 1 Cor. 15. 56.

<sup>2</sup> This classification, which has played so large a part in ecclesiastical ethics and discipline, had already been made by the Jewish rabbis and legists, and was developed with great minuteness by them.

(ver. 17), he guards his readers against narrowing the idea of "sin" to what may be called *religious* offences, to transgressions overtly committed against God. The strain of his letter, which bears so sternly against dishonour done to Christ and condemns the rejection of His mission as defiance to the Almighty Father who sent Him (vers. 9, 10), might appear to identify sin with mere unbelief and the wrong done thereby to God, with transgressions only of the first of the two great Commandments of Jesus. Hence it is observed by the way, and to guard against misconception, that "*every* unrighteousness"—every social injustice and unkindness, every failure to deal with another as one would wish to be dealt with, every moral offence, "is sin"; one cannot injure a fellow man or withhold a social due without that resistance to the will of God and transgression of the rule of man's being which constitutes "sin."<sup>1</sup>

In chap. 3. 4 "sin" was branded as "lawlessness"; now, further, "all unrighteousness" is brought under the conception of "sin." The two propositions are complementary; and each of them is reversible. They affirm that unity of the spiritual and ethical, of godliness and manliness, which is a distinctive mark of the teaching of Scripture. The rights of man, with the constitution of society and the laws of nature on which they are based, spring from the rights of God, from the fundamental relations in which He has placed mankind to Himself. Duty to our neighbour is part of our duty to God; duty to God is fulfilled in service to humanity. Religion is one with sound morals (3. 4); morals are one with true religion (5. 17). God is "all things, and in all"; conscience is His throne, and in the domain of right and wrong He is law-giver, administrator, and judge.

But we come back to the "sin unto death." The expression comes from the Old Testament. In Numbers 18. 22 it seems to denote a capital offence,—in that instance, an act of sacrilege. Similar transgressions are described

<sup>1</sup> Comp. Chap. XVI.



as being committed "with a high hand,"—wanton and outrageous acts of wickedness, for which the legal sacrifices and purifications were unavailing; such was the sin of Eli's sons, referred to in 1 Samuel 2. 25, 3. 14, and such the guilt of Judah in Jeremiah's time, on account of which Jehovah said to His prophet, "Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession unto me; for I will not hear thee" (Jer. 7. 16, 14. 10–12). The time came when Jesus turned His back on the Jewish rulers and temple, with the words, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" when He wept over Jerusalem, "O that thou hadst known in this thy day the things that belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes!" Judaism had sinned unto death.

The case of Jeremiah and apostate Judah supplies a distinct analogy to the situation before us; not improbably it was in the Apostle's mind in attaching the qualification that he does to the promise made in verse 16, that God "will give life" at the loving intercession of brother for brother. If so, there is no definite category, no specific description of transgression intended by the phrase "sin unto death"; but the general possibility of such sin being committed is affirmed. St John does not say, "There is a *sin* (ἀμαρτία) unto death"—a kind of sin, or degree of sin, with this inevitable issue, a sort of sin that lies beyond redemption, from which even the blood of Christ cannot cleanse the soul—did he not write, "The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanseth us from *all* sin"? (1. 7). But he says, "There *is* *sin* (ἔστιν ἀμαρτία) unto death"—such a thing exists; sin has, in point of fact, this fatal outcome in certain cases. There may come, and sometimes does come, in the present life a crisis at which the soul's doom is practically fixed and after which it proves "impossible to renew" the sinner "again unto repentance" (Heb. 6. 6). *When* that point is reached, *when* the sin has been committed which closes the heart against the visitings of compunction and plunges the

guilty man beyond saving help, or what shape the decisive sin may take, God alone can judge. We might have thought, for example, David's notorious sin more mortal than Saul's disobedience. The import of any particular act of wrong-doing depends on the whole constitution and history of the man who commits it. Where any degree of self-reproach and of wish for a better state is found in a sinner, there is evidence that he is not forsaken by the Spirit of God. The man who dreads that he has committed the unpardonable sin, by his very distress shows himself to be within the reach of mercy.

St John does not *forbid* his readers to pray for any sinner; in that case, they would have to know exactly what the unpardonable sin is, and where to draw the line between this and other sins. He says, "I do not tell you to pray for such a case"—one cannot urge prayer for what one deems to be impossible and against the will of God. But the bar is subjective, and personal to the given case; it is not an obstacle that lies in any general principle, or is capable of definition. God may reveal to saints in close fellowship with Him that this or that prayer is out of harmony with His will. He may arrest the petitioner, as He did Jeremiah, with the veto, "Pray not for this people for their good"; there may have been some amongst the apostates from St John's Churches concerning whom the holy Apostle had the like impression. One has heard of men living near to God, who have felt themselves for some objects and some persons sorely hindered, or even silenced, when they strove to pray, while in speaking for others they were allowed the largest liberty; and these permissions or prohibitions they could not account for, nor reduce to any rule. If one should for any reason, rightly or wrongly, believe that the sin in question is unto death, one cannot pray for it, any more than for the physical life of a man with a bullet through his brain. And if the great Hearer and Prompter of prayer should convey to the mind of the intercessor who stands in

His counsel, the conviction that such is the case, his faith in that particular is paralysed. "If we ask anything *according to His will*, He heareth us"; it is possible, in some instances rare and infinitely sad, that God may not hear the petition for an erring brother's restoration.

The Apostle has made here the exception to the gracious rule "Ask, and it shall be given you," which truth requires,—an exception which probably his own deep experience of life of prayer had compelled him to admit. But he gives us no criterion of the sin that is beyond forgiveness; he leaves it wrapped in the mysteries which surround the throne of eternal judgement.



## THE APOSTOLIC CREED

The three-fold " We know "—St John's Positiveness—The Order of his Creed—" I believe in Holiness "—The Blight of Cynicism—The Son of God Keeper of God's Sons—The Question of Entire Sanctification—" I believe in Regeneration "—A " World lying in the Evil One "—Mystery of New Births—The Christian *Noblesse oblige*—" I believe in the Mission of the Son of God "—Come to *stay*—Christian Use of the Understanding—The True God and the Idols—Christ come to *conquer*.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE APOSTOLIC CREED

THE concluding paragraph of the Epistle is the seal of the Apostle John set upon the work of his life, now drawing to a close; it is, in effect, a seal set upon the entire fabric of the Apostolic doctrine and testimony by this last survivor of the Twelve and the nearest to the heart of Jesus. Extracting the essential part of the confession, the three short sentences introduced by the thrice repeated *We know*, we have briefly St John's creed, in three articles:—

*“ We know that whosoever is begotten of God doth not sin.  
We know that we are of God.  
We know that the Son of God is come.”*

In other words, “I believe in holiness”; “I believe in regeneration”; “I believe in the mission of the Son of God.” Here we find the triple mark of our Christian profession, the standard of the Apostolic faith and life within the Church—in the recognition of our sinless calling, of our Divine birth, and of the revelation of the true God in Jesus Christ His Son. These are great things for any man to affirm. It is a grand confession that we make, who endorse the manifesto of the Apostle John; and it requires a noble style of living to sustain the declaration, and to prove oneself worthy of the high calling it presumes.

Observe the manner in which these assertions are made. Not, *We suppose*, *We hope*, *We should like to*

*believe*—in the speculative, wistful tone common in these days of clouded faith; but *We know, we know, we know!* Here is the genuine Apostolic note, the ring of a clear and steady and serene conviction, the *πληροφορία* and *παρρησία* of Christian faith. St John speaks as a man sure of his ground, who has set his foot upon the rock and feels it firm beneath his tread. He has seen and heard, and handled at every point, the things of which he writes (see I. 1-4, and Chap. VI), and he *knows* that they are as the report avouches. This is the kind of faith that, with just right, conquers the world,—the faith that derives its testimony immediately from God, and carries its verification within itself. To such effect the Apostle has written in verses 4-13. The faith behind the creed of St John's old age is that of an experimental and reasoned certainty; it is the trust and affiance of the whole man—heart, intelligence, will—by a living process directly and apprehensively grounded upon and built into the realities of God and of Christ.

Observe, moreover, the order in which the three avouchments run. They succeed in the regressive or analytic order—the opposite to that of our dogmatic creeds—the order of experience and not of systematic doctrine, of practice not of theory, the order of life and nature rather than of science or theological reflexion. St John's mind here travels up the stream, from the human to the Divine, from the present knowledge of salvation to the eternal counsels and character of God, out of which our being and salvation sprang. This is the line of reasoning which, in a majority of cases, religious conversion follows: the tree is known by its fruits; the moral demonstrates the metaphysical; supernatural lives vindicate supernatural beliefs; the image of God in godlike men attests, against all the force of prejudice and preconception, the existence of its Father and Begetter. Thus the argument of the Epistle mounts to the summit from which it first descended, and concludes with "that which was from



the beginning." In its system of thought, "the true God" and the "eternal life" are the beginning and the ending, the fountain at once and the sea of finite being. The possibility of a sinless state for the believer is rooted in the certainty that he is a child of God (see chap. 3. 1-3, 9); and this certainty is derived in turn from the sure knowledge that "the Son of God is come" in human flesh, that the very God, the Life of life, is made known in Him and brought into fatherly and saving relations with mankind (chap. 4. 9-14).

Let us consider these three Christian axioms in their relative bearing, and under the light in which the Apostle sets them and the purpose to which he applies them in this place.

1. The first article, then, in St John's experimental creed is this: "We know that every one who has been begotten of God, does not sin." It is as much as to say, "I believe in holiness; in its reality, in its possibility, in its necessity for a Christian man."

Considered from the practical side, this is the first of all our religious beliefs in its importance. It is the vital issue of all the creeds, and the test of their reality to us. The whole Nicene Confession is worth nothing to a man who does not believe in holiness. Intellectually, historically, he may understand every phrase and syllable of that majestic document, he may recite it from alpha to omega without misgiving; but it is all a dead-letter to his mind, the expression of a purely abstract and disinterested and inoperative persuasion,—like his conviction, for instance, that the moon is uninhabited. What the man does not believe in, he will not worship, he cannot admire nor seek after. There is no unbelief that cuts quite so deep as this, that disables one so utterly from every spiritual exercise and attainment. The cynic, the scorner, the sceptic as to moral excellence, the man who tells you that saints are hypocrites and religion is cant—there is no man farther from grace than he; there is none more narrow-minded and self-deceived, and miserable in his ignorance, than the

denier of the Divine in human character. Such a man is the ally and abettor of him who is named "the accuser of the brethren," whose triumph it is to blight all upward aspirations, to destroy that faith in goodness and longing after purity which find in Jesus Christ their refuge and strength. Alas for him who can see only the tares in God's vast wheat-field! who has no eye but to count the spots and wrinkles and such-like things upon the face of the Church which is his mother! With such an ideal as ours, nothing is easier than to play the censor and to mock at failure. It is ignoble to plead the defeat of others, who at least have made some struggle, in excuse for our own passive surrender to evil. The one effectual reproof for inconsistent profession of the Christian faith is a profession more consistent.

Those who know anything practically about the Christian religion, know that it means holiness in sinful men, that it makes for goodness and righteousness and truth in every possible way, that the Gospel assimilates us to its Author just so far as we obey it. And with the moral history of the world behind us, we know that no other force has wrought for the cleansing and uplifting of our common nature like this. No other agency or system that can be named, has produced the high and thorough goodness, the love to God and man, the purity of heart, the generosity, the humbleness and patience, the moral energy and courage, which "our faith" can summon into court on its behalf. Under no other order of life have these excellences been forthcoming in anything to compare with the quantity and the quality in which they have been found amongst the disciples of Jesus Christ. Its host of saints, of all lands and times, are the testimonial of the Gospel,—its credentials "written not with ink" nor "on tables of stone," but "on hearts of flesh" and "by the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor. 3. 1-3). This is the evidence which Christ Himself proposed to give of the truth of His doctrine; by it He invites the world to judge

concerning His claims. The verdict will be awaited in confidence by those who have the earnest of it in themselves. *Sin* is the great problem of the age, and of all ages—the heart-problem, the race-problem; and Jesus Christ has shown Himself competent to deal with it, under the most various and the most extreme conditions. After these nineteen centuries of Christian experiment, despite the failures and blots upon the Church's record, we can say with a confidence in some sense greater than that of the Apostolic age, "We believe in holiness; we know that for the children of God there is victory over sin."

The Epistle is, in great part, a reasoning out of this position, an argument upon the necessary connexion between faith in the Son of God and an unsinning life in the believer: "These things write we unto you, that ye sin not" (2. 1). At the outset the Apostle, in asserting that "God is light, having in Him no darkness at all," drew from this definition the sharp conclusion that "if we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth." In chapter 3. 1-9, the necessity of sinlessness in Christians was categorically laid down, and its grounds and motives were explained. The Apostle went so far as to say that the child of God "cannot sin, because he is begotten of God,—because His seed abideth in him." This is the subjective ground, the intrinsic reason, for a life of freedom from sin: in the soul is lodged a germinal principle charged with the life of God Himself, to which sin is impossible. This "seed," planted in the Christian man, communicates to him also a relative *non posse peccare*,—a potency that is identified in chap. 3. 24 with the Spirit possessed by Christ, "which God hath given us."

But in the text before us, another objective ground is alleged for the same necessity, a reason kindred to the former: "He that was begotten of God keepeth him (the one begotten of God), and the Evil One toucheth him not (*οὐχ ἄρτεται αὐτοῦ*, *layeth not hold of him*)." The

expression "begotten of God" (γεννηθεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) is unique, in this precise form, as applied to Jesus Christ: unless, to be sure, we should follow Blass<sup>1</sup> and Resch in reading, after Irenæus, Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine (*qui . . . natus est*), and the Sinaitic Syriac palimpsest, the *singular* in John 1. 13,—ὁς (scil. ὁ λόγος) . . . ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθη, *i.e.* "(on His name) who was begotten not of blood . . . but of God." Αὐτόν, not ἑαυτόν (*him* not *himself*), is clearly the true pronoun in the second clause of verse 18 ("keepeth *him*"—an object distinct from the subject); and the antithesis of perfect and aorist participles (γεγεννημένος, γεννηθείς)<sup>2</sup> unmistakably marks out *two* contrasted persons in the *keeper* and the *kept*. His alliance with Jesus Christ, the incarnate sinless One (John 1. 14, Luke 1. 35, Matt. 1. 18, 2 Cor. 5. 21), brings to the redeemed man this marvellous security: "I give," He said, "to my sheep a life eternal; and they shall never perish; and none shall snatch them out of my hand" (John 10. 28).

The warfare with wrong possessed for the Lord Jesus the glow and passion, and concrete reality, of a personal encounter: "He keeps them, and the Evil One does not touch them." The conflict between the Divine and the sinful, between the Spirit and the flesh within the man, is at the same time a contest *over* the man between Christ and Satan, between the Good Shepherd and "the wolf" who "snatcheth and scattereth" God's flock. Our safety, as St John conceives it, lies in the watchful eye, the strong arm and prompt succour, of Him who, while He was with His disciples, "guarded them in the Father's name" and

<sup>1</sup> *Philology of the Gospels*, pp. 234 ff. The saying, addressed to Joseph by "the Angel of the Lord," τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου (Matt. 1. 20), is really parallel to 1 John 5. 18 (and to John 1. 13, upon the reading of Blass), since it ascribes the origin of Jesus to no human but to a Divine begetting.

<sup>2</sup> The aorist participle must be understood of the *historical birth* of our Lord (comp. τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον . . . υἱὸς θεοῦ, Luke 1. 35; and τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενομένον ἐκ γυναικός, Gal. 4. 4); also the aorist ἐλθὼν, verse 6 above, and the aorist ἐφανερώθη of 3. 5, 8, &c.

who, all unseen, is still the Keeper of Israel abiding with the flock, the Shepherd and Bishop of souls "always, unto the world's end."<sup>1</sup>

It is God's specific property in men that Christ is set to "guard"; on that, while Jesus Christ liveth, the enemy shall lay no hand. "Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you," said Jesus to Peter before his temptation (Luke 22. 31, 32)—yes, sift you he shall, but "as wheat," which comes out of the sifting without one grain of the good corn lost! The God-begotten keeps the God-begotten,—the Firstborn His many brethren; and none may limit or qualify the integrity of that preservation. "I ascend unto *my Father and your Father*": what a oneness of family interest, a pledge of fellowship and championship, lies in that identification! Christ guarantees to the faith of His brethren by all the resources of His spiritual kingdom, by the blood of His passion and by the rod of His strength, a full defence and quittance from sin. To "touch them," the enemy must first break through the shield of Christ's omnipotence.

But is the Apostle John quite clear and firm upon this point of the sinlessness of Christian believers? The offspring of God, he says in verse 18, as earlier in 3. 9, "sins not"; and yet a moment ago he had written (ver. 16), "If any man see his brother [manifestly, a Christian brother] *sin a sin* not unto death," making provision for this very lapse and opening to the delinquent the door of restoration. The same paradox startled us in the first verse of chapter 2: "I write, that ye may not sin"—as though with better instruction and a proper understanding of the Christian's calling, sin would be out of the question; and yet in the same breath, "and if any man should sin!" What can be more trenchant, more peremptory in its logic, than the dictum of chap. 3. 6, "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither knoweth Him"? If this maxim is to be applied

<sup>1</sup> John 17. 12, Matt. 28. 20, 1 Peter 2. 25.

with dialectical rigour, then the Christian is supposed to be from the moment of his regeneration and onwards, without faltering or exception, a sinless and blameless man, and he who is found otherwise is proved unregenerate. This kind of hard and fast logic has played havoc in theology; it is not at all to the Apostle's taste. He throws out his paradox, and leaves it; he thrusts upon us the discrepancy, which any tyro who chooses may ride to death. The contradiction is in the tangled facts of life, in the unsolved antinomies of everyday Christian experience. The verbal incongruity is softened by the fact that here and in verses 6, 9 of chapter 3 (as compared with 2. 1: see pp. 114, 261) the Greek verbs asserting sinlessness imply use and wont, while those admitting the contingency of sin in the believer indicated an occurrence or isolated fact—an incident, not a character. But the inconsistency of statement is still there, and has its counterpart, only too obviously, in the life of the soul and the Church.

The principle is not surrendered, because it is contradicted by unworthy facts; it is only by the true principle that the contradictory can be corrected and overcome. The law of Christian holiness is no induction from experience; it is a deduction from the cross and the Spirit of Christ. St John admits and deals with the abnormal fact of conscious and post-regenerate sin in a child of God; he does not for a moment *allow* it. All sin, even the least, is unnatural and monstrous in a child of God, and must be regarded with a corresponding shame and grief; it excites an invincible repugnance in the Holy Spirit, which he has from God. However grievously practice may belie our moral ideal, that ideal may on no consideration be lowered in accommodation to the flesh. We dare not put up with the *necessity* of sin; the instant we do so we are lost. Christianity can make no concession to or compromise with the abominable thing, without stultifying itself and denying its sinless, suffering Lord. Sin is that which has no right to

be, and Christ's mission is God's assertion that it shall not be.

2. We come to the second article of St John's creed, implicit in the first—his doctrine of *the new birth*. It is the man who "is *begotten of God*" that "sinneth not." Those who "know that they are *of God*" have learnt the secret of holiness, and hold the clue to its hidden paths of righteousness and peace. The Apostle virtually says, "I believe in regeneration."

Taking human nature as it is and reading human history as it was and must have continued to be apart from the coming of Christ, the assurance of our text is altogether irrational. One cannot bring a clean thing out of an unclean, nor make saints out of the men described in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. "The whole world lieth in the Evil One." Knowing myself as I do (the *ἀνθρώπος ἐγώ* of Rom. 7. 25), the resurrection of the dead is less incredible than that I should live an unsinning life. Every one who has measured his own moral strength against the law of sin in his members, has groaned with Saul of Tarsus, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" But then St Paul was able to add, "I thank God [it is done], through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . . The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 7. 25-8. 4). We "must," as Jesus said, "be born anew" (John 3. 7)—born over again, from the Divine spring and original of our being.

When this was said to Nicodemus, the Jewish scholar and experienced man of the world, he took it for a useless apophthegm, a figurative way of saying that the thing was impossible. You cannot recall to its pure fountain the stream that is turbid with the filth of a hundred shores; you cannot restore the human race to its cradle of innocence in Paradise, nor send the grey and world-worn man back to his mother's womb. To declare that we "must be born anew," that reform, amendment is useless, and only regeneration will save, is to bid us despair. The message of Jesus was not

simply that men must, but that they *can* be born over again.

“We know” the fact; the process is hidden in the workings of God. It is mysterious in the same sense in which all the deepest things of life, and the nature of the human spirit, are so. Every man is, at the bottom, an enigma to himself; the most critical movements of his soul are those he is least able to explain. When psychology has taught us everything, it has really settled very little. *How* a man is “born of the Spirit,” “begotten of God” and transformed by the renewing of his mind—sometimes quite suddenly—from a doubter into a full believer, from a lover of sin into a lover of holiness, from a worldling into a conscious child of the Eternal, is an inscrutable secret. We shall never arrive at a perfect science of salvation, nor formulate the ultimate rationale of a man’s conversion to God. But the event itself, and its moral and material effects, are plain to observation. Such new births of men and of peoples are the master-facts of biography and history. “The manifestation of the Spirit” and His “fruit,” the outcome of the interior, spiritual action of Christ upon human society, is visible enough for those who care to see. “Thou hearest the voice thereof” (John 3. 8)—as you know the wind is astir by the thunder of the waves on the beach, by the crashing of the forest trees, though your own face be shielded from the blast. In those great seasons when the winds of God are blowing, only the deaf can doubt the coming on the human spirit of some fresh afflatus, some breath from the eternal shores; a throb stirs the general heart, an ocean tide swells the seas and a mighty rushing fills the spiritual atmosphere, that pulsate from some vast and unseen source. At such times multitudes of men, who lay morally dead as the bones in Ezekiel’s valley, stand up a living army of the Lord. Whole communities at certain epochs have been inspired with a sudden heroism of faith, that shines through history with a superhuman light; the secret of their courage



and their victory lay in the conviction, "Deus vult," "The Lord is on our side." But "whence" this wind "comes" or "whither it goes"—in what treasuries it is gathered, how, or where, or upon whom it may next descend—"thou knowest not."

The Apostle would have all Christian men cherish habitually the thought that they "are of God," and live in its strength. They must dare to vindicate their celestial birth and destiny; they must learn to believe in the supernatural within them, in their own redeemed, Christ-given manhood, and to assert its moral rights. The old lofty motto, *Noblesse oblige*, stands on their escutcheon. High birth demands high bearing. The son of God, the brother and fellow-heir of Jesus Christ, why should he dabble in the mire of sin? He "cannot sin, because he is born of God"; what have God's priests and kings to do with the shabby tricks and mean expedients of a mercenary ambition, with the compliances and servilities of those who crook the knee to the god of this world? Remember whose sons you are, and by the Spirit of the Father that is in you maintain the honour of your name and house, amidst a world that "lies in the power of the Evil One." Such is the application that St John makes of his doctrine concerning the New Birth.<sup>1</sup>

It is a splendid, but it is an awful thing to say, "We know that we are of God." It is to be conscious that the hand of God has been laid upon us, to have felt the breath of the Eternal pass over our spirit to awaken and renew. It is to know that there is a power working within us each, at the root of our nature, that is infinitely wiser and stronger and better than ourselves,—a Spirit planted in our hearts which comes directly from the being and the will of the Father-God and links us individually to Him. To *know* this is to hold a distinction immeasurably above earthly glory, and to be superior to all the lures of ambition. It is to

<sup>1</sup> Trace again the connexion of thought in chap. 3. 1-10; comp. Chaps. XV, XVI.

be charged with a principle of righteousness that can dissolve every bond of iniquity, that breaks the power of worldly fear and pleasure and will make us, living or dying, more than conquerors.

3. The third is the fundamental article of St John's belief; it is the all in all of his life and of his world of thought: "I believe in the mission of the Son of God." This last is not, like the other two articles, the declaration of a personal experience, but of a grand historical and cosmic event: "We know that *the Son of God is come!*" Perfect holiness and conscious sonship to God date from the advent of the Son of God, whose "blood cleanses from all sin,"—"the Son" who "makes us free" that we may be "free indeed" (1. 7; John 8. 36). If the sum of this letter, in its practical aim, is "that you sin not," the sum of its theology is "that Jesus is the Son of God" (ver. 5); its Christology and its ethics blend in the experience that Christians are in Christ Jesus themselves sons of God. Within this circle lies the secret of the new life and the new world of Christianity.

Faith in the filial Godhead of Jesus was no fruit of doctrinal reflexion, no late developed theologoumenon of some Johannine school. The writer learnt his first lesson in the mystery, unless his memory deceives him, at the time of his earliest acquaintance with Jesus, from the Baptist, the master of his youth, on the banks of the Jordan (John 1. 29-34). From that day to this he has known, with an ever-growing apprehension of the fact, that "*the Son of God is come,*" that He has arrived and is here<sup>1</sup> in this world of men. And though the Lord returned to the Father and is lost to sight and

<sup>1</sup> The Greek verb is ἦκω (*adsum*), which is used nowhere else in the Epistle, but in John 2. 4, 4. 47, 6. 37, 8. 42. The last of these passages is instructive: "I came forth from God, and *am come*"—as much as to say, "and here I am!" Jesus confronts His enemies with the Divine *fact* of His presence, of His works and character. In ἦκω "the stress is laid wholly on the present" (Westcott); whereas under the perfect tense (ἐλήλυθα) of chap. 4. 2, John 16. 28, 18. 37, the present is viewed as springing out of the past.

earthly contact, those who know Him know that He is with us always, that He has come to stay (John 14. 18, 28; Matt. 28. 20); the Apostle does not say, "We know that the Son of God *did* come," or "has come," but that He "*is* come"—once and for all.

He has come into the world and mixed among men, "and the world knew Him not, His own received Him not"; its "princes crucified the Lord of glory" (John 1. 11; 1 Cor. 2. 8); for all His coming, "the world" still "lies in the Evil One." That we, out of all mankind, should know of His coming is no merit of ours, but a grace: "He hath given us understanding (*διάνοιαν*) that we should know" Him, and God in Him.<sup>1</sup> "This is the only place in which *διάνοια* occurs in St John's writings; and generally nouns which express intellectual powers are rare in them" (Westcott).<sup>2</sup> The phrase is most significant. The Apostle does not write, "He hath given us a heart to love Him"—that goes without saying—but "an *understanding* to know." It is a right comprehension of the advent that is implied, the power to realize what is behind the phenomenal fact, the discernment of the veritable God (*τὸν ἀληθινόν*) in the Son whom He sent. This *knowledge of God* in Christ is the bed-rock of Christianity. St John's creed is that of the sound intellect, as well as of the simple heart. It claims the homage of our intelligence, our studious and discriminating thought, without which it cannot win our deepest love. St John has done well to tell us that *διάνοια*, no less than *πνεῦμα* and *ἀγάπη*, is the gift of Christ (comp. 3. 1, 24). His truth calls for the service of the understanding, while His love elicits and kindles the affections.

The object of the knowledge which the Son of God

<sup>1</sup> Here the verb is *γινώσκωμεν*, not the *οἶδαμεν* of the three great assertions, for our knowledge of God is in the making. This is not the ascertainment of a definite fact, but the apprehension of an infinite reality; comp. the note on p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> For the use of *διάνοια* (*mind*), see Matt. 22. 37, Col. 1. 21, 1 Peter 1. 13, 2 Peter 3. 1.

brings is "the True<sup>1</sup> One,"—*i.e.* God Himself, the Real, the Living, in contrast with dead, false "idols" (comp. 1 Thess. 1. 10), whom Jesus has shown to the world. To glorify the Father, not Himself, was the end of Christ's coming, pursued with unswerving loyalty (see p. 335); the Apostle would have misinterpreted his Master had he stated things otherwise, or given the name of "the True" in such a connexion to any other than Him to whom the Son Himself ascribed it—"the only true God" (John 17. 3). He repeats the confession of Jesus, for his own last sentence of testimony: "This is the true God, and (here, in this knowledge, is) eternal life."

The supreme knowledge comes from without to ourselves; it is truth shown to us, not evolved within us nor reflected from our own ideas. But the knowledge of God does not stop there, and terminate in the objective perception. If we truly apprehend it, then it apprehends us in turn and absorbs us into itself, into Him whom it reveals; so that "we are in the True One," since we are—and so far as we are—"in His Son Jesus Christ."

Dogmatic theology, too eager for proof-texts, has made out of the last clause of verse 20 an affirmation, superfluous after all that the Apostle has said and foreign to this passage, of the proper Deity of *Christ*. What St John really has to do is to seal his letter with the assurance to his once pagan readers, that they have found and grasped *the very God* in Christ, and are no longer mocked with idols and phantoms of blessedness; they are no more, as in heathen days, "men without hope, and godless in the world" (Eph. 2. 12). In this faith well may they, as they surely can, *guard them-*

<sup>1</sup> Τὸν ἀληθινόν is a phrase distinctive of St John; it occurs nine times in his Gospel, thrice in this Epistle, and ten times in the Apocalypse; five times only in the rest of the New Testament. It signifies truth of being, *verity*; while ἀληθῆς signifies truth of statement, *veracity*. "The true light" of 2. 8 above and John 1. 9, the "true worshippers" of John 4. 23, "the true vine" of John 15. 1, and "true tabernacle" of Heb. 8. 2, are all ἀληθινά—things that verify their names, realities behind the appearance. See also note on p. 171.

*selves from the idols* (ver. 21). Old habit and the pressure of heathen society around them, and the enchantments and sorceries which the ancient cults possessed, made the danger of yielding to idolatry constant with St John's readers, and to some of them well-nigh irresistible. They were as men subject to an incessant siege, marked at intervals by violent assaults, who have to stand day and night upon their guard.

No other, no slighter faith will save pagan or Christian, the plain man or the theologian, from the idols of his own imagining. St John's "little children" know that the Son of God is come by "the witness in" them, by "the Spirit He has given" (ver. 10, 3. 24, &c.), by their "anointing from the Holy One," by their own changed life and character, by "the true light" that "shines" on all things for them;<sup>1</sup> and in this knowledge their security is found. The Son of God has not come to "the world" as to some material *cosmos*, a mere foothold in space and time; but in truth to that temple and inner centre of the world, the individual mind. When Christ comes to "dwell in the heart by faith," He has come indeed; then at last the Son of man has where to lay His head, and to build His throne. Those *know* that He has come who have "received Him as Saviour and Son of God," to whom accordingly He "has given right to become children of God,—those that believe in His name" (John 1. 12, Eph. 3. 17, 19).

The man thus redeemed by the Son of God carries in his heart the pledge of his Redeemer's world-wide victory. It is no limited, personal salvation that St John conceives in these large outlines. He has just spoken of "the whole world"—ὁ κόσμος ὅλος, the world *as a whole*, in its collective capacity and prevailing character, as "lying in the Evil One" (ver. 19), in the domain and under the hand of Satan.<sup>2</sup> The ex-

<sup>1</sup> Chap. 2. 5-8, 20; 3. 14, 19; 4. 16 f.; John 1. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κείται: "The phrase answers to the εἶναι ἐν τῷ ἀληθινῷ that follows, and to the characteristic Pauline ἐν Χριστῷ; comp. 3. 24,

pression recalls the scene of the Third Temptation of our Lord (Matt. 4. 8-11; Luke 4. 5-8), when the Devil showed to Jesus from an exceeding high mountain "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" —in the midst of it, holding the imperial throne at Rome, Tiberius Cæsar, with his angel's face and fiend's heart, the ostensible lord of the nations. The great Usurper dared to say, "All this is delivered unto *me*, and to whomsoever I will I give it!" But listen to Jesus, and He shall speak: "All things were delivered unto *me* of my Father," "All authority is given unto me, in heaven and upon earth!" (Matt. 11. 27, 28. 18). Which, pray, of the two counter-claims is legitimate? which of those rival masters is finally to dominate the earth?

"The world lieth in the Evil One": so it was, beyond question, in the Apostle's day, under the empire of Tiberius, of Nero, and Domitian; and such is the case to a very large extent at this modern date. "But (δέ)<sup>1</sup> the Son of God is come!" Against all the evils and miseries of the time, against the crimes and ruin of the ages as against our personal guilt and impotence, there is that one fact to set; but it is sufficient. He has come to "destroy the works of the Devil," to "root out every plant which our heavenly Father had not planted"; and Christ is doing this, through the hands of His servants, upon a wider scale and with more fruitful and visible results than ever before. He will not fail nor be discouraged until the work of uprooting and

4. 15. The connexion shows that τῷ πονηρῷ is masculine, and the converse of κείσθαι ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ is given in John 17. 15, ἵνα τηρήσῃς ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ. A close parallel to this expression is found in Sophocles, *Œd. Col.* 247, ἐν ὑμῖν ὡς θεῶν κείμεθα τλάμονες" (Westcott).

<sup>1</sup> How is it that the Revisers failed to restore this antithesis? Westcott, of course, notes it, and makes much of it: "The third affirmation is introduced by the adversative particle (οἶδαμεν δέ). There is—this seems to be the line of thought—a startling antithesis in life of good and evil. We have been made to feel it in all its intensity. But, at the same time, we can face it in faith." St John uses δέ seldom as compared with καί, and never without distinctive meaning; comp. p. 304.

replanting is complete. "The strong man armed keepeth his goods in peace," till there arrives "the stronger than he"; then the house is spoiled, and the captives are set free. The Son of God has not come into our world to be defeated. He did not set forth upon a random and uncalculated mission, nor sit down to the siege without first counting the cost. He has set His imperial foot down upon this earth, and He will not draw it back. Its soil has been stained and stamped with the blood of His redemption; the purchase-mark is ineffaceable. Jesus Christ has lifted up before the nations the banner of His cross, which floats a victorious ensign over seas and continents; and to Him shall the gathering of the peoples be.

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