

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[Preface](#)

First Epistle

Part 1

[Chapter 1](#) - The Surroundings of the First Epistle of St. John

[Chapter 2](#) - The Connection of the Epistle with the Gospel of St. John

[Chapter 3](#) - The Polemical Element in the First Epistle of St. John

[Chapter 4](#) - The Image of St. John's Soul in His Epistle

Part 2

Some General Rules for the Interpretation of the First Epistle of St. John

[Chapter 5](#) - Analysis and Theory of St. John's Gospel

[Chapter 6](#) - St. John's Gospel Historical, not Ideological

[Chapter 7](#) - Extent of the Atonement

[Chapter 8](#) - Missionary Application Of the Extent of the Atonement

[Chapter 9](#) - The Influence of the Great Life Walk a Personal Influence

[Chapter 10](#) - The World which We Must Not Love

[Chapter 11](#) - Use and Abuse of the Sense of the Vanity of the World

[Chapter 12](#) - Knowing All Things

[Chapter 13](#) - Lofty Ideals Perilous unless Applied

[Chapter 14](#) - Boldness in the Day of Judgment

[Chapter 15](#) - Birth and Victory

[Chapter 16](#) - The Gospel as a Gospel of Witness; the Three Witnesses

[Chapter 17](#) - The Witness of Men (Applied to the Resurrection)

[Chapter 18](#) - Sin unto Death

[Chapter 19](#) - The Terrible Truism which has No Exception

Second Epistle

[Chapter 20](#) - Theology and Life in Kyria's Letter

Third Epistle

[Chapter 21](#) - The Quietness of True Religion

The Expositor's Bible

EDITED BY THE REV.
SIR W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.
Editor of "The Expositor"; etc.

THE EPISTLES OF ST. JOHN

TWENTY-ONE DISCOURSES,

BY
WILLIAM ALEXANDER, D.D., D.C.L.,

BRASENOSE COLLEGE, OXFORD,
LORD BISHOP OF DERRY AND RAPHOE.

SECOND THOUSAND.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON,
27, PATERNOSTER ROW.
MDCCLXXXIX.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,
The Epistles of St. John

Preface

IT is now many years ago since I entered upon a study of the Epistles of St. John, as serious and prolonged as was consistent with the often distracting cares of an Irish Bishop. Such fruit as my labours produced enjoyed the advantage of appearing in the last volume of the Speaker's Commentary in 1881.

Since that period I have frequently turned again to these Epistles — subsequent reflection or study not seldom filling in gaps in my knowledge, or leading me to modify former interpretations. When invited last year to resume my old work, I therefore embraced willingly the opportunity which was presented to me.

Let me briefly state the method pursued in this book.

I. The First Part contains four Discourses.

(1) In the first Discourse I have tried to place the reader in the historical surroundings from which (unless all early Church history is unreal, a past that never was present) these Epistles emanated.

(2) In the second Discourse I compare the Epistle with the Gospel. This is the true point of orientation for the commentator. Call the connection between the two documents what we may ; be the Epistle the Hieronymian interpretation precisely as it stood, not preface, appendix, moral and devotional commentary, or accompanying encyclical address to the Churches, which were " the nurslings of John " ; that connection is constant and pervasive. Unless this principle is firmly grasped, we not only lose a defence and confirmation of the Gospel, but dissolve the whole consistency of the Epistle, and leave it floating — the thinnest cloud in the whole cloudland of mystic idealism,

(3) The third Discourse deals with the polemical element in these Epistles, Some commentators indeed, like the excellent Henry Hammond, " spy out Gnostics where there are none." They confuse us with uncouth names, and conjure up the ghosts of long-forgotten errors until we seem to hear a theological bedlam, or to see theological scarecrows. Yet Gnosticism, Doketism, Cerinthianism, certainly sprang from the teeming soil of Ephesian thought ; and without a recognition of this fact, we shall never understand the Epistle. Un-doubtedly, if the Apostle had addressed himself only to contemporary error, his great Epistle would have become completely obsolete for us. To subsequent ages an antiquated polemical treatise is like a fossil scorpion with a sting of stone. But a divinely taught polemic under transitory forms of error finds principles as lasting as human nature,

(4) The object of the fourth Discourse is to bring out the image of St, John's soul—the essentials of the spiritual life to be found in those precious chapters which still continue to be an element of the life of the Church.

Such a view, if at all accurate, will enable the reader to contemplate the whole of the

Epistle with the sense of completeness, of remoteness, and of unity which arises from a general survey apart from particular difficulties. An ancient legend insisted that St. John exercised miraculous power in blending again into one the broken pieces of a precious stone. We may try in an humble way to bring these fragmentary particles of spiritual gem-dust together, and fuse them into one.

II. The plan pursued in the second part is this. The First Epistle (of which only I need now speak) is divided into ten sections.

The sections are thus arranged —

(1) The text is given in Greek. In this matter I make no pretence to original research ; and have simply adopted Tischendorf's text, with occasional amendments from Dr. Scrivener or Prof. Westcott. At one time I might have been tempted to follow Lachmann ; but experience taught me that he is "audacior quam limatior," and I held my hand. The advantage to every studious reader of having the divine original close by him for comparison is too obvious to need a word more.

With the Greek I have placed in parallel columns the translations most useful for ordinary readers — the Latin, the English A.V. and R.V. The Latin text is that of the "Codex Amiatinus," after Tischendorf's splendid edition of 1854. In this the reader will find, more than a hundred and twenty years after the death of St. Jerome, an interpretation more diligent and more accurate than that which is supplied by the ordinary Vulgate text. The saint felt "the peril of presuming to judge others where he himself would be judged by all ; of changing the tongue of the old, and carrying back a world which was growing hoary to the initial essay of infancy." The Latin is of that form to which ancient Latin Church writers gave the name of "rusticitas." But it is a happy — I had almost said a divine — rusticity. In translating from the Hebrew of the Old Testament, St. Jerome has given a new life, a strange tenderness or awful cadence, to prophets and psalmists. The voice of the fields is the voice of Heaven also. The tongue of the people is for once the tongue of God. This Hebraistic Latin or Latinised Hebrew forms the strongest link in that mysterious yet most real spell wherewith the Latin q{ the Church enthral the soul of the world. But to return to our immediate subject. The student can seldom go wrong by more than a hair's breadth when he has before him three such translations. In the first column stands St. Jerome's vigorous Latin. The second contains the English A.V., of which each clause seems to be guarded by the spirits of the holy dead, as well as by the love of the living Church ; and to tell the innovator that he "does wrong to show it violence, being so majestic." The third column offers to view the scholarlike— if sometimes just a little pedantic and provoking— accuracy of the R.V. To this comparison of versions I attach much significance. Every translation is an additional commentary, every good translation the best of commentaries.

I have ventured with much hesitation to add upon another column in each section a translation drawn up by myself for my own private use ; the greater portion of which was made a year or two before the publication of the R.V. Its right to be here is this, that it affords the best key to my meaning in any place where the exposition may be imperfectly expressed.¹

(2) One or more Discourses are attached to most of the sections. In these I may have seemed sometimes to have given myself a wide scope, but I have tried to make a sound and careful exegesis the basis of each. And I have throughout considered myself bound to draw out some great leading idea of St. John with conscientious care.

(2) The Discourses (or if there be no Discourse in the section, the text and versions) are followed by short notes, chiefly exegetical, in which I have not willingly passed by any real difficulty.

I have not wished to cumber my pages with constant quotations. But in former years I have read, in some cases with much care, the following commentators — St. Augustine's Tractatus, St. John Chrysostom's Homilies on the Gospel (full of hints upon the Epistles), Cornelius a Lapide ; of older post-Reformation commentators, the excellent Henry Hammond, the eloquent Dean Hardy, the precious fragments in Pole's Synopsis — above all, the inimitable Bengel ; of moderns, Diisterdieck, Huther, Ebrard, Neander ; more recently. Professor Westcott, whose subtle and exquisite scholarship deserves the gratitude of every student of St. John. Of Haupt I know nothing, with the exception of an analysis of the Epistle, which is stamped with the highest praise of so refined and competent a judge as Archdeacon Farrar. But having read this list fairly in past years, I am now content to have before me nothing but a Greek Testament, the Grammars of Winer and Donaldson, the New Testament lexicons of Bretschneider, Grimm, and Mintert, with Tromm's "Concordantia LXX." For, on the whole, I really prefer St. John to his commentators. And I hope I am not ungrateful for help which I have received from them, when I say that I now seem to myself to understand him better without the dissonance of their many voices. "Johannem nisi ex Johanne ipso non intellexeris."

III. It only remains to commend this book, such as it is, not only to theological students, but to general readers, who I hope will not be alarmed by a few Greek words here and there.

I began my fuller study of St. John's Epistle in the noonday of life ; I am closing it with the sunset in my eyes. I pray God to sanctify this poor attempt to the edification of souls, and the good of the Church. And I ask all who may find it useful, to offer their intercessions for a blessing upon the book, and upon its author.

WILLIAM DERRY AND RAPHOE.

The Palace, Londonderry,

February 6th, 1889.

Merciful God, we beseech Thee to cast Thy bright beams of light upon Thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of Thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John, may so walk in the light of Thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1. I venture to call attention to the rendering "very." It enables the translator to mark the important distinction between two words : ἀληθής, factually true and real, as opposed to that which in point of fact is mendacious ; ἀγιθινός, ideally true and real, that which alone realizes the idea imperfectly expressed by something else. This is one of St. John's favourite words. In regard to ἀγάπη I have not had the courage of my convictions. The word "charity" seems to me almost providentially preserved for the rendering of that term. It is not without a purpose that ξρως is so rigorously excluded from the New Testament. The objection that "charity" conveys to ordinary English people the notion of mere material alms is of little weight. If "charity" is sometimes a little metallic, is not "love" sometimes a little mauding?

I agree with Canon Evans that the word, strictly speaking, should be always translated "charity" when alone, " love " when in regimen. Yet I have not been bold enough to put "God is charity " for " God is love."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 1

Part 1

1 John

THE SURROUNDINGS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN. 1Jo 5:21

AFTER the example of a writer of genius, preachers and essayists for the last forty years have constantly applied—or misapplied—some lines from one of the greatest of Christian poems. Dante writes of St. John—

"As he, who looks intent, And strives with searching ken, how he may see The sun in his eclipse, and, through decline Of seeing, loseth power of sight: so I Gazed on that last resplendence."

The poet meant to be understood of the Apostle's spiritual splendour of soul, of the absorption of his intellect and heart in his conception of the Person of Christ and of the dogma of the Holy Trinity. By these expositors of Dante the image is transferred to the style and structure of his writings. But confusion of thought is not magnificence, and mere obscurity is never sunlike. A blurred sphere and undecided outline is not characteristic of the sun even in eclipse. Dante never intended us to understand that St. John as a writer was distinguished by a beautiful vagueness of sentiment, by bright but tremulously drawn lines of dogmatic creed. It is indeed certain that round St. John himself, at the time when he wrote, there were many minds affected by this vague mysticism. For them, beyond the scanty region of the known, there was a world of darkness whose shadows they desired to penetrate. For them this little island of life was surrounded by waters into whose depths they affected to gaze. They were drawn by a mystic attraction to things which they themselves called the "shadows," the "depths," the "silences." But for St. John these shadows were a negation of the message which he delivered that "God is light, and darkness in Him is none." These silences were the contradiction of the Word who has once for all interpreted God. These depths were "depths of Satan." For the men who were thus enamoured of indefiniteness, of shifting sentiments and flexible creeds, were Gnostic heretics. Now St. John's style, as such, has not the artful variety, the perfect balance in the masses of composition, the finished logical cohesion of the Greek classical writers. Yet it can be loftily or pathetically impressive. It can touch the problems and processes of the moral and spiritual world with a pencil tip of deathless light, or compress them into symbols which are solemnly or awfully picturesque. Above all St. John has the faculty of enshrining dogma in forms of statement which are firm and precise—accurate enough to be envied by philosophers, subtle enough to defy the passage of heresy through their finely drawn yet powerful lines. Thus in the beginning of his Gospel all false thought upon the Person of Him who is the living theology of His Church is refuted by anticipation that which in itself or in its certain consequences unhumanises or undeifies the God Man; that which denies the singularity of the One Person who was Incarnate, or the reality and entirety of the manhood of Him who fixed His

Tabernacle of humanity in us.

It is therefore a mistake to look upon the First Epistle of St. John as a creedless composite of miscellaneous sweetnesses, a disconnected rhapsody upon philanthropy. And it will be well to enter upon a serious perusal of it, with the conviction that it did not drop from the sky upon an unknown place, at an unknown time, with an unknown purpose. We can arrive at some definite conclusions as to the circumstances from which it arose, and the sphere in which it was written—at least if we are entitled to say that we have done so in the case of almost any other ancient document of the same nature.

Our simplest plan will be, in the first instance, to trace in the briefest outline the career of St. John after the Ascension of our Lord, so far as it can be followed certainly by Scripture, or with the highest probability from early Church history. We shall then be better able to estimate the degree in which the Epistle fits into the framework of local thought and circumstances in which we desire to place it.

Much of this biography can best be drawn out by tracing the contrast between St. John and St. Peter, which is conveyed with such subtle and exquisite beauty in the closing chapter of the fourth Gospel.

The contrast between the two Apostles is one of history and of character.

Historically, the work done by each of them for the Church differs in a remarkable way from the other.

We might have anticipated for one so dear to our Lord a distinguished part in spreading the Gospel among the nations of the world. The tone of thought revealed in parts of his Gospel might even have seemed to indicate a remarkable aptitude for such a task. St. John's peculiar appreciation of the visit of the Greeks to Jesus, and his preservation of words which show such deep insight into Greek religious ideas, would apparently promise a great missionary, at least to men of lofty speculative thought. But in the Acts of the Apostles St. John is first overshadowed, then effaced, by the heroes of the missionary epic, St. Peter and St. Paul. After the close of the Gospels he is mentioned five times only. Once his name occurs in a list of the Apostles. Thrice he passes before us with Peter. Once again (the first and last time when we hear of St. John in personal relation with St. Paul) he appears in the Epistle to the Galatians with two others, James and Cephas, as reputed to be pillars of the Church. But whilst we read in the Acts of his taking a certain part in miracles, in preaching, in confirmation; while his boldness is acknowledged by adversaries of the faith; not a line of his individual teaching is recorded. He walks in silence by the side of the Apostle who was more fitted to be a missionary pioneer.

With the materials at our command, it is difficult to say how St. John was employed whilst the first great advance of the cross was in progress. We know for certain that he was at Jerusalem during the second visit of St. Paul. But there is no reason for conjecturing that he was in that city when it was visited by St. Paul on his last voyage (A.D. 60); while we shall presently have occasion to show how markedly the Church tradition connects St. John with Ephesus.

We have next to point out that this contrast in the history of the Apostles is the result of a contrast in their characters. This contrast is brought out with a marvellous prophetic symbolism in the miraculous draught of fishes after the Resurrection.

First as regards St. Peter.

"When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him (for he was naked), and did cast himself into the sea." His was the warm energy, the forward impulse of young life, the free bold plunge of an impetuous and chivalrous nature into the waters which are nations and peoples. In he must; on he will. The prophecy which follows the thrice renewed restitution of the fallen Apostle is as follows: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee where thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death He should glorify God, and when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me." This, we are told, is obscure; but it is obscure only as to details. To St. Peter it could have conveyed no other impression than that it foretold his martyrdom. "When thou wast young," points to the tract of years up to old age. It has been said that forty is the old age of youth, fifty the youth of old age. But our Lord does not actually define old age by any precise date. He takes what has occurred as a type of Peter's youthfulness of heart and frame—"girding himself," with rapid action, as he had done shortly before; "walking," as he had walked on the white beach of the lake in the early dawn; "whither thou wouldest," as when he had cried with impetuous, half-defiant independence, "I go a-fishing," invited by the auguries of the morning, and of the water. The form of expression seems to indicate that Simon Peter was not to go far into the dark and frozen land; that he was to be growing old, rather than absolutely old. Then should he stretch forth his hands, with the dignified resignation of one who yields manfully to that from which nature would willingly escape. "This spake He," adds the evangelist, "signifying by what death He shall glorify God." What fatal temptation leads so many commentators to minimise such a prediction as this? If the prophecy were the product of a later hand, added after the martyrdom of St. Peter, it certainly would have wanted its present inimitable impress of distance and reserve.

It is in the context of this passage that we read most fully and truly the contrast of our Apostle's nature with that of St. Peter. St. John, as Chrysostom has told us in deathless words, was loftier, saw more deeply, pierced right into and through spiritual truths, was more the lover of Jesus than of Christ, as Peter was more the lover of Christ than of Jesus. Below the different work of the two men, and determining it, was this essential difference of nature, which they carried with them into the region of grace. St. John was not so much the great missionary with his sacred restlessness; not so much the oratorical expositor of prophecy with his pointed proofs of correspondence between prediction and fulfilment, and his passionate declamation driving in the conviction of guilt like a sting that pricked the conscience. He was the theologian; the quiet master of the secrets of the spiritual life; the calm, strong controversialist who excludes error by constructing truth. The work of such a spirit as his was rather like the finest product of venerable and long established Churches. One gentle word of Jesus sums up the biography of long years which apparently were without the crowded vicissitudes to which other Apostles were exposed. If the old Church history is true, St. John was either not called upon to die for Jesus, or escaped from that death by a miracle. That one word of the Lord was to become a sort of motto of St. John. It occurs some twenty-six times in the brief pages of these Epistles. "If I will that he abide"—abide in the bark, in the Church, in one spot, in life, in spiritual communion with Me. It is to be remembered finally, that not only spiritual, but ecclesiastical consolidation is attributed to St. John by the voice of history. He occupied himself with the visitation of his Churches and the development of Episcopacy. So in the sunset of the Apostolic age stands before us the mitred form of John the Divine. Early Christianity had three successive

capitals—Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus. Surely, so long as St. John lived, men looked for a Primate of Christendom not at Rome but at Ephesus.

How different were the two deaths! It was as if in His words our Lord allowed His two Apostles to look into a magic glass, wherein one saw dimly the hurrying feet, the prelude to execution which even the saint wills not; the other the calm life, the gathered disciples, the quiet sinking to rest. In the clear obscure of that prophecy we may discern the outline of Peter's cross, the bowed figure of the saintly old man. Let us be thankful that John "tarried." He has left the Churches three pictures that can never fade—in the gospel the picture of Christ, in the Epistles the picture of his own soul, in the Apocalypse the picture of Heaven.

So far we have relied almost exclusively upon indications supplied by Scripture. We now turn to Church history to fill in some particulars of interest.

Ancient tradition unhesitatingly believed that the latter years of St. John's prolonged life were spent in the city of Ephesus, or province of Asia Minor, with the Virgin Mother, the sacred legacy from the cross, under his fostering care for a longer or shorter portion of those years. Manifestly he would not have gone to Ephesus during the lifetime of St. Paul. Various circumstances point to the period of his abode there as beginning a little after the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 67). He lived on until towards the close of the first century of the Christian era, possibly two years later (A.D. 102). With the date of the Apocalypse we are not directly concerned, though we refer it to a very late period in St. John's career, believing that the Apostle did not return from Patmos until just after Domitian's death. The date of the Gospel may be placed between A.D. 80 and 90. And the First Epistle accompanied the Gospel, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter.

The Epistle then, like the Gospel, and contemporaneously with it, saw the light in Ephesus, or in its vicinity. This is proved by three pieces of evidence of the most unquestionable solidity.

(1) The opening chapters of the Apocalypse contain an argument which cannot be explained away for the connection of St. John with Asia Minor and with Ephesus. And the argument is independent of the authorship of that wonderful book. Whoever wrote the Book of the Revelation must have felt the most absolute conviction of St. John's abode in Ephesus and temporary exile to Patmos. To have written with a special view of acquiring a hold upon the Churches of Asia Minor, while assuming from the very first as fact what they, more than any other Churches in the world, must have known to be fiction, would have been to invite immediate and contemptuous rejection. The three earliest chapters of the Revelation are unintelligible, except as the real or assumed utterance of a Primate (in later language) of the Churches of Asia Minor. To the inhabitants of the barren and remote isle of Patmos, Rome and Ephesus almost represented the world; their rocky nest among the waters was scarcely visited except as a brief resting place for those who sailed from one of those great cities to the other, or for occasional traders from Corinth.

(2) The second evidence is the fragment of the Epistle of Irenaeus to Florinus preserved in the fifth book of the "Ecclesiastical History" of Eusebius. Irenaeus mentions no dim tradition, appeals to no past which was never present. He has but to question his own recollections of Polycarp, whom he remembered in early life. "Where he sat to talk, his way, his manner of life, his personal appearance, how he used to tell of his intimacy with John, and with the others who had seen the Lord."

Irenaeus elsewhere distinctly says that "John himself issued the Gospel while living at Ephesus in Asia Minor, and that he survived in that city until Trajan's time."

(3) The third great historical evidence which connects St. John with Ephesus is that of Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus, who wrote a synodical epistle to Victor and the Roman Church on the Quartodeciman question, toward the close of the second century. Polycrates speaks of the great ashes which sleep in Asia Minor until the Advent of the Lord, when He shall raise up His saints. He proceeds to mention Philip who sleeps in Hierapolis; two of his daughters; a third who takes her rest in Ephesus, and "John moreover, who leaned upon the breast of Jesus, who was a high priest bearing the radiant plate of gold upon his forehead."

This threefold evidence would seem to tender the sojourn of St. John at Ephesus for many years one of the most solidly attested facts of earlier Church history.

It will be necessary for our purpose to sketch the general condition of Ephesus in St. John's time.

A traveller coming from Antioch of Pisidia (as St. Paul did A.D. 54) descended from the mountain chain which separates the Meander from the Cayster. He passed down by a narrow ravine to the "Asian meadow" celebrated by Homer. There, rising from the valley, partly running up the slope of Mount Coressus, and again higher along the shoulder of Mount Prion, the traveller saw the great city of Ephesus towering upon the hills, with widely scattered suburbs. In the first century the population was immense, and included a strange mixture of races and religions. Large numbers of Jews were settled there, and seems to have possessed a full religious organisation under a High priest or Chief Rabbi. But the prevailing superstition was the worship of the Ephesian Artemis. The great temple, the priesthood whose chief seems to have enjoyed a royal or quasi-royal rank, the affluence of pilgrims at certain seasons of the year, the industries connected with objects of devotion, supported a swarm of devotees, whose fanaticism was intensified by their material interest in a vast religious establishment. Ephesus boasted of being a theocratic city, the possessor and keeper of a temple glorified by art as well as by devotion. It had a civic calendar marked by a round of splendid festivities associated with the cultus of the goddess. Yet the moral reputation of the city stood at the lowest point, even in the estimation of Greeks. The Greek character was effeminated in Ionia by Asiatic manners, and Ephesus was the most dissolute city of Ionia. Its once superb schools of art became infected by the ostentatious vulgarity of an ever-increasing parvenu opulence. The place was chiefly divided between dissipation and a degrading form of literature. Dancing and music were heard day and night; a protracted revel was visible in the streets. Lascivious romances whose infamy was proverbial were largely sold and passed from hand to hand. Yet there were not a few of a different character. In that divine climate, the very lassitude, which was the reaction from excessive amusement and perpetual sunshine, disposed many minds to seek for refuge in the shadows of a visionary world. Some who had received or inherited Christianity from Aquila and Priscilla, or from St. Paul himself, thirty or forty years before, had contaminated the purity of the faith with inferior elements derived from the contagion of local heresy, or from the infiltration of pagan thought. The Ionian intellect seems to have delighted in imaginative metaphysics; and for minds undisciplined by true logic or the training of severe science imaginative metaphysics is a dangerous form of mental recreation. The adept becomes the slave of his own formulae, and drifts into partial insanity by a process which seems to himself to be one of indisputable reasoning. Other influences outside Christianity ran in the same direction. Amulets were bought by trembling believers. Astrological calculations were received with the irresistible

fascination of terror. Systems of magic, incantations, forms of exorcism, traditions of theosophy, communications with demons—all that we should now sum up under the head of spiritualism—laid their spell upon thousands. No Christian reader of the nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles will be inclined to doubt that beneath all this mass of superstition and imposture there lay some dark reality of evil power. At all events the extent of these practices, these "curious arts" in Ephesus at the time of St. Paul's visit, is clearly proved by the extent of the local literature which spiritualism put forth. The value of the books of magic which were burned by penitents of this class, is estimated by St. Luke at fifty thousand pieces of silver—probably about thirteen hundred and fifty pounds of our money!

Let us now consider what ideas or allusions in the Epistles of St. John coincide with, and fit into, this Ephesian contexture of life thought.

We shall have occasion in the third chapter to refer to forms of Christian heresy or of semi-Christian speculation indisputably pointed to by St. John, and prevalent in Asia Minor when the Apostle wrote. But besides this, several other points of contact with Ephesus can be detected in the Epistles before us.

(1) The first Epistle closes with a sharp decisive warning, expressed in a form which could only have been employed when those who were addressed habitually lived in an atmosphere saturated with idolatry, where the social temptations to come to terms with idolatrous practices were powerful and ubiquitous. This was no doubt true of many other places at the time, but it was preeminently true of Ephesus. Certain of the Gnostic Christian sects in Ionia held lax views about "eating things sacrificed unto idols," although fornication was a general accompaniment of such a compliance. Two of the angels of the Seven Churches of Asia within the Ephesian group—the angels of Pergamum and of Thyatira—receive special admonition from the Lord upon this subject. These considerations prove that the command, "Children, guard yourselves from the idols," had a very special suitability to the conditions of life in Ephesus.

(2) The population of Ephesus was of a very composite kind. Many were attracted to the capital of Ionia by its reputation as the capital of the pleasures of the world, It was also the centre of an enormous trade by land

and sea. Ephesus, Alexandria, Antioch, and Corinth were the four cities where at that period all races and all religions of civilised men were most largely represented. Now the First Epistle of St. John has a peculiar breadth in its representation of the purpose of God. Christ is not merely the fulfilment of the hopes of one particular people. The Church is not merely destined to be the home of a handful of spiritual citizens. The Atonement is as wide as the race of man. "He is the propitiation for the whole world; we have seen, and bear witness that the Father sent the Son as Saviour of the world." A cosmopolitan population is addressed in a cosmopolitan epistle.

(3) We have seen that the gaiety and sunshine of Ephesus was sometimes darkened by the shadows of a world of magic; that for some natures Ionia was a land haunted by spiritual terrors. He must be a hasty student who fails to connect the extraordinary narrative in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts with the ample and awful recognition in the Epistle to the Ephesians of the mysterious conflict in the Christian life against evil intelligences, real, though unseen. The brilliant rationalist may dispose of such things by the convenient and compendious method of a sneer. "Such narratives as that" (of St. Paul's struggle with the exorcists at Ephesus) "are disagreeable little spots in everything that is done by the people. Though we cannot

do a thousandth part of what St. Paul did, we have a system of physiology and of medicine very superior to his." Perhaps he had a system of spiritual diagnosis very superior to ours. In the epistle to the Angel of the Church of Thyatira, mention is made of "the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess," who led astray the servants of Christ. St. John surely addresses himself to a community where influences precisely of this kind exist, and are recognised when he writes, - "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God." The Church or Churches, which the First Epistle directly contemplates, did not consist of men just converted. Its whole language supposes Christians, some of whom had grown old and were "fathers" in the faith, while others who were younger enjoyed the privilege of having been born and brought up in a Christian atmosphere. They are reminded again and again, with a reiteration which would be unaccountable if it had no special significance, that the commandment "that which they heard," "the word," "the message," is the same which they had "from the beginning." Now this will exactly suit the circumstances of a Church like the Ephesian, to which another Apostle had originally preached the Gospel many years before. On the whole, we have in favour of assigning these Epistles to Ionian and Ephesian surroundings a considerable amount of external evidence. The general characteristics of the First Epistle consonant with the view of their origin which we have advocated are briefly these.

- (1) It is addressed to readers who were encompassed by peculiar temptations to make a compromise with idolatry.
- (2) It has an amplitude and generality of tone which befitted one who wrote to a Church which embraced members from many countries, and was thus in contact with men of many races and religions.
- (3) It has a peculiar solemnity of reference to the invisible world of spiritual evil and to its terrible influence upon the human mind.
- (4) The Epistle is pervaded by a desire to have it recognised that the creed and law of practice which it asserts is absolutely one with that which had been proclaimed by earlier heralds of the cross to the same community.

Every one of these characteristics is consistent with the destination of the Epistle for the Christians of Ephesus in the first instance. Its polemical element, which we are presently to discuss, adds to an accumulation of coincidences which no ingenuity can volatilise away. The Epistle meets Ephesian circumstances; it also strikes at Ionian heresies. Aia-so-Louk, the modern name of Ephesus, appears to be derived from two Greek words, which speak of St. John the Divine, the theologian of the Church. As the memory of the Apostle haunts' the city where he so long lived, even in its fall and long decay under its Turkish conquerors, -and the fatal spread of the malaria from the marshes of the Cayster—so a memory of the place seems to rest in turn upon the Epistle, and we read it more satisfactorily while we assign to it the origin attributed to it by Christian antiquity, and keep that memory before our minds.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 2

THE CONNECTION OF THE EPISTLE WITH THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN—

1Joh 1:4

FROM the wholesale burning of books at Ephesus, as a consequence of awakened convictions, the most pregnant of all commentators upon the New Testament has drawn a powerful lesson. "True religion," says the writer, "puts bad books out of the way." Ephesus at great expense burnt curious and evil volumes, and the "word of God grew and prevailed." And he proceeds to show how just in the very matter where Ephesus had manifested such costly penitence, she was rewarded by being made a sort of depository of the most precious books which ever came from human pens. St. Paul addresses a letter to the Ephesians. Timothy was Bishop of Ephesus when the two great pastoral Epistles were sent to him. All St. John's writings point to the same place. The Gospel and Epistles were written there, or with primary reference to the capital of Ionia. The Apocalypse was in all probability first read at Ephesus.

Of this group of Ephesian books we select two of primary importance—the Gospel and First Epistle of St. John. Let us dwell upon the close and thorough connection of the two documents, upon the interpretation of the Epistle by the Gospel, by whatever name we may prefer to designate the connection.

It is said indeed by a very high authority, that while the "whole Epistle is permeated with thoughts of the person and work of Christ," yet "direct references to facts of the Gospel are singularly rare." More particularly it is stated that "we find here none of the foundation and (so to speak) crucial events summarised in the earliest Christian confession as we still find them in the Apostle's creed." And among these events are placed, "the Birth of the Virgin Mary, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Session, the Coming to Judgment."

To us there seems to be some exaggeration in this way of putting the matter. A writing which accompanied a sacred history, and which was a spiritual comment upon that very history, was not likely to repeat the history upon which it commented, just in the same shape. Surely the Birth is the necessary condition of having come in the flesh. The incident of the piercing of the side, and the water and blood which flowed from it, is distinctly spoken of; and in that the Crucifixion is implied. Shrinking with shame from Jesus at His Coming, which is spoken of in another verse, has no meaning unless that Coming be to Judgment. The sixth chapter is, if we may so say, the section of "the Blood," in the fourth Gospel. That section standing in the Gospel, standing in the great Sacrament of the Church, standing in the perpetually cleansing and purifying efficacy of the Atonement—ever present as a witness, which becomes personal, because identified with a Living Personality—finds its echo and counterpart in the Epistle towards the beginning and near the close.

We now turn to that which is the most conclusive evidence of connection between

two documents—one historical, the other moral and spiritual—of which literary composition is capable. Let us suppose that a writer of profound thoughtfulness has finished, after long elaboration, the historical record of an eventful and many-sided life—a life of supreme importance to a nation, or to the general thought and progress of humanity. The book is sent to the representatives of some community or school. The ideas which its subject has uttered to the world, from their breadth and from the occasional obscurity of expression incident to all great spiritual utterances, need some elucidation. The plan is really exhaustive, and combines the facts of the life with a full insight into their relations; but it may easily be missed by any but thoughtful readers. The author will accompany this main work by something which in modern language we might call an introduction, or appendix, or advertisement, or explanatory pamphlet, or encyclical letter. Now the ancient form of literary composition rendered books packed with thought doubly difficult both to read and write; for they did not admit footnotes, or marginal analyses, or abstracts. St. John then practically says, first to his readers in Asia Minor, then to the Church forever—"With this life of Jesus I send you not only thoughts for your spiritual benefit, moulded round His teaching, but something more; I send you an abstract, a compendium of contents at the beginning of this letter; I also send you at its close a key to the plan on which my Gospel is conceived." And surely a careful reader of the Gospel at its first publication would have desired assistance exactly of this nature. He would have wished to have a synopsis of contents, short but comprehensive, and a synoptical view of the author's plan—of the idea which guided him in his choice of incidents so momentous and of teaching so varied.

We have in the First Epistle two synopses of the Gospel which correspond with a perfect precision to these claims. We have:

- (1) a synopsis of the contents of the Gospel;
- (2) a synoptical view of the conception from which it was written.

I We find in the Epistle at the very outset a synopsis of the contents of the Gospel.

"That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we gazed upon, and our hands handled—I speak concerning the Word who is the Life—that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you also."

What are the contents of the Gospel?

- (1) A lofty and dogmatic prooemium, which tells us of "the Word who was in the beginning with God—in Whom was life."
- (2) Discourses and utterances, sometimes running on through pages, sometimes brief and broken.
- (3) Works, sometimes miraculous, sometimes wrought into the common contexture of human life—looks, influences, seen by the very eyes of St. John and others, gazed upon with ever deepening joy and wonder.
- (4) Incidents which proved that all this issued from One who was intensely human; that it was as real as life and humanity—historical, not visionary; the doing and the effluence of a Manhood which could be, and which was, grasped by human hands.

Such is a synopsis of the Gospel precisely as it is given in the beginning of the First

Epistle.

(1) The Epistle mentions first, "that which was from the beginning." There is the compendium of the prooemium of the Gospel.

(2) One of the most important constituent parts of the Gospel is to be found in its ample preservation of dialogues, in which the Saviour is one interlocutor; of monologues spoken to the hushed hearts of the disciples, or to the listening Heart of the Father, yet not in tones so low that their love did not find it audible. This element of the narrative is summed up by the writer of the Epistle in two words—"That which we heard."

(3) The works of benevolence or power, the doings and sufferings—the pathos or joy which springs up from them in the souls of the disciples occupy a large portion of the Gospel. All these come under the heading,

"that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we gazed upon," with one unbroken gaze of wonder as so beautiful, and of awe as so divine.

(4) The assertion of the reality of the Manhood of Him who was yet the Life manifested—a reality through all His words, works, sufferings—finds its strong, bold summary in this compendium of the contents of the Gospel, "and our hands have handled." Nay, a still shorter compendium, follows:

(1) The Life with the Father.

(2) The Life manifested.

II But we have more than a synopsis which embraces the contents of the Gospel at the beginning of the Epistle. We have towards its close a second synopsis of the whole framework of the Gospel; not now the theory of the Person of Christ, which in such a life was necessarily placed at its beginning, but of the human conception which pervaded the Evangelist's composition.

The second synopsis, not of the contents of the Gospel, but of the aim and conception which it assumed in the form into which it was moulded by St. John, is given by the Epistle with a fulness which omits scarcely a paragraph of the Gospel. In the space of six verses of the fifth chapter the word witness, as verb or substantive, is repeated ten times. The simplicity of St. John's artless rhetoric can make no more emphatic claim on our attention. The Gospel is indeed a tissue woven out of many lines of evidence human and divine. Compress its purpose into one single word. No doubt it is supremely the Gospel of the Divinity of Jesus. But, next to that, it may best be defined as the Gospel of Witness. These witnesses we may take in the order of the Epistle. St. John feels that his Gospel is more than a book; it is a past made everlastingly present. Such as the great Life was in history, so it stands forever. Jesus is "the propitiation," "is righteous," "is here." So the great influences round His Person, the manifold witnesses of His Life, stand witnessing forever in the Gospel and in the Church. What are these?

(1) The Spirit is ever witnessing. So our Lord in the Gospel—"when the Comforter is come, He shall witness of Me." No one can doubt that the Spirit is one preeminent subject of the Gospel. Indeed, teaching about Him, above all as the witness to Christ, occupies three unbroken chapters in one place.

(2) The water is ever witnessing. So long as St. John's Gospel lasts, and permeates

the Church with its influence, the water must so testify. There is scarcely a paragraph of it where water is not; almost always with some relation to Christ. The witness of the Baptist is, "I baptize with water." The Jordan itself bears witness that all its waters cannot give that which He bestows who is "preferred before" John. Is not the water of Cana that was made wine a witness to His glory? The birth of "water and of the Spirit," is another witness. And so in the Gospel, section after section. The water of Jacob's well; the water of the pool of Bethesda; the waters of the sea of Galilee, with their stormy waves upon which He walked; the water outpoured at the feast of tabernacles, with its application to the river of living water; the water of Siloam; the water poured into the basin, when Jesus washed the disciples' feet; the water which, with the blood, streamed from the riven side upon the cross; the water of the sea of Galilee in its gentler mood, when Jesus showed Himself on its beach to the seven; as long as all this is recorded in the Gospel, as long as the sacrament of Baptism, with its visible water and its invisible grace working in the regenerate, abides among the faithful; -so long is the water ever witnessing.

(3) The Blood is ever "witnessing." Expiation once for all; purification continually from the blood outpoured; drinking the blood of the Son of Man by participation in the sacrament of His love, with the grace and strength that it gives day by day to innumerable souls; the Gospel concentrated into that great sacrifice; the Church's gifts of benediction summarised in the unspeakable Gift; this is the unceasing witness of the Blood.

(4) "The witness of men" fills the Gospel from beginning to end. The glorious series of confessions wrung from willing and unwilling hearts form the points of division round which the whole narrative may be grouped. Let us think of all those attestations which lie between the Baptist's precious testimony, with the sweet yet fainter utterances of Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, and the perfect creed of Christendom condensed into the burning words of Thomas—"my Lord and my God." What a range of feeling and faith; what a variety of attestation coming from human souls, sometimes wrung from them half unwillingly, sometimes uttered at crisis moments with an impulse that could not be resisted! The witness of men in the Gospel, and the assurance of one testimony that was to be given by the Apostles individually and collectively, besides the evidences already named, include the following—the witness of Nicodemus, of the Samaritan woman, of the Samaritans, of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, of Simon Peter, of the officers of the Jewish authorities, of the blind man, of Pilate.

(5) The "witness of God" occupies also a great position in the fourth Gospel. That witness may be said to be given in five forms: the witness of the Father, of Christ Himself, of the Holy Spirit, of Scripture, of miracles. This great cloud of witnesses, human and divine, finds its appropriate completion in another subjective witness. The whole body of evidence passes from the region of the intellectual to that of the moral and spiritual life. The evidence acquires that evidentness which is to all our knowledge what the sap is to the tree. The faithful carries it in his heart; it goes about with him, rests with him day and night, is close to him in life and death. He, the principle of whose being is belief ever going out of itself and resting its acts of faith on the Son of God, has all that manifold witness in him.

It would be easy to enlarge upon the verbal connection between the Epistle before us and the Gospel which it accompanied. We might draw out (as has often been done) a list of quotations from the Gospel, a whole common treasury of mystic language; but we prefer to leave an undivided impression upon the mind. A document which gives

us a synopsis of the contents of another document at the beginning, and a synoptical analysis of its predominant idea at the close, covering the entire work, and capable of absorbing every part of it (except some necessary adjuncts of a rich and crowded narrative), has a connection with it which is vital and integral. The Epistle is at once an abstract of the contents of the Gospel, and a key to its purport. To the Gospel, at least to it and the Epistle considered as integrally one, the Apostle refers when he says: "these things write we unto you."

St. John had asserted that one end of his declaration was to make his readers hold fast "' fellowship with us," i.e., with the Church as the Apostolic Church; aye, and that fellowship of ours is "with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ; and these things," he continues (with special reference to his Gospel, as spoken of in his opening words), "we write unto you, that your joy may be fulfilled."

There is as truly a joy as a "patience and comfort of the Scriptures." The Apostle here speaks of "your joy," but that implies his also.

All great literature, like all else that is beautiful, is a "joy forever." To the true student his books are this. But this is so only with a few really great books. We are not speaking of works of exact science. Butler, Pascal, Bacon, Shakespeare, Homer, Scott, theirs is work of which congenial spirits never grow quite tired. But to be capable of giving out joy, books must have been written with it. The Scotch poet tells us that no poet ever found the Muse until he had learned to walk beside the brook, and "to think long." That which is not thought over with pleasure; that which, as it gradually rises before the author in its unity, does not fill him with delight; will never permanently give pleasure to readers. He must know joy before he can say—"these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

The book that is to give joy must be a part of a man's self. That is just what most books are not. They are laborious, diligent, useful perhaps; they are not interesting or delightful. How touching it is, when the poor old stiff hand must write, and the overworked brain think, for bread! Is there anything so pathetic in literature as Scott setting his back bravely to the wall, and forcing from his imagination the reluctant creations which used to issue with such splendid profusion from its haunted chambers?

Of the conditions under which an inspired writer pursued his labours we know but little. But some conditions are apparent in the books of St. John with which we are now concerned. The fourth Gospel is a book written without *arriere pensee*, without literary conceit, without the paralysing dread of criticism. What verdict the polished society of Ephesus would pronounce; what sneers would circulate in philosophic quarters; what the numerous heretics would murmur in their conventicles; what Critics within the Church might venture to whisper, missing perhaps favourite thoughts and catch words; St. John cared no more than if he were dead. He communed with the memories of the past; he listened for the music of the Voice which had been the teacher of his life. To be faithful to these memories, to recall these words, to be true to Jesus, was his one aim. No one can doubt that the Gospel was written with a full delight. No one who is capable of feeling ever has doubted that it was written as if with "a feather dropped from an angel's wing"; that without aiming at anything but truth, it attains in parts at least a transcendent beauty. At the close of the proemium, after the completest theological formula which the Church has ever possessed—the still, even pressure of a tide of thought—we have a parenthetic sentence, like the splendid unexpected rush and swell of a sudden wave ("we beheld the glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father"); then after

the parenthesis a soft and murmuring fall of the whole great tide ("full of grace and truth"). Can we suppose that the Apostle hung over his sentence with literary zest? The number of writers is small who can give us an everlasting truth by a single word, a single pencil touch; who, having their mind loaded with thought, are wise enough to keep that strong and eloquent silence which is the prerogative only of the highest genius. St. John gives us one of these everlasting pictures, of these inexhaustible symbols, in three little words—"He then having received the sop, went immediately out, and it was night." Do we suppose that he admired the perfect effect of that powerful self-restraint? Just before the crucifixion he writes—"Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crowns of thorns, and the purple robe, and Pilate saith unto them, Behold the Man!" The pathos, the majesty, the royalty of sorrow, the admiration and pity of Pilate, have been for centuries the inspiration of Christian art. Did St. John congratulate himself upon the image of sorrow and of beauty which stands forever in these lines? With St. John as a writer it is as with St. John delineated in the fresco at Padua by the genius of Giotto. The form of the ascending saint is made visible through a reticulation of rays of light in colours as splendid as ever came from mortal pencil; but the rays issue entirely from the Saviour, whose face and form are full before him.

The feeling of the Church has always been that the Gospel of St. John was a solemn work of faith and prayer. The oldest extant fragment upon the canon of the New Testament tells us that the Gospel was undertaken after earnest invitations from the brethren and the bishops, with solemn united fasting; not without special revelation to Andrew the Apostle that John was to do the work. A later and much less important document, connected in its origin with Patmos, embodies one beautiful legend about the composition of the Gospel. It tells how the Apostle was about to leave Patmos for Ephesus; how the Christians of the island besought him to leave in writing an account of the Incarnation, and mysterious life of the Son of God; how St. John and his chosen friends went forth from the haunts of men about a mile, and halted in a quiet spot called the gorge of Rest, and then ascended the mountain which overhung it. There they remained three days. "Then," writes Prochorus, "he ordered me to go down to the town for paper and ink. And after two days I found him standing rapt in prayer. Said he to me — 'take the ink and paper, and stand on my right hand.' And I did so. And there was a great lightning and thunder, so that the mountain shook. And I fell on the ground as if dead. Whereupon John stretched forth his hand and took hold of me, and said—'stand up at this spot at my right hand.' After which he prayed again, and after his prayer said unto me—'son Prochorus, what thou hearest from my mouth, write upon the sheets.' And having opened his mouth as he was standing praying, and looking up to heaven, he began to say—'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' And so following on, he spake in order, standing as he was, and I wrote sitting."

True instinct which tells us that the Gospel of St. John was the fruit of prayer as well as of memory; that it was thought out in some valley of rest, some hush among the hills; that it came from a solemn joy which it breathed forth upon others! "These things write I unto you, that your joy may be fulfilled." Generation after generation it has been so. In the numbers numberless of the Redeemed, there can be very few who have not been brightened by the joy of that book. Still, at one funeral after another, hearts are soothed by the word in it which says—"I am the Resurrection and the Life." Still the sorrowful and the dying ask to hear again and again "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." A brave young officer sent to the war in Africa, from a regiment at home, where he had caused grief by his extravagance, penitent and dying in his tent, during the fatal day of Isandula, scrawled in pencil

—"Dying, dear father and mother — happy—for Jesus says, 'He that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'" Our English Communion Office, with its divine beauty, is a texture shot through and through with golden threads from the discourse at Capernaum. Still are the disciples glad when they see the Lord in that record. It is the book of the church's smiles; it is the gladness of the saints; it is the purest fountain of joy in all the literature of earth.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 3

THE POLEMICAL ELEMENT IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.— 1Joh 4:2,3

A DISCUSSION (however far from technical completeness) of the polemical element in St. John's Epistle, probably seems likely to be destitute of interest or of instruction, except to ecclesiastical or philosophical antiquarians. Those who believe the Epistle to be a divine book must, however, take a different view of the matter. St. John was not merely dealing with forms of human error which were local and fortuitous. In refuting them he was enunciating principles of universal import, of almost illimitable application. Let us pass by those obscure sects, those subtle curiosities of error, which the diligence of minute research has excavated from the masses of erudition under which they have been buried; which theologians, like other antiquarians, have sometimes labelled with names at once uncouth and imaginative. Let us fix our attention upon such broad and well-defined features of heresy as credible witnesses have indelibly fixed upon the contemporaneous heretical thought of Asia Minor; and we shall see not only a great precision in St. John's words, but a radiant image of truth, which is equally adapted to enlighten us in the peculiar dangers of our age.

Controversy is the condition under which all truth must be held, which is not in necessary subject matter—which is not either mathematical or physical. In the case of the second, controversy is active, until the fact of the physical law is established beyond the possibility of rational discussion; until self-consistent thought can only think upon the postulate of its admission. Now in these departments all the argument is on one side. We are not in a state of suspended speculation, leaning neither to affirmation nor denial, which is doubt. We are not in the position of inclining either to one side or the other, by an almost impalpable overplus of evidence, which is suspicion; or by those additions to this slender stock which convert suspicion into opinion. We are not merely yielding a strong adhesion to one side, while we must yet admit, to ourselves at least, that our knowledge is not perfect, nor absolutely manifest—which is the mental and moral position of belief. In necessary subject matter, we know and see with that perfect intellectual vision for which controversy is impossible.

The region of belief must therefore, in our present condition, be a region from which controversy cannot be excluded.

Religious controversialists may be divided into three classes, for each of which we may find an emblem in the animal creation. The first are the nuisances, at times the numerous nuisances, of Churches. These controversialists delight in showing that the convictions of persons whom they happen to dislike, can, more or less plausibly, be pressed to unpopular conclusions. They are incessant fault finders. Some of them, if they had an opportunity, might delight in finding the sun guilty in his daily worship of the many-coloured ritualism of the western clouds. Controversialists of this class, if minute, are venomous, and capable of inflicting a degree of pain quite out of

proportion to their strength. Their emblem may be found somewhere in the range of "every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." The second class of controversialists is of a much higher nature. Their emblem is the hawk, with his bright eye, with the forward throw of his pinions, his rushing flight along the woodland skirt, his unerring stroke. Such hawks of the Churches, whose delight is in pouncing upon fallacies, fulfil an important function. They rid us of tribes of mischievous winged errors. The third class of controversialists is that which embraces St. John supremely—such minds also as Augustine's in his loftiest and most inspired moments, such as those which have endowed the Church with the Nicene Creed. Of such the eagle is the emblem. Over the grosser atmosphere of earthly anger or imperfect motives, over the clouds of error, poised in the light of the True Sun, with the eagle's upward wing and the eagle's sunward eye, St. John looks upon the truth. He is indeed the eagle of the four Evangelists, the eagle of God. If the eagle could speak with our language, his style would have something of the purity of the sky and of the brightness of the light. He would warn his nestlings against losing their way in the banks of clouds that lie below him so far. At times he might show that there was a danger or an error whose position he might indicate by the sweep of his wing, or by descending for a moment to strike.

There are then polemics in the Epistle and in the Gospel of St. John. But we refuse to hunt down some obscure heresy in every sentence. It will be enough to indicate the master heresy of Asia Minor, to which St. John undoubtedly refers, with its intellectual and moral perils. In so doing we shall find the very truth which our own generation especially needs.

The prophetic words addressed by St. Paul to the Church of Ephesus thirty years before the date of this Epistle had found only too complete a fulfilment. "From among their own selves," at Ephesus in particular, through the Churches of Asia Minor in general, men had arisen "speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." The prediction began to justify itself when Timothy was Bishop of Ephesus only five or six years later. A few significant words in the First Epistle to Timothy let us see the heretical influences that were at work. St. Paul speaks with the solemnity of a closing charge when he warns Timothy against what were once "profane babblings," and "antitheses of the Gnosis which is falsely so called." In an earlier portion of the same Epistle the young bishop is exhorted to charge certain men not to teach a "different doctrine," neither to give "heed to myths and genealogies," out of whose endless mazes no intellect entangled in them can ever find its way. Those commentators put us on a false scent who would have us look after Judaizing error, Jewish "stemmata." The reference is not to Judaistic ritualism, but to semi-Pagan philosophical speculation. The "genealogies" are systems of Divine potencies which the Gnostics (and probably some Jewish Rabbis of Gnosticising tendency) called "aeons," and so the earliest Christian writers understood the word.

Now without entering into the details of Gnosticism, this may be said of its general method and purpose. It aspired at once to accept and to transform the Christian creed; to elevate its faith into a philosophy, a knowledge—and then to make this knowledge cashier and supersede faith, love, holiness, redemption itself.

This system was strangely eclectic, and amalgamated certain elements not only of Greek and Egyptian, but of Persian and Indian, Pantheistic thought. It was infected throughout with dualism and doketism. Dualism held that all good and evil in the universe proceeded from two first principles, good and evil. Matter was the power of evil whose home is in the region of darkness. Minds which started from this

fundamental view could only accept the Incarnation provisionally and with reserve, and must at once proceed to explain it away. "The Word was made flesh"; but the Word of God, the True Light, could not be personally united to an actual material system called a human body, plunged in the world of matter, darkened and contaminated by its immersion. The human flesh in which Jesus appeared to be seen was fictitious. Redemption was a drama with a shadow for its hero. The phantom of a Redeemer was nailed to the phantom of a cross. Philosophical dualism logically became theological doketism. Docketism logically evaporated dogmas, sacraments, duties, redemption.

It may be objected that this doketism has been a mere temporary and local aberration of the human intellect; a metaphysical curiosity, with no real roots in human nature. If so, its refutation is an obsolete piece of an obsolete controversy; and the Epistle in some of its most vital portions is a dead letter.

Now of course literal doketism is past and gone, dead and buried. The progress of the human mind, the slow and resistless influence of the logic of common sense, the wholesome influence of the sciences of observation in correcting visionary metaphysics, have swept away aeons, emanations, dualism, and the rest. But a subtler, and to modern minds infinitely more attractive, doketism is round us, and accepted, as far as words go, with a passionate enthusiasm.

What is this doketism?

Let us refer to the history and to the language of a mind of singular subtlety and power.

In George Eliot's early career she was induced to prepare for the press a translation of Strauss's mythical explanation of the life of Jesus. It is no disrespect to so great a memory to say, that at that period of her career, at least, Miss Evans must have been unequal to grapple with such a work, if she desired to do so from a Christian point of view. She had not apparently studied the history or the structure of the Gospels. What she knew of their meaning she had imbibed from an antiquated and unscientific school of theologians. The faith of a sciolist engaged in a struggle for its life with the fatal strength of a critical giant instructed in the negative lore of all ages, and sharpened by hatred of the Christian religion; met with the result which was to be expected. Her faith expired, not without some painful throes. She fell a victim to the fallacy of youthful conceit—I cannot answer this or that objection, therefore it is unanswerable. She wrote at first that she was "Strauss-sick." It made her ill to dissect the beautiful story of the crucifixion. She took to herself a consolation singular in the circumstances. The sight of an ivory crucifix, and of a pathetic picture of the Passion, made her capable of enduring the first shock of the loss which her heart had sustained. That is, she found comfort in looking at tangible reminders of a scene which had ceased to be a historical reality, of a Sufferer who had faded from a living Redeemer into the spectre of a visionary past. After a time, however, she feels able to propose to herself and others "a new starting point. We can never have a satisfactory basis for the history of the man Jesus, but that negation does not affect the Idea of the Christ, either in its historical influence, or its great symbolic meanings." Yes! a Christ who has no history, of whom we do not possess one undoubted word, of whom we know, and can know, nothing; who has no flesh of fact, no blood of life; an idea, not a man; this is the Christ of modern doketism. The method of this widely diffused school is to separate the sentiments of admiration which the history inspires from the history itself; to sever the ideas of the faith from the facts of the faith, and then to present the ideas thus surviving the dissolvents of

criticism as at once the refutation of the facts and the substitute for them.

This may be pretty writing, though false and illogical writing is rarely even that; but a little consideration will show that this new starting point is not even a plausible substitute for the old belief.

(1) We question simple believers in the first instance. We ask them what is the great religious power in Christianity for themselves, and for others like-minded? What makes people pure, good, self-denying, nurses of the sick, missionaries to the heathen? They will tell us that the power lies, not in any doketic idea of a Christ-life which was never lived, but in "the conviction that that idea was really and perfectly incarnated in an actual career," of which we have a record literally and absolutely true in all essential particulars. When we turn to the past of the Church, we find that as it is with these persons, so it has ever been with the saints. For instance, we hear St. Paul speaking of his whole life. He tells us that "whether we went out of ourselves it was unto God, or whether we be sober, it is for you"; that is to say, such a life has two aspects, one Godward, one manward. Its Godward aspect is a noble insanity, its manward aspect a noble sanity; the first with its beautiful enthusiasm, the second with its saving common sense. What is the source of this? "For the love of Christ constraineth us," — forces the whole stream of life to flow between these two banks without the deviations of selfishness—"because we thus judge that He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but to Him who for their sakes died and rose again." It was the real unselfish life of a real unselfish Man which made such a life as that of St. Paul a possibility. Or we may think of the first beginning of St. John's love for our Lord. When he turned to the past, he remembered one bright day about ten in the morning, when the real Jesus turned to him and to another with a real look, and said with a human voice, "What seek ye?" and then—"Come, and ye shall see." It was the real living love that won the only kind of love which could enable the old man to write as he did in this Epistle so many years afterwards—"we love because He first loved us."

(2) We address ourselves next to those who look at Christ simply as an ideal. We venture to put to them a definite question. You believe that there is no solid basis for the history of the man Jesus; that his life as a historical reality is lost in a dazzling mist of legend and adoration. Has the idea of a Christ, divorced from all accompaniment of authentic fact, unfixed in a definite historical form, uncontinued in an abiding existence, been operative or inoperative for yourselves? Has it been a practical power and motive, or an occasional and evanescent sentiment? There can be no doubt about the answer. It is not a make belief, but a belief, which gives purity and power. It is not an ideal of Jesus, but the blood of Jesus, which cleanseth us from all sin.

There are other lessons of abiding practical importance to be drawn from the polemical elements in St. John's Epistle. These, however, we can only briefly indicate, because we wish to leave an undivided impression of that which seems to be St. John's chief object controversially. There were Gnostics in Asia Minor for whom the mere knowledge of certain supposed spiritual truths was all in all, as there are those amongst ourselves who care for little but what are called clear views. For such St. John writes—"and hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." There were heretics in and about Ephesus who conceived that the special favour of God, or the illumination which they obtained by junction with the sect to which they had "gone out" from the Church, neutralised the poison of sin, and made innocuous for them that which might have been deadly for others. They suffered, as they thought, no more contamination by it, than "gold by lying upon the

dunghill" (to use a favourite metaphor of their own). St. John utters a principle which cleaves through every fallacy in every age which says or insinuates that sin subjective can in any case cease to be sin objective. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law. All unrighteousness is sin." Possibly within the Church itself, certainly among the sectarians without it, there was a disposition to lessen the glory of the Incarnation, by looking upon the Atonement as narrow and partial in its aim. St. John's unhesitating statement is that "He is the propitiation for the whole world." Thus does the eagle of the Church ever fix his gaze above the clouds of error, upon the Sun of universal truth.

Above all, over and through his negation of temporary and local errors about the person of Christ, St. John leads the Church in all ages to the true Christ. Cerinthus, in a form which seems to us eccentric and revolting, proclaimed a Jesus not born of a virgin, temporarily endowed with the sovereign power of the Christ, deprived of Him before His passion and resurrection, while the Christ remained spiritual and impassible. He taught a commonplace Jesus. At the beginning of his Epistle and Gospel John "wings his soul, and leads his readers onward and upward." He is like a man who stands upon the shore and looks upon town and coast and bay. Then another takes the man off with him far to sea. All that he surveyed before is now lost to him; and as he gazes ever oceanward, he does not stay his eye upon any intervening object, but lets it range over the infinite azure. So the Apostle leads us above all creation, and transports us to the ages before it; makes us raise our eyes, not suffering us to find any end in the stretch above, since end is none. That "in the beginning," "from the beginning," of the Epistle and Gospel, includes nothing short of the eternal God. The doketics of many shades proclaimed an ideological, a misty Christ. "Every spirit which confesseth Jesus Christ as in flesh having come is of God, and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus, is not of God." "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, they who confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh." Such a Christ of mist as these words warn us against is again shaped by more powerful intellects and touched with tenderer lights. But the shadowy Christ of George Eliot and of Mill is equally arraigned by the hand of St. John. Each believer may well think within himself—I must die, and that, it may be, very soon; I must be alone with God, and my own soul; with that which I am and have been; with my memories, and with my sins. In that hour the weird desolate language of the Psalmist will find its realisation: "Lover and friend hast thou put from me, and mine acquaintance are—darkness." Then we want, and then we may find, a real Saviour. Then we shall know that if we have only a doketic Christ, we shall indeed be alone—for "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."

NOTE

THE two following extracts in addition to what has been already said in this discourse will supply the reader with that which it is most necessary for him to know upon the heresies of Asia Minor.

1. Two principal heresies upon the nature of Christ then prevailed, each diametrically opposite to the other, as well as to the Catholic faith. One was the heresy of the Doketae, which destroyed the verity of the Human Nature in Christ; the other was the heresy of the Ebionites, who denied the Divine Nature, and the eternal Generation, and inclined to press the observation of the ceremonial law. Ancient writers allow these as heresies

2. of the first century; all admit that they were powerful in the age of Ignatius. Hence

Theodoret ("Prooem.") divided the books of these heresies into two categories. In the first he included those who put forward the idea of a second Creator, and asserted that the Lord had appeared illusively. In the second he placed those who maintained that the Lord was merely a man. Of the first Jerome observed ('Adv. Lucifer.,' 23) 'that while the Apostles yet remained upon the earth, while the blood of Christ was almost smoking upon the sod of Judea, some asserted that the body of the Lord was a phantom.' Of the second the same writer remarked that 'St. John, at the invitation of the bishops of Asia Minor, wrote his Gospel against Cerinthus and other heretics—and especially against the dogma of the Ebionites then rising into existence, who asserted that Christ did not exist before Mary.' Epiphanius notes that these heresies were mainly of Asia Minor (ἡμικρατία). 'Haeres.,' 56 (Pearson, "Vindic. Ignat.," 2, 100, 1, p. 351).

3. "Two of these sects or schools are very ancient, and seem to have been referred to by St. John. The first is that of the Naassenians or Ophites. The antiquity of this sect is guaranteed to us by the author of the 'Philosophumena,' who represents them as the real founders of Gnosticism. 'Later,' he says, 'they were called Gnostics, pretending that they only knew the depths.' (To this allusion is made in Re 2:24, which would identify these sectaries with the Balaamites and Nicolaitans.) The second of these great heresies of Asia Minor is the doketic. The publication of the 'Philosophumena' has furnished us with more precise information about their tenets. We need not say much about the Divine emanation—the fall of souls into matter, their corporeal captivity, their final rehabilitation (these are merely the ordinary Gnostic ideas). But we may follow what they assert about the Saviour and His manifestation in the world. Θεὸς ἀμὴν ἐν ἡμῖν τῆς οὐλῆς τοῦ τῆς Πατρὸς (οὐ μονογενὴς παῖς ἀπέψεν αἰώνιος), who descended to the region of shadows and the Virgin's womb, where He clothed Himself in a gross, human material body. But this was a vestment of no integrally personal and permanent character; it was, indeed, a sort of masquerade, an artifice or fiction imagined to deceive the prince of this world. The Saviour at His baptism received a second birth, and clad himself with a subtler texture of body, formed in the bosom of the waters—if that can be termed a body which was but a fantastic texture woven or framed upon the model of His earthly body. During the hours of the Passion, the flesh formed in Mary's womb, and it alone, was nailed to the tree. The great Archon or Demiurgus, whose work that flesh was, was played upon and deceived, in pouring His wrath only upon the work of His hands. For the soul, or spiritual substance, which had been wounded in the flesh of the Saviour, extricated itself from this as from an unmeet and hateful vesture; and itself contributing to nailing it to the cross, triumphed by that very flesh over principalities and powers. It did not, however, remain naked, but clad in the subtler form which it had assumed in its baptismal second birth ('Philosoph.,' 8:10). What is remarkable in this theory is, first, the admission of the reality of the terrestrial body, formed in the Virgin's womb, and then nailed to the cross. The negation is only of the real and permanent union of this body with the heavenly spirit which inhabits it. We shall further note the importance which it attaches to the Saviour's baptism, and the part played by water, as if an intermediate element between flesh and spirit. This may bear upon 1Jo 5:8."

[This passage is from a "Dissertation—les Trois Temoins Celestes," in a collection of religious and literary papers by French scholars (Tom. 2., Sept., 1868, pp. 388-392). The author, since deceased, was the Abbe Le Hir, M. Renan's instructor in Hebrew at Saint Sulpice, and pronounced by his pupil one of the first of European Hebraists and scientific theologians.]



The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 4

THE IMAGE OF ST. JOHN'S SOUL IN HIS EPISTLE— 1Jo 5:18-20

Much has been said in the last few years of a series of subtle and delicate experiments in sound. Means have been devised of doing for the ear something analogous to that which glasses do for another sense, and of making the results palpable by a system of notation. We are told that every tree, for instance, according to its foliage, its position, and the direction of the winds, has its own prevalent note or tone, which can be marked down, and its timbre made first visible by this notation, and then audible. So is it with the souls of the saints of God, and chiefly of the Apostles. Each has its own note, the prevalent key on which its peculiar music is set. Or we may employ another image which possibly has St. John's own authority. Each of the Twelve has his own emblem among the twelve vast and precious foundation stones which underlie the whole wall of the Church. St. John may thus differ from St. Peter, as the sapphire's azure differs from the jasper's strength and radiance. Each is beautiful, but with its own characteristic tint of beauty.

We propose to examine the peculiarities of St. John's spiritual nature which may be traced in this Epistle. We try to form some conception of the key on which it is set, of the colour which it reflects in the light of heaven, of the image of a soul which it presents. In this attempt we cannot be deceived. St. John is so transparently honest; he takes such a deep, almost terribly severe view of truth. We find him using an expression about truth which is perhaps without a parallel in any other writer. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness we lie, and are not doing the truth." The truth then for him is something co-extensive with our whole nature and whole life. Truth is not only to be spoken—that is but a fragmentary manifestation of it. It is to be done. It would have been for him the darkest of lies to have put forth a spiritual commentary on his Gospel which was not realised in himself. In the Epistle, no doubt, he uses the first person singular sparingly, modestly including himself in the simple "we" of Christian association. Yet we are as sure of the perfect accuracy of the picture of his soul, of the music in his heart which he makes visible and audible in his letter, as we are that he heard the voice of many waters, and saw the city coming down from God out of heaven; as sure, as if at the close of this fifth chapter he had added with the triumphant emphasis of truth, in his simple and stately way, "I John heard these things and saw them." He closes this letter with a threefold affirmation of certain primary postulates of the Christian life; of its purity, of its privilege, of its Presence,—"we know," "we know," "we know." In each case the plural might be exchanged for the singular. He says "we know," because he is sure "I know."

In studying the Epistles of St. John we may well ask what we see and hear therein of St. John's character,

- (1) as a sacred writer,
- (2) as a saintly soul.

I We consider first the indications in the Epistle of the Apostle's character as a sacred writer. For help in this direction we do not turn with much satisfaction to essays or annotations pervaded by the modern spirit. The textual criticism of minute scholarship is no doubt much, but it is not all. Aorists are made for man; not man for the aorist. He indeed who has not traced every fibre of the sacred text with grammar and lexicon cannot quite honestly claim, to be an expositor of it. But in the case of a book like Scripture this, after all, is but an important preliminary. The frigid subtlety of the commentator who always seems to have the questions for a divinity examination before his eyes, fails in the glow and elevation necessary to bring us into communion with the spirit of St. John. Led by such guides, the Apostle passes under our review as a third-rate writer of a magnificent language in decadence, not as the greatest of theologians and masters of the spiritual life—with whatever defects of literary style, at once the Plato of the Twelve in one region, and the Aristotle in the other; the first by his "lofty inspiration," the second by his "judicious utilitarianism." The deepest thought of the Church has been brooding for seventeen centuries over these pregnant and many-sided words, so many of which are the very words of Christ. To separate ourselves from this vast and beautiful commentary is to place ourselves out of the atmosphere in which we can best feel the influence of St. John.

Let us read Chrysostom's description of the style and thought of the author of the fourth Gospel. "The son of thunder, the loved of Christ, the pillar of the Churches, who leaned on Jesus' bosom, makes his entrance. He plays no drama, he covers his head with no mask. Yet he wears array of inimitable beauty. For he comes having his feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, and his loins girt, not with fleece dyed in purple, or be dropped with gold, but woven through and through with, and composed of, the truth itself. He will now appear before us, not dramatically, for with him there is no theatrical effect or fiction, but with his head bared he tells the bare truth. All these things he will speak with absolute accuracy, being the friend of the King Himself—aye, having the King speaking within him, and hearing all things from Him which He heareth from the Father; as He saith—'you I have called friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father, I have made known unto you.' Wherefore, as if we all at once saw one stooping down from yonder heaven, and promising to tell us truly of things there, we should all flock to listen to him, so let us now dispose ourselves. For it is from up there that this man speaks down to us. And the fisherman is not carried away by the whirling current of his own exuberant verbosity; but all that he utters is with the steadfast accuracy of truth, and as if he stood upon a rock he budes not. All time is his witness. Seest thou the boldness, and the great authority of his words! how he utters nothing by way of doubtful conjecture, but all demonstratively, as if passing sentence. Very lofty is this Apostle, and full of dogmas, and lingers over them more than over other things!" This admirable passage, with its fresh and noble enthusiasm, nowhere reminds us of the glacial subtleties of the schools. It is the utterance of an expositor who spoke the language in which his master wrote, and breathed the same spiritual atmosphere. It is scarcely less true of the Epistle than of the Gospel of St. John.

Here also "He is full of dogmas," here again he is the theologian of the Church. But we are not to estimate the amount of dogma merely by the number of words in which it is expressed. Dogma, indeed, is not really composed of isolated texts—as pollen showered from conifers and germs scattered from mosses, accidentally brought together and compacted, are found upon chemical analysis to make up certain lumps of coal. It is primary and structural. The Divinity and Incarnation of Jesus pervade the First Epistle. Its whole structure is Trinitarian. It contains two of

the three great three-word dogmatic utterances of the New Testament about the nature of God (the first being in the fourth Gospel)—"God is Spirit," "God is light," "God is love." The chief dogmatic statements of the Atonement are found in these few chapters. "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." "He is the propitiation for the whole world." "God loved us, and sent His Son the propitiation for our sins." Where the Apostle passes on to deal with the spiritual life, he once more "is full of dogmas," i.e., of eternal, self-evidenced, oracular sentences, spoken as if "down from heaven," or by one "whose foot is upon a rock,"—apparently identical propositions, all-inclusive, the dogmas of moral and spiritual life, as those upon the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, are of strictly theological truth. A further characteristic of St. John as a sacred writer in his Epistle is, that he appears to indicate throughout the moral and spiritual conditions which were necessary for receiving the Gospel with which he endowed the Church as the life of their life. These conditions are three. The first is spirituality, submission to the teaching of the Spirit, that they may know by it the meaning of the words of Jesus—the "anointing" of the Holy Ghost, which is ever "teaching all things" that He said. The second condition is purity, at least the continuing effort after self-purification which is incumbent even upon those who have received the great pardon. This involves the following in life's daily walk of the One perfect life walk, the imitation of that which is supremely good, "incarnated in an actual earthly career." All must be purity, or effort after purity, on the side of those who would read aright the Gospel of the immaculate Lamb of God. The third condition for such readers is love—charity. When he comes to deal fully with that great theme, the eagle of God wheels far out of sight. In the depths of His Eternal Being, "God is love." Then this truth comes closer to us as believers. It stands completely and forever manifested in its work in us, because "God hath sent" (a mission in the past, but with abiding consequences) "His Son, His only begotten Son into the world, that we may live through Him." Yet again, he rises higher from the manifestation of this love to the eternal and essential principle in which it stands present forever. "In this is the love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and once for all sent His Son a propitiation for our sins." Then follows the manifestation of our love. "If God so loved us, we also are bound to love one another." Do we think it strange that St. John does not first draw the lesson—"If God so loved us, we also are bound to love God"? It has been in his heart all along, but he utters it in his own way, in the solemn pathetic question—"He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, God whom he hath not seen how can he love?" Yet once more he sums up the creed in a few: short words. "We have believed the love that God hath in us." Truly and deeply has it been said that this creed of the heart, suffused with the softest tints and sweetest colours, goes to the root of all heresies upon the Incarnation, whether in St. John's time or later. That God should give up His Son by sending Him forth in humanity; that the Word made flesh should humble Himself to the death upon the cross, the Sinless offer Himself for sinners, this is what heresy cannot bring itself to understand. It is the excess of such love which makes it incredible. "We have believed the love" is the whole faith of a Christian man. It is St. John's creed in three words.

Such are the chief characteristics of St. John as a sacred writer, which may be traced in his Epistle. These characteristics of the author imply corresponding characteristics of the man. He who states with such inevitable precision, with such noble and self-contained enthusiasm, the great dogmas of the Christian faith, the great laws of the Christian life, must himself have entirely believed them. He who insists upon these conditions in the readers of his Gospel must himself have aimed at, and possessed, spirituality, purity, and love.

II We proceed to look at the First Epistle as a picture of the soul of its author.

(1) His was a life free from the dominion of wilful and habitual sin of any kind. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, and he cannot continue sinning." "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him." A man so entirely true, if conscious to himself of any reigning sin, dare not have deliberately written these words.

(2) But if St. John's was a life free from subjection to any form of the power of sin, he shows us that sanctity is not sinlessness, in language which it is alike unwise and unsafe to attempt to explain away. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." "If we say that we have not sinned and are not sinners, we make Him a liar." But so long as we do not fall back into darkness, the blood of Jesus is ever purifying us from all sin. This he has written that the fulness of the Christian life may be realised in believers; that each step of their walk may follow the blessed footprints of the most holy life; that each successive act of a consecrated existence may be free from sin. And yet, if any fail in some such single act, if he swerve, for a moment, from the "true tenour" of the course which he is shaping, there is no reason to despair. Beautiful humility of this pure and lofty soul! How tenderly, with what lowly graciousness he places himself among those who have and who need an Advocate. "Mark John's humility," cries St. Augustine; "he says not 'ye have,' nor 'ye have me,' nor even 'ye have Christ.' But he puts forward Christ, not himself; and he says 'we have,' not 'ye have,' thus placing himself in the rank of sinners." Nor does St. John cover himself under the subterfuges by which men at different times have tried to get rid of a truth so humiliating to spiritual pride—sometimes by asserting that they so stand accepted in Christ that no sin is accounted to them for such; sometimes by pleading personal exemption for themselves as believers.

This Epistle stands alone in the New Testament in being addressed to two generations—one of which after conversion had grown old in a Christian atmosphere, whilst the other had been educated from the cradle under the influences of the Christian Church. It is therefore natural that such a letter should give prominence to the constant need of pardon. It certainly does not speak so much of the great initial pardon, as of the continuing pardons needed by human frailty. In dwelling upon pardon once given, upon sanctification once begun, men are possibly apt to forget the pardon that is daily wanting, the purification that is never to cease. We are to walk daily from pardon to pardon, from purification to purification. Yesterday's surrender of self to Christ may grow ineffectual if it be not renewed today. This is sometimes said to be a humiliating view of the Christian life. Perhaps so—but it is the view of the Church, which places in its offices a daily confession of sin; of St. John in this Epistle; nay, of Him who teaches us, after our prayers for bread day by day, to pray for a daily forgiveness. This may be more humiliating, but it is safer teaching than that which proclaims a pardon to be appropriated in a moment for all sins past, present, and to come.

This humility may be traced incidentally in other regions of the Christian life. Thus he speaks of the possibility at least of his being among those who might "shrink with shame from Christ in His coming." He does not disdain to write as if, in hours of spiritual depression, there were tests by which he too might need to lull and "persuade his heart before God."

(3) St. John again has a boundless faith in prayer. It is the key put into the child's hand by which he may let himself into the house, and come into his Father's

presence when he will, at any hour of the night or day. And prayer made according to the conditions which God has laid down is never quite lost. The particular thing asked for may not indeed be given; but the substance of the request—the holier wish, the better purpose underlying its weakness and imperfection—never fails to be granted.

(4) All but superficial readers must perceive that in the writings and character of St. John there is from time to time a tonic and wholesome severity. Art and modern literature have agreed to bestow upon the Apostle of love the features of a languid and inert tenderness. It is forgotten that St. John was the son of thunder; that he could once wish to bring down fire from heaven; and that the natural character is transfigured, not inverted, by grace. The Apostle uses great plainness of speech. For him a lie is a lie, and darkness is never courteously called light. He abhors and shudders at those heresies which rob the soul first of Christ, and then of God. Those who undermine the Incarnation are for him not interesting and original speculators, but "lying prophets." He underlines his warnings against such men with his roughest and blackest pencil mark. "Whoso sayeth to him 'good speed' hath fellowship with his works, those wicked works"—for such heresy is not simply one work, but a series of works. The schismatic prelate or pretender Diotrephes may "babble," but his babblings are wicked words for all that, and are in truth the "works which he is doing."

The influence of every great Christian teacher lasts long beyond the day of his death. It is felt in a general tone and spirit, in a special appropriation of certain parts of the creed, in a peculiar method of the Christian life. This influence is very discernible in the remains of two disciples of St. John, Ignatius and Polycarp. In writing to the Ephesians Ignatius does not indeed explicitly refer to St. John's Epistle, as he does to that of St. Paul to the Ephesians. But he draws in a few bold lines a picture of the Christian life which is imbued with the very spirit of St. John. The character which the Apostle loved was quiet and real; we feel that his heart is not with "him that sayeth." So Ignatius writes—"it is better to keep silence, and yet to be, than to talk and not to be. It is good to teach if 'he that sayeth doeth.' He who has gotten to himself the word of Jesus truly is able to hear the silence of Jesus also, so that he may act through that which he speaks, and be known through the things wherein he is silent. Let us therefore do all things as in His presence who dwelleth in us, that we may be His temple, and that He may be in us our God." This is the very spirit of St. John. We feel in it at once his severe common sense and his glorious mysticism..

We must add that the influence of St. John may be traced in matters which are often considered alien to his simple and spiritual piety. It seems that Episcopacy was consolidated and extended under his fostering care. The language of his disciple Ignatius, upon the necessity of union with the Episcopate is, after a conceivable deduction, of startling strength. A few decades could not possibly have removed Ignatius so far from the lines marked out to him by St. John as he must have advanced, this teaching upon Church government was a new departure. And with this conception of Church government we must associate other matters also. The immediate successors of St. John, who had learned from his lips, held deep sacramental views. The Eucharist is "the bread of God, the bread of heaven, the bread of life, the flesh of Christ." Again Ignatius cries—"Desire to use one Eucharist, for one is the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and on cup unto oneness of His blood, one altar, as one Bishop, with the Presbytery and deacons." Hints are not wanting that sweetness and light in public worship derived inspiration from this same quarter. The language of Ignatius deeply tinged with his passion for music. The beautiful story, how he set down, immediately after a vision, the melody to which he

had heard the angels chanting, and caused it to be used in his church at Antioch, attests the impression of enthusiasm and care for sacred song which was associated with the memory of Ignatius. Nor can we be surprised at these features of Ephesian Christianity, when we remember who was the founder of those Churches. He was the writer of three books. These books come to us with a continuous living interpretation more than seventeen centuries of historical Christianity. From the fourth Gospel in large measure has arisen the sacramental instinct from the Apocalypse the esthetic instinct, which has been certainly exaggerated both in the East and West. The third and sixth chapters of St John's Gospel permeate every baptismal and eucharistic office. Given an inspired book which represents the worship of the redeemed as one of perfect majesty and beauty, men may well in the presence of noble churches and stately liturgies, adopt the words of our great English Christian poet—

"Things which shed upon the outward frame
Of worship glory and grace—which
who shall blame That ever look'd to heaven for final rest?"

The third book in this group of writings supplies the sweet and quiet spirituality which is the foundation of every regenerate nature.

Such is the image of the soul which is presented to us by St. John himself. It is based upon a firm conviction of the nature of God, of the Divinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement of our Lord. It is spiritual. It is pure, or being purified. The highest theological truth—"God is Love"—supremely realised in the Holy Trinity, supremely manifested in the sending forth of God's only Son, becomes the law of its common social life, made visible in gentle patience, in giving and forgiving. Such a life will be free from the degradation of habitual sin. Yet it is at best an imperfect representation of the one perfect life. It needs unceasing purification by the blood of Jesus, the continual advocacy of One who is sinless. Such a nature, however full of charity, will not be weakly indulgent to vital error or to ambitious schism; for it knows the value of truth and unity. It feels the sweetness of a calm conscience, and of a simple belief in the efficacy of prayer. Over every such life—over all the grief that may be, all the temptation that must be—is the purifying hope of a great Advent, the ennobling assurance of a perfect victory, the knowledge that if we continue true to the principle of our new birth we are safe. And our safety is, not that we keep ourselves, but that we are kept by arms which are as soft as love, and as strong as eternity.

These Epistles are full of instruction and of comfort for us, just because they are written in an atmosphere of the Church which, in one respect at least, resembles our own. There is in them no reference whatever to a continuance of miraculous powers, to raptures, or to extraordinary phenomena. All in them which is supernatural continues even to this day, in the possession of an inspired record, in sacramental grace, in the pardon and holiness, the peace and strength of believers. The apocryphal "Acts of John" contain some fragments, of real beauty almost lost in questionable stories and prolix declamation. It is probably not literally true that when St. John in early life wished to make himself a home, his Lord said to him, "I have need of thee, John"; that that thrilling Voice once came to him, wafted over the still darkened sea—"John, hadst thou not been Mine, I would have suffered thee to marry." But the Epistle shows us much more effectually that he had a pure heart and virgin will. It is scarcely probable that the son of Zebedee ever drained a cup of hemlock with impunity; but he bore within him an effectual charm against the poison of sin. We of this nineteenth century may smile when we read that he possessed the power of turning leaves into gold, of transmuting pebbles into jewels,

of fusing shattered gems into one; but he carried with him wherever he went that most excellent gift of charity, which makes the commonest things of earth radiant with beauty. He may not actually have praised his Master during his last hour in words which seem to us not quite unworthy even of such lips—"Thou art the only Lord, the root of immortality, the fountain of incorruption. Thou who madest our rough wild nature soft and quiet, who deliveredst me from the imagination of the moment, and didst keep me safe within the guard of that which abideth forever." But such thoughts in life or death were never far from him for whom Christ was the Word and the Life; who knew that while "the world passeth away and the lust thereof, he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

May we so look upon this image of the Apostle's soul in his Epistle that we may reflect something of its brightness! May we be able to think, as we turn to this threefold assertion of knowledge—"I know something of the security of this keeping. I know something of the sweetness of being in the Church, that isle of light surrounded by a darkened world. I know something of the beauty of the perfect human life recorded by St. John, something of the continued presence of the Son of God, something of the new sense which He gives, that we may know Him who is the Very God." Blessed exchange—not to be vaunted loudly, but spoken reverently in our own hearts—the exchange of we, for I There is much divinity in these pronouns.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,
The Epistles of St. John

Part 2

SOME GENERAL RULES FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN

1. SUBJECT MATTER

(1) THE Epistle is to be read through with constant reference to the Gospel. In what precise form the former is related to the latter (whether as a preface or as an appendix, as a spiritual commentary or an encyclical) critics may decide. But there is a vital and constant connection. The two documents not only touch each other in thought, but interpenetrate each other; and the Epistle is constantly suggesting questions which the Gospel only can answer, e.g., 1Jo 1:1, cf. Joh 1:1-14 1Jo 5:9, "witness of men," cf. Joh 1:15-36,41,45,49,3:2,27-36,4:29-42,6:68,69,7:46,9:38,11:27,18:38,19:5,6,20:28.

(2) Such eloquence of style as St. John possesses is real rather than verbal. The interpreter must look not only at the words themselves, but at that which precedes and follows; above all he must fix his attention not only upon the verbal expression of the thought, but upon the thought itself. For the formal connecting link is not rarely omitted, and must be supplied by the devout and candid diligence of the reader. The "root below the stream" can only be traced by our bending over the water until it becomes translucent to us. 1Jo 1:7,8. Ver. 7, "the root below the stream" is a question of this kind, which naturally arises from reading ver. 6—"Must it be said that the sons of light need a constant cleansing by the blood of Jesus, which implies a constant guilt"? Some such thought is the latent root of connection. The answer is supplied by the following verse. ["It is so" for] "if we say that we have no sin," etc. Cf. also Joh 3:16,17,14:8,9,10,11,5:3 (ad. fin.), 4.

2. LANGUAGE

1. Tenses.

In the New Testament generally tenses are employed very much in the same sense, and with the same general accuracy, as in other Greek authors. The so called enallage temporum, or perpetual and convenient Hebraism, has been proved by the greatest Hebrew scholars to be no Hebraism at all. But it is one of the simple secrets of St. John's quiet: thoughtful power, that he uses tenses with the most rigorous precision.

(a) The Present of continuing, uninterrupted action, e.g., 1Jo 1:8,2:6,3:7,8,9.

Hence the so called substantised participle with article οJ has in St. John the sense of the continuous and constitutive temper and conduct of any man, the principle of his moral and spiritual life—e.g., ο λεγων, he who is ever vaunting, 1Jo 2:4; πας ο μισων, everyone the abiding principle of whose life is hatred, 1Jo 3:15; πας ο αγαπων, everyone the abiding principle of whose life is love, 1Jo 4:7.

The Infinitive Present is generally used to express an action now in course of performing or continued in itself or in its results, or frequently repeated—e.g., 1Jo 2:6,3:8,9,5:18 (Winer, "Gr. of N.T. Diction," Part 3, 44:348).

(b) The Aorist.

This tense is generally used either of a thing occurring only once, which does not admit, or at least does not require, the notion of continuance and perpetuity; or of something which is brief and, as it were, only momentary in duration (Stallbaum, "Plat. Enthyd.," p. 140). This limitation or isolation of the predicated action is most accurately indicated by the usual form of this tense in Greek. The aorist verb is encased between the augment e, past time, and the adjunct s, future time, i.e., the act is fixed off within certain limits of previous and consequent time (Donaldson, "Gr. Gr.," 427, B. 2). The aorist is used with most significant accuracy in the Epistle of St. John, 1Jo 2:6,11,27,4:10,5:18.

(c) The Perfect.

The Perfect denotes action absolutely past which lasts on in its effects. "The idea of completeness conveyed by the aorist must be distinguished from that of a state consequent on an act, which is the meaning of the perfect" (Donaldson, "Gr. Gr.," 419). Careful observation of this principle is the key to some of the chief difficulties of the Epistle. {1Jo 3:9,5:4,18}

(2) The form of accessional parallelism is to be carefully noticed. The second member is always in advance of the first; and a third is occasionally introduced in advance of the second, denoting the highest point to which the thought is thrown up by the tide of thought, e.g., 1Jo 2:4,5,6 5:11.

(3) The preparatory touch upon the chord which announces a theme to be amplified afterwards, -e.g., 1Jo 2:29,3:9-4:7,5:3,4 3:21-5:14,2:20,3:24,4:3,5:6,8,2:13,14,4:4-5:4,5.

(4) One secret of St. John's simple and solemn rhetoric consists in an impressive change in the order in which a leading word is used, e.g., Joh 2:24,4:20.

These principles carefully applied will be the best commentary upon the letter of the Apostle, to whom not only when his subject is—

"De Deo Deum verum Alpha et Omega, Patrem rerum";

but when he unfolds the principles of our spiritual life, we may apply Adam of St. Victor's powerful and untranslatable line,

"Solers scribit idiota."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS AND THEORY OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL— 1Jo 1:1

IN the opening verses of this Epistle we have a sentence whose ample and prolonged prelude has but one parallel in St. John's writings. It is, as an old divine says, "prefaced and brought in with more magnificent ceremony than any passage in Scripture."

The very emotion and enthusiasm with which it is written, and the sublimity of the exordium as a whole, tend to make the highest sense also the most natural sense. Of what or of whom does St. John speak in the phrase "concerning the Lord of Life," or "the Lord who is the Life"? The neuter "that which" is used for the masculines "He who"—according to St. John's practice of employing the neuter comprehensively when a collective whole is to be expressed. The phrase "from the beginning," taken by itself, might no doubt be employed to signify the beginning of Christianity, or of the ministry of Christ. But even viewing it as entirely isolated from its context of language and circumstance, it has a greater claim to be looked upon as from eternity or from the beginning of the creation. Other considerations are decisive in favour of the last interpretation.

(1) We have already adverted to the lofty and transcendental tone of the whole passage, elevating as it does each clause by the irresistible upward tendency of the whole sentence. "The climax and resting place cannot stop short of the bosom of God."

(2) But again, we must also bear in mind that the Epistle is everywhere to be read with the Gospel before us, and the language of the Epistle to be connected with that of the Gospel. The procemium of the Epistle is the subjective version of the objective historical point of view which we find at the close of the preface to the Gospel. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"; so St. John begins his sentence in the Gospel with a statement of a historical fact. But he proceeds, "and we delightedly beheld His glory"; that is a statement of the personal impression attested by his own consciousness and that of other witnesses. But let us note carefully that in the Epistle, which is in subjective relation to the Gospel, this process is exactly reversed. The Apostle begins with the personal impression; pauses to affirm the reality of the many proofs in the realm of fact of that which produced this impression through the senses upon the conceptions and emotions of those who were brought into contact with the Saviour; and then returns to the subjective impression from which he had originally started.

(3) Much of the language in this passage is inconsistent with our understanding by the Word the first announcement of the Gospel preaching. One might of course speak of hearing the commencement of the Gospel message, but surely not of seeing and handling it.

(4) It is a noteworthy fact that the Gospel and the Apocalypse begin with the

mention of the personal Word. This may well lead us to expect that Logos should be used in the same sense in the prooemium of the great Epistle by the same author.

We conclude then that when St. John here speaks of the Word of Life, he refers to something higher again than the preaching of life, and that he has in view both the manifestation of the life which has taken place in our humanity, and Him who is personally at once the Word and the Life. The prooemium may be thus paraphrased. "That which in all its collective influence was from the beginning as understood by Moses, by Solomon, and Micah; which we have first and above all heard in divinely human utterances, but which we have also seen with these very eyes; which we gazed upon with the full and entranced sight that delights in the object contemplated; and which these hands handled reverentially at His bidding. I speak all this concerning the Word who is also the Life."

Tracts and sheets are often printed in our day with anthologies of texts which are supposed to contain the very essence of the Gospel. But the sweetest scents, it is said, are not distilled exclusively from flowers, for the flower is but an exhalation. The Seeds, the leaf, the stem, the very bark should be macerated, because they contain the odoriferous substance in minute sacs. So the purest Christian doctrine is distilled, not only from a few exquisite flower's in a textual anthology, but from the whole substance, so to speak, of the message. Now it will be observed that at the beginning of the Epistle which accompanied the fourth Gospel, our attention is directed not to a sentiment, but to a fact and to a Person. In the collections of texts to which reference has been made, we should probably never find two brief passages which may not unjustly be considered to concentrate the essence of the scheme of salvation more nearly than any others. "The Word was made flesh." "Concerning the Word of Life (and that Life was once manifested, and we have seen and consequently are witnesses and announce to you from Him who sent us that Life, that eternal Life whose it is to have been in eternal relation with the Father, and manifested to us); That which we have seen and heard declare we from Him who sent us unto you, to the end that you too may have fellowship with us."

It would be disrespectful to the theologian of the New Testament to pass by the great dogmatic term never, so far as we are told, applied by our Lord to Himself, but with which St. John begins each of his three principal writings—The Word.

Such mountains of erudition have been heaped over this term that it has become difficult to discover the buried thought. The Apostle adopted a word which was already in use in various quarters simply because if, from the nature of the case necessarily inadequate, it was yet more suitable than any other. He also as profound ancient thinkers conceived, looked into the depths of the human mind, into the first principles of that which is the chief distinction of man from the lower creation—language. The human word, these thinkers taught, is twofold; inner and outer—now as the manifestation to the mind itself of unuttered thought, now as a part of language uttered to others. The word as signifying unuttered thought, the mould in which it exists in the mind, illustrates the eternal relation of the Father to the Son. The word as signifying uttered thought illustrates the relation as conveyed to man by the Incarnation. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten God which is in the bosom of the Father He interpreted Him." For the theologian of the Church Jesus is thus the Word; because He had His being from the Father in a way which presents some analogy to the human word, which is sometimes the inner vesture, sometimes the outward utterance of thought—sometimes the human thought in that language without which man cannot think, sometimes the speech whereby the speaker interprets it to others. Christ is the Word Whom out of the fulness of His

thought and being the Father has eternally inspoken and outspoken into personal existence.

One too well knows that such teaching as this runs the risk of appearing uselessly subtle and technical, but its practical value will appear upon reflection. Because it gives us possession of the point of view from which St. John himself surveys, and from which he would have the Church contemplate, the history of the life of our Lord. And indeed for that life the theology of the Word, i.e., of the Incarnation, is simply necessary.

For we must agree with M. Renan so far at least as this, that a great life, even as the world counts greatness, is an organic whole with an underlying vitalising idea; which must be construed as such, and cannot be adequately rendered by a mere narration of facts. Without this unifying principle the facts will be not only incoherent but inconsistent. There must be a point of view from which we can embrace the life as one. The great test here, as in art, is the formation of a living, consistent, unmutilated whole.

Thus a general point of view (if we are to use modern language easily capable of being misunderstood we must say a theory) is wanted of the Person, the work, the character of Christ. The synoptical Evangelists had furnished the Church with the narrative of His earthly origin. St. John in his Gospel and Epistle, under the guidance of the Spirit, endowed it with the theory of His Person.

Other points of view have been adopted, from the heresies of the early ages to the speculations of our own. All but St. John's have failed to coordinate the elements of the problem. The earlier attempts essayed to read the history upon the assumption that He was merely human or merely divine. They tried in their weary round to unhumanise or undeify the God-Man, to degrade the perfect Deity, to mutilate the perfect Humanity—to present to the adoration of mankind a something neither entirely human nor entirely divine, but an impossible mixture of the two. The truth on these momentous subjects was fused under the fires of controversy. The last centuries have produced theories less subtle and metaphysical, but bolder and more blasphemous. Some have looked upon Him as a pretender or an enthusiast. But the depth and sobriety of His teaching upon ground where we are able to test it—the texture of circumstantial word and work which will bear to be inspected under any microscope or cross examined by any prosecutor—have almost shamed such blasphemy into respectful silence. Others of later date admit with patronising admiration that the martyr of Calvary is a saint of transcendent excellence. But if He who called Himself Son of God was not much more than saint, He was something less. Indeed He would have been something of three characters; saint, visionary, pretender—at moments the Son of God in His elevated devotion, at other times condescending to something of the practice of the charlatan, His unparalleled presumption only excused by His unparalleled success.

Now the point of view taken by St. John is the only one which is possible or consistent—the only one which reconciles the humiliation and the glory recorded in the Gospels, which harmonises the otherwise insoluble contradictions that beset His Person and His work. One after another, to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" answers are attempted, sometimes angry, sometimes sorrowful, always confused. The frank respectful bewilderment of the better Socinianism, the gay brilliance of French romance, the heavy insolence of German criticism, have woven their revolting or perplexed christologies. The Church still points with a confidence, which only deepens as the ages pass, to the enunciation of the theory of the

Savlout's Person by St. John.—in his Gospel, "The Word was made flesh"—in his Epistle, "Concerning the Word of Life."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 6

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL HISTORICAL, NOT IDEOLOGICAL - 1Jo 1:1

OUR argument so far has been that St. John's Gospel is dominated by a central idea and by a theory which harmonises the great and many sided life which it contains, and which is repeated again at the beginning of the Epistle in a form analogous to that in which it had been cast in the proemium of the Gospel—allowing for the difference between a history and a document of a more subjective character moulded upon that history.

There is one objection to the accuracy, almost to the veracity, of a life written from such a theory or point of view. It may disdain to be shackled by the bondage of facts. It may become an essay in which possibilities and speculations are mistaken for actual events, and history is superseded by metaphysics. It may degenerate into a romance prose-poem; if the subject is religious, into or mystic effusion. In the case of the fourth Gospel the cycles in which the narrative moves, the unveiling as of the progress of a drama, are thought by some to confirm the suspicion awakened by the point of view given in its proemium, and in the opening of the Epistle. The Gospel, it is said, is ideological. To us it appears that those who have entered most deeply into the spirit of St. John will most deeply feel the significance of the two words which we place at the head of this discourse—"which we have heard," "which we have seen with our very eyes" (which we contemplated with entranced gaze), "which our hands have handled."

More truly than any other, St. John could say of this letter in the words of an American poet:

"This is not a book—It is I!"

In one so true, so simple, so profound, so oracular, there is a special reason for this prolonged appeal to the senses, for the place which is assigned to each. In the fact that hearing stands first, there is a reference to one characteristic of that Gospel to which the Epistle throughout refers. Beyond the synoptical Evangelists, St. John records the words of Jesus. The position which hearing holds in the sentence, above and prior to sight and handling, indicates the reverential estimation in which the Apostle held his Master's teaching. The expression places us on solid historical ground, because it is a moral demonstration that one like St. John would not have dared to invent whole discourses and place them in the lips of Jesus. Thus in the "we have heard" there is a guarantee of the sincerity of the report of the discourses, which forms so large a proportion of the narrative that it practically guarantees the whole Gospel.

On this accusation of ideology against St. John's Gospel, let us make a further remark founded upon the Epistle.

It is said that the Gospel systematically subordinates chronological order and

historical sequence of facts to the necessity imposed by the theory of the Word which stands in the forefront of the Epistle and Gospel.

But mystic ideology, indifference to historical veracity as compared with adherence to a conception or theory, is absolutely inconsistent with that strong, simple, severe appeal to the validity of the historical principle of belief upon sufficient evidence which pervades St. John's writings. His Gospel is a tissue woven of many lines of evidence. "Witness" stands in almost every page of that Gospel, and indeed is found there nearly as often as in the whole of the rest of the New Testament. The word occurs ten times in five short verses of the Epistle. {1Jo 5:6-12} There is no possibility of mistaking this prolixity of reiteration in a writer so simple and so sincere as our Apostle. The theologian is a historian. He has no intention of sacrificing history to dogma, and no necessity for doing so. His theory, and that alone, harmonises his facts. His facts have passed in the domain of human history, and have had that evidence of witness which proves that they did so.

A few of the stories of the earliest ages of Christianity have ever been repeated, and rightly so, as affording the most beautiful illustrations of St. John's character, the most simple and truthful idea of the impression left by his character and his work. His tender love for souls, his deathless desire to promote mutual love among his people, are enshrined in two anecdotes which the Church has never forgotten. It has scarcely been noticed that a tradition of not much later date (at least as old as Tertullian, born A.D. 90) credits St. John with a stern reverence for the accuracy of historical truth, and tells us what, in the estimation of those who were near him in time, the Apostle thought of the lawfulness of ideological religious romance. It was said that a presbyter of Asia Minor confessed that he was the author of certain apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla—probably the same strange but unquestionably very ancient document with the same title which is still preserved. The man's motive does not seem to have been selfish. His work was apparently the composition of an ardent and romantic nature passionately attracted by a saint so wonderful as St. Paul. The tradition went on to assert that St. John without hesitation degraded this clerical romance writer from his ministry. But the offence of the Asiatic presbyter would have been light indeed compared with that of the mendacious Evangelist, who could have deliberately fabricated discourses and narrated miracles which he dared to attribute to the Incarnate Son of God. The guilt of publishing to the Church apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla would have paled before the crimson sin of forging a Gospel.

These considerations upon St. John's prolonged and circumstantial claim to personal acquaintance with the Word made flesh, confirmed by every avenue of communication between man and man—and first in order by the hearing of that sweet yet awful teaching—point to the fourth Gospel again and again. And the simple assertion—"that which we have heard"—accounts for one characteristic of the fourth Gospel which would otherwise be a perplexing enigma—its dramatic vividness and consistency.

This dramatic truth of St. John's narrative, manifested in various developments, deserves careful consideration. There are three notes in the fourth Gospel which indicate either a consummate dramatic instinct or a most faithful record.

(1) The delineation of individual characters. The Evangelist tells us with no unmeaning distinction, that Jesus "knew all men, and knew what is in" Joh 3:24,25. For some persons take an apparently profound view of human nature in the abstract. They pass for being sages so long as they confine themselves to sounding

generalisations, but they are convicted on the field of life and experience. They claim to know what is in man; but they know it vaguely, as one might be in possession of the outlines of a map, yet totally ignorant of most places within its limits. Others, who mostly affect to be keen men of the world, refrain from generalisations; but they have an insight, which at times is startling, into the characters of the individual men who cross their path. There is a sense in which they superficially seem to know all men, but their knowledge after all is capricious and limited. One class affects to know men, but does not even affect to know man; the other class knows something about man, but is lost in the infinite variety of the world of real men. Our Lord knew both—both the abstract ultimate principles of human nature and the subtle distinctions which mark off every human character from every other. Of this peculiar knowledge he who was brought into the most intimate communion with the Great Teacher was made in some degree a partaker in the course of His earthly ministry. With how few touches, yet how clearly, are delineated the Baptist, Nathanael, the Samaritan woman, the blind man, Philip, Thomas, Martha and Mary, Pilate!

(2) More particularly the appropriateness and consistency of the language used by the various persons introduced in the narrative are, in the case of a writer like St. John, a multiplied proof of historical veracity. For instance, of St. Thomas only one single sentence, containing seven words, is preserved, outside the memorable narrative in the twentieth chapter; yet how unmistakably does that brief sentence indicate the same character—tender, impetuous, loving, yet ever inclined to take the darker view of things because from the very excess of its affection it cannot believe in that which it most desires, and demands accumulated and convincing proof of its own happiness. Further, the language of our Lord which St. John preserves is both morally and intellectually a marvellous witness to the proof of his assertion here in the outset of his Epistle.

This may be exemplified by an illustration from modern literature. Victor Hugo, in his "Legende des Siecles," has in one passage only placed in our Lord's lips a few words which are not found in the Evangelist. Everyone will at once feel that these words ring hollow, that there is in them something exaggerated and factitious—and that, although the dramatist had the advantage of having a type of style already constructed for him. People talk as if the representation in detail of a perfect character were a comparatively easy performance. Yet every such representation shows some flaw when closely inspected. For instance, a character in which Shakespeare so evidently delighted as Buckingham, whose end is so noble and martyr-like, is thus described, when on his trial, by a sympathising witness:

"How did he bear himself? 'When he was brought again to the bar, to hear His knell rung out, his judgment—he was struck With such an agony, he sweat extremely, And something spoke in choler, ill and hasty; But he fell to himself again, and sweetly In all the rest show'd a most noble patience.'"

Our argument comes to this point. Here is one man of all but the highest rank in dramatic genius, who utterly fails to invent even one sentence which could possibly be taken for an utterance of our Lord. Here is another, the most transcendent in the same order whom the human race has ever known, who tacitly confesses the impossibility of representing a character which shall be "one entire and perfect chrysolite," without speck or flaw. Take yet another instance. Sir Walter Scott appeals for "the fair license due to the author of a fictitious composition"; and admits that he "cannot pretend to the observation of complete accuracy even in outward costume, much less in the more important points of language and manners."

But St. John was evidently a man of no such pretensions as these kings of the human imagination—no Scott or Victor Hugo, much less a Shakespeare. How then—except on the assumption of his being a faithful reporter, of his recording words actually spoken, and witnessing to incidents which he had seen with his very eyes and contemplated with loving and admiring reverence—can we account for his having given us long successions of sentences, continuous discourses in which we trace a certain unity and adaptation; and a character which stands alone among all recorded in history or conceived in fiction, by presenting to us an excellence faultless in every detail? We assert that the one answer to this question is boldly given us by St. John in the forefront of his Epistle—"That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes—concerning the Word who is the Life—declare we unto you."

St. John's mode of writing history may profitably be contrasted with that of one who in his own fine was a great master, as it has been ably criticised by a distinguished statesman. Voltaire's historical masterpiece is a portion of the life of Maria Theresa, which is unquestionably written from a partly ideological point of view; for those who have patience to go back to the "sources," and to compare Voltaire's narrative with them, will see the process by which a literary master has produced his effect. The writer works as if he were composing a classical tragedy restricted to the unities of time and place. The three days of the coronation and of the successive votes are brought into one effect, of which we are made to feel that it is due to a magic inspiration of Maria Theresa. Yet, as the great historical critic to whom we refer proceeds to demonstrate, a different charm, very much more real because it comes from truth, may be found in literal historical accuracy without this academic rouge. Writers more conscientious than Voltaire would not have assumed that Maria Theresa was degraded by a husband who was inferior to her. They would not have substituted some pretty and pretentious phrases for the genuine emotion not quite veiled under the official Latin of the Queen. "However high a thing art may be, reality, truth, which is the work of God, is higher!" It is this conviction, this entire intense adhesion to truth, this childlike ingenuousness which has made St. John as a historian attain the higher region which is usually reached by genius alone—which has given us narratives and passages whose ideal beauty or awe is so transcendent or solemn, whose pictorial grandeur or pathos is so inexhaustible, whose philosophical depth is so unfathomable.

He stands with spellbound delight before his work without the disappointment which ever attends upon men of genius; because that work is not drawn from himself, because he can say three words—which we have "heard," which we have "seen" with our eyes, which we have "gazed" upon.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 7

EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT— 1Jo 2:1,2

OF the Incarnation of the Word, of the whole previous strain of solemn oracular annunciation, there are two great objects. Rightly understood, it at once stimulates and soothes; it supplies inducements to holiness, and yet quiets the accusing heart.

(1) It urges to a pervading holiness in each recurring circumstance of life. "That ye may not sin" is the bold universal language of the morality of God. Men only understand moral teaching when it comes with a series of monographs on the virtues, sobriety, chastity, and the rest. Christianity does not overlook these, but it comes first with all-inclusive principles. The morality of man is like the sculptor working line by line and part by part, partially and successively. The morality of God is like nature, and works in every part of the flower and tree with a sort of ubiquitous presence. "These things write we unto you." No dead letter—a living spirit infuses the lines; there is a deathless principle behind the words which will vitalise and permeate all isolated relations and developments of conduct. "These things write we unto you that ye may not sin."

(2) But further, this announcement also soothes. There may be isolated acts of sin against the whole tenour of the higher and nobler life. There may be, God forbid!—but it may be—some glaring act of inconsistency. In this case the Apostle uses a form of expression which includes himself, "we have," and yet points to Christ, not to himself, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ"—and that in view of His being One who is perfectly and simply righteous; "and He is the propitiation for our sins."

Then, as if suddenly fired by a great thought, St. John's view broadens over the whole world beyond the limits of the comparatively little group of believers whom his words at that time could reach. The Incarnation and Atonement have been before his soul. The Catholic Church is the correlative of the first, humanity of the second. The Paraclete whom he beheld is ever in relation with, ever turned towards, the Father. His propitiation is, and He is it. It was not simply a fact in history which works on with unexhaustible force. As the Advocate is ever turned towards the Father, so the propitiation lives on with unexhausted life. His intercession is not verbal, temporary, interrupted. The Church, in her best days, never prayed—"Jesus, pray for me!" It is interpretative, continuous, unbroken. In time it is eternally valid, eternally present. In space it extends as far as human need, and therefore takes in every place. "Not for our sins only," but for men universally, "for the whole world."

It is implied then in this passage, that Christ was intended as a propitiation for the whole world; and that He is fitted for satisfying all human wants.

(1) Christ was intended for the whole world. Let us see the Divine intention in one incident of the crucifixion. In that are mingling lines of glory and of humiliation. The King of humanity appears with a scarlet camp mantle flung contemptuously

over His shoulders; but to the eye of faith it is the purple of empire. He is crowned with the acanthus wreath; but the wreath of mockery is the royalty of our race. He is crucified between two thieves; but His cross is a Judgment Throne, and at His right hand and His left are the two separated worlds of belief and unbelief. All the Evangelists tell us that a superscription, a title of accusation, was written over His cross; two of them add that it was written over Him "in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew" (or in Hebrew, Greek, Latin). In Hebrew—the sacred tongue of patriarchs and seers, of the nation all whose members were in idea and destination those of whom God said, "My prophets." In Greek—the "musical and golden tongue which gave a soul to the objects of sense and a body to the abstractions of philosophy"; the language, of a people whose mission it was to give a principle of fermentation to all races of mankind, susceptible of those subtle and largely indefinable influences which are called collectively Progress. In Latin—the dialect of a people originally the strongest of all the sons of men. The three languages represent the three races and their ideas—revelation, art, literature; progress, war, and jurisprudence. Beneath the title is the thorn-crowned head of the ideal King of humanity.

Wherever these three tendencies of the human race exist, wherever annunciation can be made in human language, wherever there is a heart to sin, a tongue to speak, an eye to read, the cross has a message. The superscription, "written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin," is the historical symbol translated into its dogmatic form by St. John—"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,
The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 8

MISSIONARY APPLICATION OF THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT— 1Jo 2:2

LET us now consider the universal and ineradicable wants of man.

Such a consideration is substantially unaffected by speculation as to the theory of man's origin. Whether the first men are to be looked for by the banks of some icy river feebly shaping their arrowheads of flint, or in godlike and glorious progenitors beside the streams of Eden; whether our ancestors were the result of an inconceivably ancient evolution, or called into existence by a creative act, or sprung from some lower creature elevated in the fulness of time by a majestic inspiration, at least, as a matter of fact, man has other and deeper wants than those of the back and stomach. Man as he is has five spiritual instincts. How they came to be there, let it be repeated, is not the question. It is the fact of their existence, not the mode of their genesis, with which we are now concerned.

(1) There is almost, if not quite, without exception the instinct which may be generally described as the instinct of the Divine. In the wonderful address where St. Paul so fully recognises the influence of geographical circumstance and of climate, he speaks of God "having made out of one blood every nation of men to seek after their Lord, if haply at least" (as might be expected) "they would feel for Him"—like men in darkness groping towards the light.

(2) There is the instinct of prayer, the "testimony of the soul naturally Christian." The little child at our knees meets us halfway in the first touching lessons in the science of prayer. In danger, when the vessel seems to be sinking in a storm, it is ever as it was in the days of Jonah, when "the mariners cried every man unto his God."

(3) There is the instinct of immortality, the desire that our conscious existence should continue beyond death.

"Who would lose, Though full of pain, this intellectual being, These thoughts that wander through eternity, To perish rather swallow'd up and lost In the wide womb of uncreated night?"

(4) There is the instinct of morality, call it conscience or what we will. The lowest, most sordid, most materialised languages are never quite without witness to this nobler instinct. Though such languages have lien among the poets, yet their wings are as the wings of a dove that is covered with silver wings and her feathers like gold. The most impoverished vocabularies have words of moral judgment, "good" or "bad"; of praise or blame, "truth and lie"; above all, those august words which recognise a law paramount to all other laws, "I must," "I ought."

(5) There is the instinct of sacrifice, which, if not absolutely universal, is at least all

but so—the sense of impurity and unworthiness, which says by the very fact of bringing a victim,

"I am not worthy to come alone; may my guilt be transferred to the representative which I immolate."

(1) Thus then man seeks after God. Philosophy unaided does not succeed in finding Him. The theistic systems marshal their syllogisms; they prove, but do not convince. The pantheistic systems glitter before man's eye; but when he grasps them in his feverish hand, and brushes off the mystic gold dust from the moth's wings, a death's head mocks him. St. John has found the essence of the whole question, stripped from it all its plausible disguises, and characterises Mahomedan and Judaistic Deism in a few words. Nay, the philosophical deism of Christian countries comes within the scope of his terrible proposition. "Deo erexit Voltairius," was the philosopher's inscription over the porch of a church; but Voltaire had not in any true sense a God to whom he could dedicate it. For St. John tells us—"whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." Other words there are in his Second Epistle whose full import seems to have been generally overlooked, but which are of solemn significance to those who go out from the camp of Christianity with the idea of finding a more refined morality and a more ethereal spiritualism. "Whosoever goeth forward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ"; whosoever writes progress on his standard, and goes forward beyond the lines of Christ, loses natural as well as supernatural religion—"he hath not God."

(2) Man wants to pray. Poor disinherited child, what master of requests shall he find? Who shall interpret his broken language to God, God's infinite language to him?

(3) Man yearns for the assurance of immortal life. This can best be given by one specimen of manhood risen from the grave, one traveller come back from the undiscovered bourne with the breath of eternity on His cheek and its light in His eye; one like Jonah, Himself the living sign and proof that He has been down in the great deeps.

(4) Man needs a morality to instruct and elevate conscience. Such a morality must possess these characteristics. It must be authoritative, resting upon an absolute will; its teacher must say, not "I think," or "I conclude," but—"verily, verily I say unto you." It must be unmixed with baser and more questionable elements. It must be pervasive, laying the strong grasp of its purity on the whole domain of thought and feeling as well as of action. It must be exemplified. It must present to us a series of pictures, of object lessons in which we may see it illustrated. Finally, this morality must be spiritual. It must come to man, not like the Jewish Talmud with its seventy thousand precepts which few indeed can ever learn, but with a compendious and condensed, yet all-embracing brevity—with words that are spirit and life.

(5) As man knows duty more thoroughly, the instinct of sacrifice will speak with an ever-increasing intensity. "My heart is overwhelmed by the infinite purity of this law. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; let me find God and be reconciled to Him." When the old Latin spoke of propitiation he thought of something which brought near (prope); his inner thought was—"let God come near to me, that I may be near to God." These five ultimate spiritual wants, these five ineradicable spiritual instincts, He must meet, of whom a master of spiritual truth like St. John can say with his plenitude of insight—"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

We shall better understand the fulness of St. John's thought if we proceed to consider that this fitness in Christ for meeting the spiritual wants of humanity is exclusive.

Three great religions of the world are more or less Missionary. Hinduism, which embraces at least a hundred and ninety millions of souls, is certainly not in any sense missionary. For Hinduism transplanted from its ancient shrines and local superstitions dies like a flower without roots. But Judaism at times has strung itself to a kind of exertion almost inconsistent with its leading idea. The very word "proselyte" attests the unnatural fervour to which it had worked itself up in our Lord's time. The Pharisee was a missionary sent out by pride and consecrated by self-will. "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him tenfold more the child of hell than yourselves." Buddhism has had enormous missionary success from one point of view. Not long ago it was said that it outnumbered Christendom. But it is to be observed that it finds adherents among people of only one type of thought and character. Outside these races it is and must ever be, non-existent. We may except the fanciful perversion of a few idle people in London, Calcutta, or Ceylon, captivated for a season or two by "the light of Asia." We may except also a very few more remarkable cases where the esoteric principle of Buddhism commends itself to certain profound thinkers stricken with the dreary disease of modern sentiment. Mohammedanism has also, in a limited degree, proved itself a missionary religion, not only by the sword. In British India it counts millions of adherents, and it is still making some progress in India. In other ages whole Christian populations (but belonging to heretical and debased forms of Christianity) have gone over to Mohammedanism. Let us be just to it. It once elevated the pagan Arabs. Even now it elevates the Negro above his fetich. But it must ever remain a religion for stationary races, with its sterile God and its poor literality, the dead book pressing upon it with a weight of lead. Its merits are these—it inculcates a lofty, if sterile, Theism; it fulfils the pledge conveyed in the word Moslem, by inspiring a calm, if frigid, resignation to destiny; it teaches the duty of prayer with a strange impressiveness. But whole realms of thought and feeling are crushed out by its bloody and lustful grasp. It is without purity, without tenderness, and without humility.

Thus, then, we come back again with a truer insight to the exclusive fitness of Christ to meet the wants of mankind.

Others besides the Incarnate Lord have obtained from a portion of their fellow men some measure of passionate enthusiasm. Each people has a hero during this life, call him demigod, or what we will. But such men are idolised by one race alone. The very qualities which procure them an apotheosis are precisely those which prove how narrow the type is which they represent; how far they are from speaking to all humanity. A national type is a narrow and exclusive type.

No European, unless effeminated and enfeebled, could really love an Asiatic Messiah. But Christ is loved everywhere. No race or kindred is exempt from the sweet contagion produced by the universal appeal of the universal Saviour. From all languages spoken by the lips of man, hymns of adoration are offered to Him. We read in England the "Confessions" of St. Augustine. Those words still quiver with the emotions of penitence and praise; still breathe the breath of life. Those ardent affections, those yearnings of personal love to Christ, which filled the heart of Augustine fifteen centuries ago, under the blue sky of Africa, touch us even now under this grey heaven in the fierce hurry of our modern life. But they have in them equally the possibility of touching the Shanar of Tinnevely, the Negro—even the

Bushman, or the native of Tierra del Fuego. By a homage of such diversity and such extent we recognise a universal Saviour for the universal wants of universal man, the fitting propitiation for the whole world.

Towards the close of this Epistle St. John oracularly utters three great canons of universal Christian consciousness—"we know," "we know," "we know." Of these three canons the second is—"we know that we are from God, and the world lieth wholly in the wicked one." "A characteristic Johannic exaggeration!" some critic has exclaimed; yet surely even in Christian lands where men lie outside the influences of the Divine society, we have only to read the Police reports to justify the Apostle. In columns of travels, again, in the pages of Darwin and Baker, from missionary records in places where the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations, we are told of deeds of lust and blood which almost make us blush to bear the same form with creatures so degraded. Yet the very same missionary records bear witness that in every race which the Gospel proclamation has reached, however low it may be placed in the scale of the ethnologist; deep under the ruins of the fall are the spiritual instincts, the affections which have for their object the infinite God, and for their career the illimitable ages. The shadow of sin is broad indeed. But in the evening light of God's love the shadow of the cross is projected further still into the infinite beyond. Missionary success is therefore sure, if it be slow. The reason is given by St. John. "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 9

THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREAT LIFE WALK A PERSONAL INFLUENCE— 1Jo 2:6

THIS verse is one of those in reading which we may easily fall into the fallacy of mistaking familiarity for knowledge.

Let us bring out its meaning with accuracy.

St. John's hatred of unreality, of lying in every form, leads him to claim in Christians a perfect correspondence between the outward profession and the inward life, as well as the visible manifestation of it. "He that saith" always marks a danger to those who are outwardly in Christian communion. It is the "take notice" of a hidden falsity. He whose claim, possibly whose vaunt, is that he abideth in Christ, has contracted a moral debt of far reaching significance. St. John seems to pause for a moment. He points to a picture in a page of the scroll which is beside him—the picture of Christ in the Gospel drawn by himself; not a vague magnificence, a mere harmony of colour, but a likeness of absolute historical truth. Every pilgrim of time in the continuous course of his daily walk, outward and inward, has by the possession of that Gospel contracted an obligation to be walking by the one great life walk of the Pilgrim of eternity. The very depth and intensity of feeling half hushes the Apostle's voice. Instead of the beloved Name which all who love it will easily supply, St. John uses the reverential He, the pronoun which specially belongs to Christ in the vocabulary of the Epistle. "He that saith he abideth in Him" is bound, even as He once walked, to be ever walking.

I The importance of example in the moral and spiritual life gives emphasis to this canon of St. John.

Such an example as can be sufficient for creatures like ourselves should be at once manifested in concrete form and susceptible of ideal application.

This was felt by a great, but unhappily antichristian, thinker, the exponent of a severe and lofty morality. Mr. Mill fully confesses that there may be an elevating and an ennobling influence in a Divine ideal; and thus justifies the apparently startling precept—"be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." But he considered that some more human model was necessary for the moral striver. He recommends novel readers, when they are charmed or strengthened by some conception of pure manhood or womanhood, to carry that conception with them into their own lives. He would have them ask themselves in difficult positions, how that strong and lofty man, that tender and unselfish woman, would have behaved in similar circumstances, and so bear about with them a standard of duty at once compendious and affecting. But to this there is one fatal objection—that such an elaborate process of make believe is practically impossible. A fantastic morality, if it were possible at all, must be a feeble morality. Surely an authentic example will be greatly more valuable.

But example, however precious, is made indefinitely more powerful when it is living example, example crowned by personal influence.

So far as the stain of a guilty past can be removed from those who have contracted it, they are improvable and capable of restoration, chiefly, perhaps almost exclusively, by personal influence in some form. When a process of deterioration and decay has set in in any human soul, the germ of a more wholesome growth is introduced in nearly every case, by the transfusion and transplantation of healthier life. We test the soundness or the putrefaction of a soul by its capacity of receiving and assimilating this germ of restoration. A parent is in doubt whether is susceptible of renovation, whether he son has not become wholly evil. He tries to bring the young man under the personal influence of a friend of noble and sympathetic character. Has his son any capacity left for being touched by such a character; of admiring its strength on one side, its softness on another? When he is in contact with it, when he perceives how pure, how self-sacrificing, how true and straight it is, is there a glow in his face, a trembling of his voice, a moisture in his eye, a wholesome self-humiliation? Or does he repel all this with a sneer and a bitter gibe? Has he that evil attitude which is possessed only by the most deeply corrupt—"they blaspheme, rail at glories." The Chaplain of a penitentiary records that among the most degraded of its inmates was one miserable creature. The Matron met her with firmness, but with a good will which no hardness could break down, no insolence overcome. One evening after prayers the Chaplain observed this poor outcast stealthily kissing the shadow of the Matron thrown by her candle upon the wall. He saw that the diseased nature was beginning to be capable of assimilating new life, that the victory of wholesome personal influence had begun. He found reason for concluding that his judgment was well founded.

The law of restoration by living example through personal influence pervades the whole of our human relations under God's natural and moral government as truly as the principle of mediation. This law also pervades the system of restoration revealed to us by Christianity. It is one of the chief results of the Incarnation itself. It begins to act upon us first, when the Gospels become something more to us than a mere history, when we realise in some degree how He walked. But it is not complete until we know that all this is not merely of the past, but of the present; that He is not dead, but living; that we may therefore use that little word "is" about Christ in the lofty sense of St. John—"even as He is pure; in Him is no sin"; "even as He is righteous; He is the propitiation for our sins." If this is true, as it undoubtedly is, of all good human influence personal and living, is it not true of the Personal and living Christ in an infinitely higher degree? If the shadow of Peter overshadowing the sick had some strange efficacy; if handkerchiefs or aprons from the body of Paul wrought upon the sick and possessed; what may be the spiritual result of contact with Christ Himself? Of one of those men specially gifted to raise struggling natures and of others like him, a true poet lately taken from us has sung in one of his most glorious strains. Matthew Arnold likens mankind to a host inexorably bound by divine appointment to march over mountain and desert to the city of God. But they become entangled in the wilderness through which they march, split into mutinous factions, and are in danger of "battering on the rocks" forever in vain, of dying one by one in the waste. Then comes the poet's appeal to the "Servants of God":—

"Then in the hour of need
Of your fainting, dispirited race,
Ye like angels appear!
Languor is not in your heart,
Weakness is not in your word,
Weariness not on your brow.
Eyes rekindling, and prayers
Follow your steps as ye go.
Ye fill up the gaps in
our file,
Strengthen the wavering line,
Stablish, continue our march—
On, to the bound of the waste—
On to the City of God."

If all this be true of the personal influence of good and strong men—true in proportion to their goodness and strength—it must be true of the influence of the Strongest and Best with Whom we are brought into personal relation by prayer and sacraments, and by meditation upon the sacred record which tells us what His one life walk was. Strength is not wanting upon His part, for He is able to save to the uttermost. Pity is not wanting; for to use touching words (attributed to St. Paul in a very ancient apocryphal document), "He alone sympathised with a world that has lost its way."

Let it not be forgotten that in that of which St. John speaks lies the true answer to an objection, formulated by the great antichristian writer above quoted, and constantly repeated by others. "The ideal of Christian morality," says Mr. Mill, "is negative rather than positive; passive rather than active; innocence rather than nobleness; abstinence from evil, rather than energetic pursuit of good; in its precepts (as has been well said), 'thou shalt not' predominates unduly over 'thou shalt.' The answer is this.

(1) A true religious system must have a distinct moral code. If not, it would be justly condemned for "expressing itself" (in the words of Mr. Mill's own accusation against Christianity elsewhere) "in language most general, and possessing rather the impressiveness of poetry or eloquence than the precision of legislation." But the necessary formula of precise legislation is, "thou shalt not"; and without this it cannot be precise.

(2) But further. To say that Christian legislation is negative, a mere string of "thou shalt nots," is just such a superficial accusation as might be expected from a man who should enter a church upon some rare occasion, and happen to listen to the Ten Commandments, but fall asleep before he could hear the Epistle and Gospel. The philosopher of duty, Kant, has told us that the peculiarity of a moral principle, of any proposition which states what duty is, is to convey the meaning of an imperative through the form of an indicative. In his own expressive, if pedantic, language—"its categorical form involves an epitactic meaning." St. John asserts that the Christian "ought to walk even as Christ walked." To everyone who receives it, that proposition is therefore precisely equivalent to a command—"walk as Christ walked." Is it a negative, passive morality, a mere system of "thou shalt not," which contains such a precept as that? Does not the Christian religion in virtue of this alone enforce a great "thou shalt"; which every man who brings himself within its range will find rising with him in the morning, following him like his shadow all day long, and lying down with him when he goes to rest?

II It should be clearly understood that in the words "even as He walked," the Gospel of St. John is both referred to and attested.

For surely, to point with any degree of moral seriousness to an example, is to presuppose some clear knowledge and definite record of it. No example can be beautiful or instructive when its shape is lost in darkness. It has indeed been said by a deeply religious writer, "that the likeness of the Christian to Christ is to His character, not to the particular form in which it was historically manifested." And this, of course, is in one sense a truism. But how else except by this historical manifestation can we know the character of Christ in any true sense of the word knowledge? For those who are familiar with the fourth Gospel, the term "walk" was tenderly significant. For if it was used with a reminiscence of the Old Testament and of the language of our Lord, to denote the whole continuous activity of the life of

any man inward and outward, there was another signification which became entwined with it. St. John had used the word historically in his Gospel, not without allusion to the Saviour's homelessness on earth, to His itinerant life of beneficence and of teaching. Those who first received this Epistle with deepest reverence as the utterance of the Apostle whom they loved, when they came to the precept—"walk even as He walked"—would ask themselves how did He walk? What do we know of the great rule of life thus proposed to us? The Gospel which accompanied this letter, and with which it was in some way closely connected, was a sufficient and definite answer.

III The character of Christ in his Gospel is thus, according to St. John, the loftiest ideal of purity, peace, self-sacrifice, unbroken communion with God; the inexhaustible fountain of regulated thoughts, high aims, holy action, constant prayer.

We may advert to one aspect of this perfection as delineated in the fourth Gospel—our Lord's way of doing small things, or at least things which in human estimation appear to be small.

The fourth chapter of that Gospel contains a marvellous record of word and work. Let us trace that record back to its beginning. There are seeds of spiritual life scattered in many hearts which were destined to yield a rich harvest in due time; there is the account of one sensuous nature, quickened and spiritualised; there are promises which have been for successive centuries as a river of God to weary natures. All these results issue from three words spoken by a tired traveller, sitting naturally over a well—"give me to drink."

We take another instance. There is one passage in St. John's Gospel which divides with the prooemium of his Epistle the glory of being the loftiest, the most prolonged, the most sustained, in the Apostle's writings.

It is the prelude of a work which might have seemed to be of little moment. Yet all the height of a great ideal is over it, like the vault of heaven; all the power of a Divine purpose is under it, like the strength of the great deep; all the consciousness of His death, of His ascension, of His coming dominion, of His Divine origin, of His session at God's right hand—all the hoarded love in His heart for His own which were in the world—passes by some mysterious transference into that little incident of tenderness and of humiliation. He sets an everlasting mark upon it, not by a basin of gold crusted with gems, nor by mixing precious scents with the water which He poured out, nor by using linen of the finest tissue, but by the absolute perfection of love and dutiful humility in the spirit and in every detail of the whole action. It is one more of those little chinks through which the whole sunshine of heaven streams in upon those who have eyes to see. {Joh 13:1-6}

The underlying secret of this feature of our Lord's character is told by Himself. "My meat is to be ever doing the will of Him that sent Me, and so, when the times come, by one great decisive act to finish His work." All along the course of that life walk there were smaller preludes to the great act which won our redemption—multitudinous daily little perfect epitomes of love and sacrifice, without which the crowning sacrifice would not have been what it was. The plan of our life must, of course, be constructed on a scale as different as the human from the Divine. Yet there is a true sense in which this lesson of the great life may be applied to us.

The apparently small things of life must not be despised or neglected on account of their smallness, by those who would follow the precept of St. John. Patience and

diligence in petty trades, in services called menial, in waiting on the sick and old, in a hundred such works, all come within the sweep of this net, with its lines that look as thin as cobwebs, and which yet for Christian hearts are stronger than fibres of steel—"walk even as He walked." This, too, is our only security. A French poet has told a beautiful tale. Near a river which runs between French and German territory, a blacksmith was at work one snowy night near Christmas time. He was tired out, standing by his forge, and wistfully looking towards his little home, lighted up a short quarter of a mile away, and wife and children waiting for their festal supper, when he should return. It came to the last piece of his work, a rivet which it was difficult to finish properly; for it was of peculiar shape, intended by the contractor who employed him to pin the metal work of a bridge which he was constructing over the river. The smith was sorely tempted to fail in giving honest work, to hurry over a job which seemed at once so troublesome and so trifling. But some good angel whispered to the man that he should do his best. He turned to the forge with a sigh, and never rested until the work was as complete as his skill could make it. The poet carries us on for a year or two. War breaks out. A squadron of the blacksmith's countrymen is driven over the bridge in headlong flight. Men, horses, guns, try its solidity. For a moment or two the whole weight of the mass really hangs upon the one rivet. There are times in life when the whole weight of the soul also hangs upon a rivet; the rivet of sobriety, of purity, of honesty, of command of temper. Possibly we have devoted little or no honest work to it in the years when we should have perfected the work; and so, in the day of trial, the rivet snaps, and we are lost.

There is one word of encouragement which should be finally spoken for the sake of one class of God's servants.

Some are sick, weary, broken, paralysed, it may be slowly dying. What—they sometimes think—have we to do with this precept? Others who have hope, elasticity, capacity of service, may walk as He walked; but we can scarcely do so. Such persons should remember what walking in the Christian sense is—all life's activity inward and outward. Let them think of Christ upon His cross. He was fixed to it, nailed hand and foot. Nailed; yet never—not when He trod upon the waves, not when He moved upward through the air to His throne—never did He walk more truly, because He walked in the way of perfect love. It is just whilst looking at the moveless form upon the tree that we may hear most touchingly the great "thou shalt"—thou shalt walk even as He walked.

IV As there is a literal, so there is a mystical walking as Christ walked. This is an idea which deeply pervades St. Paul's writings. Is it His birth? We are born again. Is it His life? We walk with Him in newness of life. Is it His death? We are crucified with Him. Is it His burial? We are buried with Him. Is it His resurrection? We are risen again with Him. Is it His ascension—His very session at God's right hand? "He hath raised us up and made us sit together with Him in heavenly places." They know nothing of St. Paul's mind who know nothing of this image of a soul seen in the very dust of death, loved, pardoned, quickened, elevated, crowned, throned. It was this conception at work from the beginning in the general consciousness of Christians which moulded round itself the order of the Christian year.

It will illustrate this idea for us if we think of the difference between the outside and the inside of a church.

Outside on some high spire we see the light just lingering far up, while the shadows are coldly gathering in the streets below; and we know that it is winter. Again the evening falls warm and golden on the churchyard, and we recognise the touch of

summer. But inside it is always God's weather; it is Christ all the year long. Now the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, or circumcised with the knife of the law, manifested to the Gentiles, or manifesting Himself with a glory that breaks through the veil; now the Man tempted in the wilderness; now the victim dying on the cross; now the Victor risen, ascended, sending the Holy Spirit; now for twenty-five Sundays worshipped as the Everlasting Word with the Father and the Holy Ghost. In this mystical following of Christ also, the one perpetual lesson is —" he that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk even as He walked."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 10

THE WORLD WHICH WE MUST NOT LOVE— 1Jo 2:15, 16

AN adequate development of words so compressed and pregnant as these would require a separate treatise, or series of treatises. But if we succeed in grasping St. John's conception of the world, we shall have a key that will open to us this cabinet of spiritual thought.

In the writings of St. John the world is always found in one or other of four senses, as may be decided by the context.

(1) It means the creation, the universe. So our Lord in His High priestly prayer—"Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."

(2) It is used for the earth locally as the place where man resides; and whose soil the Son of God trod for a while. "I am no more in the world, but these are in the world."

(3) It denotes the chief inhabitants of the earth, they to whom the counsels of God mainly point—men universally. Such a transference is common in nearly all languages. Both the inhabitants of a building, and the material structure which contains them, are called "a house"; and the inhabitants are frequently bitterly blamed, while the beauty of the structure is passionately admired. In this sense there is a magnificent width in the word "world." We cannot but feel indignant at attempts to gird its grandeur within the narrow rim of a human system. "The bread that I will give," said He who knew best, "is My flesh which I will give for the life of the world." "He is the propitiation for the whole world," writes the Apostle at the beginning of this chapter. In this sense, if we would imitate Christ, if we would aspire to the Father's perfection, "love not the world" must be tempered by that other tender oracle—"God so loved the world."

In none of these senses can the world here be understood. There remains then

(4) a fourth signification, which has two allied shades of thought. World is employed to cover the whole present existence, with its blended good and evil—susceptible of elevation by grace, susceptible also of deeper depths of sin and ruin. But yet again the indifferent meaning passes into one that is wholly evil, wholly within a region of darkness. The first creation was pronounced by God in each department "good" collectively; when crowned by God's masterpiece in man, "very good." "All things," our Apostle tells us, "were made through Him (the Word), and without Him was not anything made that was made." But as that was a world wholly good, so is this a world wholly evil. This evil world is not God's creation, drew not its origin from Him. All that is in it came out from it, from nothing higher. This wholly evil world is not the material creation; if it were, we should be landed in dualism, or Manicheism. It is not an entity, an actual tangible thing, a creation. It is not of God's world that St. John cries in that last fierce word of abhorrence which he flings at it as he sees the shadowy thing like an evil spirit made visible in an idols arms—"the world lieth

wholly in the evil one."

This anti-world, this caricature of creation, this thing of negations, is spun out of three abuses of the endowment of God's glorious gift of free will to man; out of three noble instincts ignobly used. First, "the lust of the flesh"—of which flesh is the seat, and supplies the organic medium through which it works. The flesh is that softer part of the frame which by the network of the nerves is intensely susceptible of pleasurable and painful sensations: capable of heroic patient submission to the higher principles of conscience and spirit, capable also of frightful rebellion. Of all theologians St. John is the least likely to fall into the exaggeration of libelling the flesh as essentially evil. Is it not he who, whether in his Gospel, or in his Epistles, delights to speak of the flesh of Jesus, to record words in which He refers to it? Still the flesh brings us into contact with all sins which are sins that spring from, and end in, the senses. Shall we ask for a catalogue of particulars from St. John? Nay, we cannot expect that the virgin Apostle, who received the Virgin Mother from the Virgin Lord upon the cross, will sully his virgin pen with words so abhorred. When he has uttered the lust of the flesh his shudder is followed by an eloquent silence. We can fill up the blank too well—drunkenness, gluttony, thoughts and motions which spring from deliberate, wilfully cherished, rebellious sensuality; which fill many of us with pain and fear, and wring cries and bitter tears from penitents, and even from saints. The second, abuse of free will, the second element in this world which is not God's world, is the desire of which the eyes are the seat—"the lust of the eyes." To the two sins which we instinctively associate with this phrase—voluptuousness and curiosity of the senses or the soul—Scripture might seem to add envy, which derives so much of its aliment from sight. In this lies the Christian's warning against wilfully indulging in evil sights, bad plays, bad books, bad pictures.

He who is outwardly the spectator of these things becomes inwardly the actor of them. The eye is, so to speak, the burning glass of the soul; it draws the rays from their evil brightness to a focus, and may kindle a raging fire in the heart. Under this department comes unregulated spiritual or intellectual curiosity. The first need not trouble us so much as it did Christians in a more believing time. Comparatively very few are in danger from the planchette or from astrology. But surely it is a rash thing for an ordinary mind, without a clear call of duty, without any adequate preparation, to place its faith within the deadly grip of some powerful adversary. People really seem to have absolutely no conscience about reading anything—the last philosophical Life of Christ, or the last romance; of which the titles might be with advantage exchanged, for the philosophical history is a light romance, and the romance is a heavy philosophy. The third constituent in the evil anti-trinity of the anti-world is "the pride" (the arrogancy, gasconade, almost swagger) "of life," of which the lower life is the seat. The thought is not so much of outward pomp and ostentation as of that false pride which arises in the heart. The arrogancy is within; the gasconade plays its "fantastic tricks before high heaven." And each of these three elements (making up as they do collectively all that is "in the world" and springing out of the world) is not a substantive thing, not an original ingredient of man's nature, or among the forms of God's world; it is the perversion of an element which had a use that was noble, or at least innocent. For first comes "the lust of the flesh." Take those two objects to which this lust turns with a fierce and perverted passion. The possession of flesh in itself leads man to crave for the necessary support to his native weakness. The mutual craving for the love of beings so like and so unlike as man and woman, if it be a weakness, has at least a most touching and exquisite side. Again, is not a yearning for beauty gratified through the eyes? Were they not given for the enjoyment, for the teaching, at once high and sweet, of Nature and of Art? Art may be a moral and spiritual discipline. The ideas of Beauty from gifted minds

by cunning hands transferred to, and stamped upon, outward things, come from the ancient and uncreated Beauty, whose beauty is as perfect as His truth and strength. Still further; in the lower life, and in its lawful use, there was intended to be a something of quiet satisfaction, a certain restfulness, at times making us happy and triumphant. And lo! for all this, not moderate fare and pure love, not thoughtful curiosity and the sweet pensiveness which is the best tribute to the beautiful—not a wise humility which makes us feel that our times are in God's hands and our means His continual gift—but degraded senses, low art, evil literature, a pride which is as grovelling as it is godless.

These three typical summaries of the evil tendencies in the exercise of free will correspond with a remarkable fulness to the two narratives of trial which give us the compendium and general outline of all human temptation.

Our Lord's three temptations answer to this division. The lust of the flesh is in essence the rebellion of the lower appetites, inherent to creaturely dependence, against the higher principle or law. The nearest and only conceivable approach to this in the sinless Man would be in His seeking lawful support by unlawful means—procuring food by a miraculous exertion of power, which only would have become sinful, or short of the highest goodness, by some condition of its exercise at that time and in that place. An appeal to the desire for beauty and glory, with an implied hint of using them for God's greater honour, is the essence of the second temptation; the one possible approximation to the "lust of the eyes" in that perfect character. The interior deception of some touch of pride in the visible support of angels wafting the Son of God through the air is Satan's one sinister way of insinuating to the Saviour something akin to "the pride of life."

In the case of the other earlier typical trials it will be observed that while the temptations fit into the same threefold framework, they are placed in an order which exactly reverses that of St. John. For in Eden the first approach is through "pride"; the magnificent promise of elevation in the scale of being, of the knowledge that would win the wonder of the spiritual world. "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." {Ge 3:5} The next step is that which directs the curiosity both of the senses and of the aspiring mind to the object, forbidden—"when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise." {Ge 3:6} Then seems to have come some strange and sad rebellion of the lower nature, filling their souls with shame; some bitter revelation of the law of sin in their members; some knowledge that they were contaminated by the "lust of the flesh." {Ge 3:7} The order of the temptation in the narrative of Moses is historical; St. John's order is moral and spiritual, answering to the facts of life. The "lust of the flesh," which may approach the child through childish greed, grows apace. At first it is half unconscious; then it becomes coarse and palpable. In the man's desire acting with unregulated curiosity, through ambition of knowledge at any price, searching out for itself books and other instruments with deliberate desire to kindle lust, the "lust of the eyes" ceases not its fatal influence. The crowning sin of pride with its selfishness, which is self apart from God as well as from the brother, finds its place in the "pride of life."

III We may now be in a position to see more clearly against what world the Primate of early Christendom pronounced his anathema, and launched his interdict, and why?

What "world" did he denounce?

Clearly not the world as the creation, the universe. Not again the earth locally. God made and ordered all things. Why should we not love them with a holy and a blameless love? Only we should not love them in themselves; we should not cling to them forgetting Him. Suppose that some husband heaped beautiful and costly presents upon his wife whom he loved. At last with the intuition of love he begins to see what is the secret of such cold imitation of love as that icy heart can give. She loves him not — his riches, not the man; his gifts, not the giver. And thus loving with that frigid love which has no heart in it, there is no true love; her heart is another's. Gifts are given that the giver may be loved in them. If it is true that "gifts are naught when givers prove unkind," it is also true that there is a sort of adultery of the heart when the taker is unkind—because the gift is valuable, not because the bestower is dear. And so the world, God's beautiful world, now becomes to us an idol. If we are so lost in the possession of Nature, in the march of law, in the majestic growth, in the stars above and in the plants below, that we forget the Lawgiver, who from such humble beginnings has brought out a world of beauty and order; if with modern poets we find content, calm, happiness, purity, rest, simply in contemplating the glaciers, the waves, and the stars; then we look at the world even in this sense in a way which is a violation of St. John's rule. Yet again, the world which is now condemned is not humanity. There is no real Christianity in taking black views, and speaking bitter things, about the human society to which we belong, and the human nature of which we are partakers. No doubt Christianity believes that man "is very far gone from original righteousness"; that there is a "corruption in the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam." Yet the utterers of unwholesome apothegms, the suspects of their kind, are not Christian thinkers. The philosophic historian, whose gorge rose at the doctrine of the Fall, thought much worse of man practically than the Fathers of the Church. They bowed before martyrdom and purity, and believed in them with a child-like faith. For Gibbon, the martyr was not quite so true, nor the virgin quite so pure, nor the saint quite so holy. He Who knew human nature best, Who has thrown that terrible ray of light into the unlit gulf of the heart when He tells us "what proceeds out of the heart of man," {Mr 7:21} had yet the ear which was the first to hear the trembling of the one chord that yet kept healthful time and tune in the harlot's passionate heart. He believed that man was recoverable; lost, but capable of being found. After all, in this sense there is something worthy of love in man. "God so loved" (not so hated) "the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." Shall we say that we are to hate the world which He loved?

And now we come to that world which God never loved, never will love, never will reconcile to Himself, -which we are not to love.

This is most important to see; for there is always a danger in setting out with a stricter standard than Christ's, a narrower road than the narrow one which leads to heaven. Experience proves that they who begin with standards of duty which are impossibly high end with standards of duty which are sometimes sadly low. Such men have tried the impracticable, and failed; the practicable seems to be too hard for them ever afterwards. They who begin by an athematising the world in things innocent, indifferent, or even laudable, not rarely end by a reaction of thought which believes that the world is nothing and nowhere.

But there is such a thing as the world in St. John's sense—an evil world brought into existence by the abuse of our free will; filled by the anti-trinity, by "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."

Let us not confuse "the world" with the earth, with the whole race of man, with

general society, with any particular set, however much some sets are to be avoided. Look at the thing fairly. Two people, we will say, go to London, to live there. One, from circumstances of life and position, naturally falls into the highest social circle. Another has introductions to a smaller set, with an apparently more serious connection. Follow the first some evening. He drives to a great gathering. The room which he enters is ablaze with light; jewelled orders sparkle upon men's coats, and fair women move in exquisite dresses. We look at the scene and we say—"what worldly society has the man fallen into!" Perhaps so, in a sense. But about the same time the other walks to a little room with humbler adjuncts, where a grave and apparently serious circle meet together. We are able to look in there also, and we exclaim—"this is serious society, unworldly society." Perhaps so, again. Yet let us read the letters of Mary Godolphin. She bore a life unspotted by the world in the dissolute court of Charles II, because the love of the Father was in her. In small serious circles are there no hidden lusts which blaze up in scandals? Is there no vanity, no pride, no hatred? In the world of Charles II's court Mary Godolphin lived out of the world which God hated; in the religious world not a few, certainly, live in the world which is not God's. For, once more, the world is not so much a place—though at times its power seems to have been drawn into one intense focus, as in the empire of which Rome was the centre, and which may have been in the Apostle's thought in the following verse. In the truest and deepest sense the world consists of our own spiritual surrounding; it is the place which we make for our own souls. No walls that ever were reared can shut out the world from us; the "Nun of Kenmare" found that it followed her into the seemingly spiritual retreat of a severe Order. The world in its essence is subtler and thinner than the most infinitesimal of the bacterian germs in the air. They can be strained off by the exquisite apparatus of a man of science. At a certain height they cease to exist. But the world may be wherever we are; we carry it with us wherever we go, it lasts while our lives last. No consecration can utterly banish it even from within the church's walls; it dares to be round us while we kneel, and follows us into the presence of God.

Why does God hate this "world"—the world in this sense? St. John tells us. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Deep in every heart must be one or other of two loves. There is no room for two master passions. There is an expulsive power in all true affection. What tenderness and pathos, how much of expostulation, more potent because reserved—"the love of the Father is not in him"! He has told all his "little ones" that he has written to them because they "know the Father." St. John does not use sacred names at random. Even Voltaire felt that there was something almost awful in hearing Newton pronounce the name of God. Such in an incomparably higher degree is the spirit of St. John. In this section he writes of "the love of the Father," {1Jo 2:15,16} and of the "will of God." (Ibid. ver. 17.) The first title has more sweetness than majesty; the second more majesty than sweetness. He would throw into his plea some of the winningness of one who uses this as a resistless argument with a tempted, but loving child—an argument often successful when every other fails. "If you do this, your Father will not love you; you will not be His child." We have but to read this with the hearts of God's dear children. Then we shall find that if the "love not" of this verse contains "words of extirpation" it ends with others which are intended to draw us with cords of a man, and with bands of love.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 11

USE AND ABUSE OF THE SENSE OF THE VANITY OF THE WORLD— 1Jo 2:17

THE connection of the passage in which these words occur is not difficult to trace for those who are used to follow those "roots below the stream," those real rather than verbal links latent in the substance of St. John's thoughts. He addresses those whom he has in view with a paternal authority, as his "sons" in the faith—with an endearing variation as "little children." He reminds them of the wisdom and strength involved in their Christian life. Theirs is the sweetest flower of knowledge—"to know the Father." Theirs is the grandest crown of victory—"to overcome the wicked one." But there remains an enemy in one sense more dangerous than the Evil One—the world. By the world in this place we are to understand that element in the material and human sphere, in the region of mingled good and evil, which is external to God, to the influence of His Spirit, to the boundaries of His Church—nay, which frequently passes over those boundaries. In this sense it is, so to speak, a fictitious world, a world of wills separated from God because dominated by self; a shadowy caricature of creation; an anti-kosmos, which the Author of the kosmos has not made. What has been well called "the great love not" rings out—"love not the world." For this admonition two reasons of ever enduring validity are given by St. John.

(1) The application of the law of human nature, that two master passions cannot coexist in one man. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

(2) The unsatisfactory nature of the world, its incurable transitoriness, its "visible tendency to nonexistence." "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof."

It will be well to consider how far this thought of the transitoriness of the world, of its drifting by in ceaseless change, is in itself salutary and Christian, how far it needs to be supplemented and elevated by that which follows and closes the verse.

I There can be no doubt, then, that up to a certain point this conviction is a necessary element of Christian thought, feeling, and character; that it is at least among the preliminaries of a saving reception of Christ.

There is in the great majority of the world a surprising and almost incredible levity. There is a disposition to believe in the permanency of that which we have known to continue long, and which has become habitual. There is a tale of a man who was resolved to keep from his children the knowledge of death. He was the Governor of a colony, and had lost in succession his wife and many children. Two only, mere infants, were left. He withdrew to a beautiful and secluded island, and tried to barricade his daughters from the fatal knowledge which, when once acquired, darkens the spirit with anticipation. In the ocean island death was to be a forbidden word. If met with in the pages of a book, and questions were asked, no answer was to be given. If some one expired, the body was to be removed, and the children were

to be told that the departed had gone to another country. It does not need much imagination to feel sure that the secret could not be kept; that some fish on the coral reef, or some bright bird in the tropic forest, gave the little ones the hint of a something that touched the splendour of the sunset with a strange presentiment; that some hour came when, as to the rest of us, so to them, the mute presence would insist upon being made known. Ours is a stranger mode of dealing with ourselves than was the father's way of dealing with his children. We tacitly resolve to play a game of make believe with ourselves, to forget that which cannot be forgotten, to remove to an incalculable distance that which is inexorably near. And the fear of death with us does not come from the nerves, but from the will. Death ushers us into the presence of God. Those of whom, we speak hate and fear death because they fear God and hate His presence. Now it is necessary for such persons as these to be awakened from their illusion. That which is supremely important for them is to realise that "the world" is indeed "drifting by"; that there is an emptiness in all that is created, a vanity in all that is not eternal; that time is short, eternity long. They must be brought to see that with the world, the "lust thereof" (the concupiscence, the lust of it, which has the world for its object, which belongs to it, and which the world stimulates) passes by also. The world, which is the object of the desire, is a phantom and a shadow; the desire itself must be therefore the phantom of a phantom and the shadow of a shadow.

This conviction has a thousand times over led human souls to the one true abiding centre of eternal reality. It has come in a thousand ways. It has been said that one heard the fifth chapter of Genesis read, with those words eight times repeated over the close of each record of longevity, like the strokes of a funeral bill, "and he died"; and that the impression never left him, until he planted his foot upon the rock over the tide of the changing years. Sometimes this conviction is produced by the death of friends—sometimes by the slow discipline of life—sometimes no doubt it may be begun, sometimes deepened, by the preacher's voice upon the watch night, by the effective ritualism of the tolling bell, of the silent prayer, of the well-selected hymn. And it is right that the world's dancing in, or drinking in, the New Year, should be a hint to Christians to pray it in. This is one of the happy plagiarisms which the Church has made from the world. The heart feels as it never did before the truth of St. John's sad, calm, oracular survey of existence. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof."

II But we have not sounded the depth of the truth—certainly we have not exhausted St. John's meaning—until we have asked something more. Is this conviction alone always a herald of salvation? Is it always, taken by itself, even salutary? Can it never be exaggerated, and become the parent of evils almost greater than those which it supersedes?

We are led by careful study of the Bible to conclude that this sentiment of the flux of things is capable of exaggeration. For there is one important principle which arises from a comparison of the Old Testament with the New in this matter.

It is to be noticed that the Old Testament has infinitely more which corresponds to the first proposition of the text, without the qualification which follows it, than we can find in the New.

The patriarch Job's experience echoes in our ears. "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay." The Funeral Psalms make their melancholy chant. "Behold, Thou hast made my days as it

were a span long Verily every man living is altogether vanity. For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain spare me a little that I may smile again." Or we read the words of Moses, the man of God, in that ancient psalm of his, that hymn of time and of eternity. All that human speech can say is summed up in four words, the truest, the deepest, the saddest, and the most expressive, that ever fell from any mortal pen. "We bring our years to an end, as a sigh." Each life is a sigh between two eternities!

Our point is that in the New Testament there is greatly less of this element—greatly less of this pathetic moralising upon the vanity and fragility of human life, of which we have only cited a few examples—and that what there is lies in a different atmosphere, with sunnier and more cheerful surroundings. Indeed, in the whole compass of the New Testament there is perhaps but one passage which is set quite in the same key with our familiar declamations upon the uncertainty and shortness of human life—where St. James desires Christians ever to remember in all their projects to make deduction for the will of God, "not knowing what shall be on the morrow." In the New Testament the voice which wails for a second about the changefulness and misery is lost in the triumphant music by which it is encompassed. If earthly goods are depreciated, it is not merely because "the load of them troubles, the love of them taints, the loss of them tortures"; it is because better things are ready. There is no lamentation over the change, no clinging to the dead past. The tone is rather one of joyful invitation. "Your raft is going to pieces in the troubled sea of time; step into a gallant ship. The volcanic isle on which you stand is undermined by silent fires; we can promise to bring you with us to a shore of safety where you shall be compassed about with songs of deliverance."

It is no doubt true to urge that this style of thought and language is partly to be ascribed to a desire that the attention of Christians should be fixed on the return of their Lord, rather than upon their own death. But, if we believe Scripture to have been written under Divine guidance, the history of religion may supply us with good grounds for the absence of all exaggeration from its pages in speaking of the misery of life and the transitoriness of the world.

The largest religious experiment in the world, the history of a religion which at one time numerically exceeded Christendom, is a gigantic proof that it is not safe to allow unlimited license to melancholy speculation. The true symbol for humanity is not a skull and an hourglass.

Some two thousand five hundred years ago, towards the end of the seventh century before Christ, at the foot of the mountains of Nepaul, in the capital of a kingdom of Central India, an infant was born whom the world will never forget. All gifts seemed to be showered on this child. He was the son of a powerful king and heir to his throne. The young Siddhartha was of rare distinction, brave and beautiful, a thinker and a hero, married to an amiable and fascinating princess. But neither a great position nor domestic happiness could clear away the cloud of melancholy which hung over Siddhartha, even under that lovely sky. His deep and meditative soul dwelt night and day upon the mystery of existence. He came to the conclusion that the life of the creature is incurably evil from three causes—the very fact of existence, desire, and ignorance. The things revealed by sense are evil. None has that continuance and that fixity which are the marks of Law, and the attainment of which is the condition of happiness. At last his resolution to leave all his splendour and become an ascetic was irrevocably fixed. One splendid morning the prince drove to a glorious garden. On his road he met a repulsive old man, wrinkled, toothless, bent. Another day, a wretched being wasted with fever crossed his path. Yet a third

excursion

- and a funeral passes along the road with a corpse on an open bier, and friends wailing as they go. His favourite attendant is obliged in each case to confess that these evils are not exceptional—that old age, sickness, and death are the fatal conditions of conscious existence for all the sons of men. Then the Prince Royal takes his first step towards becoming the deliverer of humanity. He cries—"woe, woe to the youth which old age must destroy, to the health which sickness must undermine, to the life which has so few days and is so full of evil." Hasty readers are apt to judge that the Prince was on the same track with the Patriarch of Idumea, and with Moses the man of God in the desert—nay, with St. John, when he writes from Ephesus that "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof."

It may be well to reconsider this; to see what contradictory principle lies under utterances which have so much superficial resemblance.

Siddhartha became known as the Buddha, the august founder of a great and ancient religion. That religion has of later years been favourably compared with Christianity—yet what are its necessary results, as drawn out for us by those who have studied it most deeply? Scepticism, fanatic hatred of life, incurable sadness in a world fearfully misunderstood; rejection of the personality of man, of God, of the reality of Nature. Strange enigma! The Buddha sought to win annihilation by good works; everlasting non-being by a life of purity, of alms, of renunciation, of austerity. The prize of his high calling was not everlasting life, but everlasting death; for what else is impersonality, unconsciousness, absorption into the universe, but the negation of human existence? The acceptance of the principles of Buddhism is simply a sentence of death intellectually, morally, spiritually, almost physically, passed upon the race which submits to the melancholy bondage of its creed of desolation. It is the opium drunkenness of the spiritual world without the dreams that are its temporary consolation. It is enervating without being soft, and contemplative without being profound. It is a religion which is spiritual without recognising the soul, virtuous without the conception of duty, moral without the admission of liberty, charitable without love. It surveys a world without nature, and a universe without God. The human soul under its influence is not so much drunken as asphyxiated by a monotonous, unbalanced, perpetual repetition of one half of the truth—"the world passeth away, and the lust thereof."

For let us carefully note that St. John adds a qualification which preserves the balance of truth. Over against the dreary contemplation of the perpetual flux of things, he sets a constant course of doing—over against the world, God in His deepest, truest personality, "the will of God"—over against the fact of our having a short time to live, and being full of misery, an everlasting fixity, "he abideth forever"—(so well brought out by the old gloss which slipped into the Latin text, "even as God abideth forever"). As the Lord had taught before, so the disciple now teaches, of the rocklike solidity, of the permanent abiding, under and over him who "doeth." Of the devotee who became in his turn the Buddha, Cakhya-Mouni could not have said one word of the close of our text. "He"—but human personality is lost in the triumph of knowledge. "Doeth the will of God"—but God is ignored, if not denied. "Abideth forever"—but that is precisely the object of his aversion, the terror from which he wishes to be emancipated at any price, by any self-denial.

It may be supposed that this strain of thought is of little practical importance. It may be of use, indeed, in other lands to the missionary who is brought into contact with forms of Buddhism in China, India, or Ceylon, but not to us in these countries. In

truth it is not so. It is about half a century ago since a great English theologian warned his University that the central principle of Buddhism was being spread far and wide in Europe from Berlin. This propaganda is not confined to philosophy. It is at work in literature generally, in poetry, in novels, above all in those collection of "Pensees" which have become so extensively popular. The unbelief of the last century advanced with flashing epigrams and defiant songs. With Byron it softened at times into a melancholy which was perhaps partly affected. But with Amiel, and others of our own day, unbelief assumes a sweet and dirge-like tone. The satanic mirth of the past unbelief is exchanged for a satanic melancholy in the present. Many currents of thought run into our hearts, and all are tinged with a darkness before unknown from new substances in the soil which colours the waters. There is little fear of our not hearing enough, great fear of our hearing too much, of the proposition—"the world passeth away, and the lust thereof."

All this may possibly serve as some explanation for the fact that the Christian Church, as such, has no fast for the last day of the year, no festival for New Year's Day except one quite unconnected with the lessons which may be drawn from the flight of time. The death of the old year, the birth of the new year, have touching associations for us. But the Church consecrates no death but that of Jesus and His martyrs, no nativity but that of her Lord, and of one whose birth was directly connected with His own — John the Baptist. A cause of this has been found in the fact that the day had become so deeply contaminated by the abominations of the heathen Saturnalia that it was impossible in the early Church to continue any very marked observation of it. This may well be so; but it is worth considering whether there is not another and deeper reason. Nothing that has now been said can be supposed to militate against the observance of this time by Christians in private, with solemn penitence for the transgressions of the past year, and earnest prayer for that upon which we enter—nothing against the edification of particular congregations by such services as those most striking ones which are held in so many places. But some explanation is supplied why the "Water-night" is not recognised in the calendar of the Church.

Let us take our verse together as a whole and we have something better than moralising over the flight of time and the transitoriness of the world; something better than vulgarising "vanity of vanities" by vapid iteration.

It is hard to conceive a life in which death and evanescence have nothing that enforces their recognition. Now the removal of one dear to us, now a glance at the obituary with the name of some one of almost the same age as ourselves, brings a sudden shadow over the sunniest field. Yet surely it is not wholesome to encourage the perpetual presence of the cloud. We might impose upon ourselves the penance of being shut up all a winter's night with a corpse, go half crazy with terror of that unearthly presence, and yet be no more spiritual after all.

We must learn to look at death in a different way, with new eyes. We all know how different dead faces are. Some speak to us merely of material ugliness, of the sweep of "decay's effacing fingers." In others a new idea seems to light up the face; there is the touch of a superhuman irradiation, of a beauty from a hidden life. We feel that we look on one who has seen Christ, and say—"We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." These two kinds of faces answer to the two different views of life.

Not the transitory, but the permanent; not the fleeting, but the abiding; not death, but life, is the conclusion of the whole matter. The Christian life is not an initial spasm

followed by a chronic dyspepsia. What does St. John give us as the picture of it exemplified in a believer? Daily, perpetual, constant doing the will of God. This is the end far beyond—somewhat inconsistent with—obstinately morbid meditation and surrounding ourselves with multiplied images of mortality. Lying in a coffin half the night might not lead to that end; nay, it might be a hindrance thereto. Beyond the grave, outside the coffin, is the object at which we are to look. "The current of things temporal," cries Augustine, "sweeps along. But like a tree over that stream has risen our Lord Jesus Christ. He willed to plant Himself as it were over the river. Are you whirled along by the current? Lay hold of the wood. Does the love of the world roll you onward in its course? Lay hold upon Christ. For you He became temporal that you might become eternal. For He was so made temporal as to remain eternal. Join thy heart to the eternity of God, and thou shalt be eternal with Him."

Those who have heard the Miserere in the Sistine Chapel describe the desolation which settles upon the soul which surrenders itself to the impression of the ritual. As the psalm proceeds, at the end of each rhythmical pulsation of thought, each beat of the alternate wings of the parallelism, a light upon the altar is extinguished. As the wail grows sadder the darkness grows deeper. When all the lights are out and the last echo of the strain dies away, there would be something suitable for the penitent's mood in the words—"the world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Upon the altar of the Christian heart there are tapers at first unlighted, and before it a priest in black vestments. But one by one the vestments are exchanged for others which are white; one after another the lamps are lighted slowly and without noise, until gradually, we know not how, the whole place is full of light. And ever sweeter and clearer, calm and happy, with a triumph which is at first repressed and reverential, but which increases as the light becomes diffused, the words are heard strong and quiet—a plain song now that wilt swell into an anthem presently—"he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 12

KNOWING ALL THINGS— 1Jo 2:20

THERE is little of the form of logical argument to which Western readers are habituated in the writings of St. John, steeped as his mind was in Hebraic influences. The inferential "therefore" is not to be found in this Epistle. Yet the diligent reader or expositor finds it more difficult to detach any single sentence, without loss to the general meaning, than in any other writing of the New Testament. The sentence may look almost as if its letters were graven brief and large upon a block of marble, and stood out in oracular isolation—but upon reverent study it will be found that the seemingly lapidary inscription is one of a series with each of which it is indissolubly connected—sometimes limited, sometimes enlarged, always coloured and influenced by that which precedes and follows.

It is peculiarly needful to bear this observation in mind in considering fully the almost startling principle stated in the verse which is prefixed to this discourse. A kind of spiritual omniscience appears to be attributed to believers. Catechisms, confessions, creeds, teachers, preachers, seem to be superseded by a stroke of the Apostle's pen, by what we are half tempted to consider as a magnificent exaggeration. The text sounds as if it outstripped even the fulfilment of the promise of the new covenant contained in Jeremiah's prophecy—"they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them."

The passages just before and after St. John's splendid annunciation in our text are occupied with the subject of Antichrist, here first mentioned in Scripture. In this section of our Epistle Antichrist is

(1) revealed, and

(2) refuted.

(1) Antichrist is revealed by the very crisis which the Church was then traversing. From this especially, from the transitory character of a world drifting by them in unceasing mutation, the Apostle is led to consider this as one of those crisis hours of the Church's history, each of which may be the last hour, and which is assuredly—in the language of primitive Christianity—a last hour. The Apostle therefore exclaims with fatherly affection—"Little children, it is a last hour."

Deep in the heart of the Apostolic Church, because it came from those who had received it from Christ, there was one awful anticipation. St. John in this passage gives it a name. He remembers Who had told the Jews that "if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." He can announce to them that "as ye have heard this Antichrist cometh, even so now" (precisely as ye have heard) "many antichrists have come into existence and are around you, whereby we know that it is a last hour." The name Antichrist occurs only in these Epistles, and seems purposely

intended to denote both one who occupies the place of Christ, and one who is against Christ. In "the Antichrist" the antichristian principle is personally concentrated. The conception of representative men is one which has become familiar to modern students of the philosophy of history. Such representative men, at once the products of the past, moulders of the present, and creative of the future, sum up in themselves tendencies and principles good and evil, and project them in a form equally compacted and intensified into the coming generations. Shadows and anticipations of Antichrist the holiest of the Church's sons have sometimes seen, even in the high places of the Church. But it is evident that as yet the Antichrist has not come. For wherever St. John mentions this fearful impersonation of evil, he connects the manifestation of his influence with absolute denial of the true Manhood, of the Messiahship, of the everlasting sonship of Jesus. of the Father, Who is His and our Father. In negation of the Personality of God, in the substitution, of a glittering, but unreal, idea of human goodness and active philanthropy for the historical Christ, we of this age may not improbably hear his advancing footsteps, and foresee the advent of a day when antichristianity shall find its great representative man.

(2) Antichrist is also refuted by a principle common to the life of Christians and by its result.

The principle by which he is refuted is a gift of insight lodged in the Church at large, and partaken of by all faithful souls.

A hint of a solemn crisis had been conveyed to the Christians of Asia Minor by secessions from the great Christian community. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us (which they did not, but went out) that they might be made manifest that not all are of us." Not only this. "Yea further, ye yourselves have a hallowing oil from Him who is hallowed, a chrism from the Christ, an unction from the Holy One, even from the Son of God." Chrism (as we are reminded by the most accurate of scholars) is always the material with which anointing is performed, never the act of anointing; it points to the unction of prophets, priests, and kings under the Old Testament, in whose sacrifices and mystic language oil symbolises the Holy Spirit as the spirit of joy and freedom. Quite possibly there may be some allusion to a literal use of oil in Baptism and Confirmation, which began at a very early period; though it is equally possible that the material may have arisen from the spiritual, and not in the reverse order. But beyond all question the real predominant reference is to the Holy Ghost. In the chrism here mentioned there is a feature characteristic of St. John's style. For there is first a faint prelude note which (as we find in several other important subjects) is faintly struck and seems to die away, but is afterwards taken up, and more fully brought out. The full distinct mention of the Holy Spirit comes like a burst of the music of the "Veni Creator," carrying on the fainter prelude when it might seem to have been almost lost. The first reverential, almost timid hint, is succeeded by another, brief but significant—almost dogmatically expressive of the relation of the Holy Spirit to Christ as His Chrism, "the Chrism of Him." We shall presently have a direct mention of the Holy Ghost. "Hereby we know that He abideth in us, from the Spirit which He gave us."

Antichrist is refuted by a result of this great principle of the life of the Holy Spirit in the living Church. "Ye have" chrism from the Christ; Antichrist shall not lay his unhallowing disanointing hand upon you. As a result of this, "ye know all things."

How are we to understand this startling expression?

If we receive any teachers as messengers commissioned by God, it is evident that their message must be communicated to us through the medium of human language. They come to us with minds that have been in contact with a Mind of infinite knowledge, and deliver utterances of universal import. They are therefore under an obligation to use language which is capable of being misunderstood by some persons. Our Lord and His Apostles so spoke at times. Two very different classes of men constantly misinterpret words like those of our text. The rationalist does so with a sinister smile; the fanatic with a cry of hysterical triumph. The first may point his epigram with effective reference to the exaggerated promise which is belied by the ignorance of so many ardent believers; the second may advance his absurd claim to personal infallibility in all things spiritual.

Yet an Apostle calmly says "yet have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." This, however, is but another asterisk directing the eye to the Master's promise in the Gospel, which is at once the warrant and the explanation of the utterance here. "The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." {Joh 14:26} The express limitation of the Saviour's promise is the implied limitation of St. John's statement. "The Holy Ghost has been sent, according to this unfailing pledge. He teaches you (and, if He teaches, you know) all things which Christ has said, as far as their substance is written down in a true record—all things of the new creation spoken by our Lord, preserved by the help of the Spirit in the memories of chosen witnesses with unfading freshness, by the same Spirit unfolded and interpreted to you."

We should observe in what spirit and to whom St. John speaks.

He does not speak in the strain which would be adopted by a missionary in addressing inert lately brought out of heathenism into the fold of Christ. He does not like a modern preacher or tract writer at once divide his observations into two parts, one for the converted, one for the unconverted; all are his "dear ones" as beloved, his "sons" as brought into close spiritual relationship with himself. He classes them simply as young and old, with their respective graces of strength and knowledge. All are looked upon as "abiding"; almost the one exhortation is to abide unto the end in a condition upon which all have already entered, and in which some have long continued. We feel throughout the calmness and assurance of a spiritual teacher writing to Christian men who, had either been born in the atmosphere of Christian tradition, or had lived in it for many years. They are again and again appealed to on the ground of a common Christian confidence—"we know." They have all the articles of the Christian creed, the great inheritance of a faithful summary of the words and works of Christ. The Gospel which Paul at first preached in Asia Minor was the starting point of the truth which remained among them, illustrated, expanded, applied, but absolutely unaltered. What the Christians whom St. John has in view really want is the revival of familiar truths, not the impartation of new. No spiritual voyage of discovery is needed; they have only to explore well known regions. The memory and the affections must be stimulated. The truths which have become "cramped and bed ridden" in the dormitory of the soul must acquire elasticity from exercise. The accumulation of ashes must be blown away, and the spark of fire beneath fanned into flame. This capacity of revival, of expansion, of quickened life, of developed truth, is in the unction common to the faithful, in the latent possibilities of the new birth. The same verse to which we have before referred as the best interpreter of this should be consulted again. There is an instructive distinction between the tenses—"as His unction is teaching" —" as it taught you." The teaching was, once for all, the creed definite and fixed, the body of truth a sum

total looked upon as one. "The unction taught." Once for all the Holy Spirit made known the Incarnation and stamped the recorded words of Christ with His seal. But there are depths of thought about His person which need to be reverently explored. There is an energy in His work which was not exhausted in the few years of its doing, and which is not imprisoned within the brief chronicle in which it is written. There are a spirit and a life in His words. In one aspect they have the strength of the tornado, which advances in a narrow line; but every foot of the column, as if armed with a tooth of steel, grinds and cuts into pieces all which resists it. Those words have also depths of tenderness, depths of wisdom, into which eighteen centuries have looked down and never yet seen the last of their meaning. Advancing time does hut broaden the interpretation of the wisdom and the sympathy of those words. Applications of their significance are being discovered by Christian souls in forms as new and manifold as the claims of human need. The Church collectively is like one sanctified mind meditating incessantly upon the Incarnation; attaining more and more to an understanding of that character as it widens in a circle of glory round the form of its historical manifestation—considering how those words may be applied not only to self, but to humanity. The new wants of each successive generation bring new help out of that inexhaustible store. The Church may have "decided opinions"; but she has not the "deep slumber" which is said to accompany them. How can she be fast asleep who is ever learning from a teacher Who is always supplying her with fresh and varied lessons? The Church must be ever learning, because the anointing which "taught" once for all is also ever "teaching."

This profound saying is therefore chiefly true of Christians as a whole. Yet each individual believer may surely have a part in it. "There is a teacher in the heart who has also a chair in heaven." "The Holy Spirit who dwells in the justified soul," says a pious writer, "is a great director." May we not add that He is a great catechist? In difficulties, whether worldly, intellectual, or spiritual, thousands for a time helpless and ignorant, in presence of difficulties through which they could not make their way, have found with surprise how true in the sequel our text has become to them.

For we all know how different things, persons, truths, ideas may become, as they are seen at different times and in different lights, as they are seen in relation to God and truth or outside that relation. The bread in Holy Communion is unchanged in substance; but some new and glorious relation is superadded to it. It is devoted by its consecration to the noblest use manward and Godward, so that St. Paul speaks of it with hushed reverence as "The Body." {1Co 11:29} It seems to be a part of the same law that some one—once perhaps frivolous, commonplace, sinful—is taken into the hand of the great High Priest, broken with sorrow and penitence, and blessed; and thereafter he is at once personally the same, and yet another higher and better by that awful consecration to another use. So again with some truth of creed or catechism which we have fallen into the fallacy of supposing that we know because it is familiar. It may be a truth that is sweet or one that is tremendous. It awaits its consecration, its blessing, its transformation into a something which in itself is the same, yet which is other to us. That is to say, the familiar truth is old, in itself: in substance and expression. It needs no other, and can have no better formula. To change the formula would be to alter the truth; but to us it is taught newly with a fuller and nobler exposition by the unction which is "ever teaching," whereby we "know all things."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 13

LOFTY IDEALS PERILOUS UNLESS APPLIED— 1Jo 3:16-18

EVEN the world sees that the Incarnation of Jesus Christ has very practical results. Even the Christmas which the world keeps is fruitful in two of these results—forgiving and giving. How many of the multitudinous letters at that season contain one or other of these things—either the kindly gift, or the tender of reconciliation; the confession "I was wrong," or the gentle advance "we were both wrong."

Love, charity (as we rather prefer to say), in its effects upon all our relations to others, is the beautiful subject of this section of our Epistle. It begins with the message of love itself—yet another asterisk referring to the Gospel, to the very substance of the teaching which the believers of Ephesus had first received from St. Paul, and which had been emphasised by St. John. This message is announced not merely as a sounding sentiment, but for the purpose of being carried out into action. As in moral subjects virtues and vices are best illustrated by their contraries; so, beside the bright picture of the Son of God, the Apostle points to the sinister likeness of Cain. After some brief and parenthetic words of pathetic consolation, he states as the mark of the great transition from death to life, the existence of love as a pervading spirit effectual in operation. The dark opposite of this is then delineated in consonance with the mode of representation just above. But two such pictures of darkness must not shadow the sunlit gallery of love. There is another—the fairest and brightest. Our love can only be estimated by likeness to it; it is imperfect unless it is conformed to the print of the wounds, unless it can be measured by the standard of the great Self-sacrifice. But if this may be claimed as the one real proof of conformity to Christ, much more is the limited partial sacrifice of "this world's good" required. This spirit, and the conduct which it requires in the long run, will be found to be the test of all solid spiritual comfort, of all true self-condemnation or self-acquittal.

We may say of the verses prefixed to this discourse, that they bring before us charity in its idea, in its example, in its characteristics—in theory, in action, in life.

I We have here love in its idea, "hereby know we love." Rather "hereby know we The Love."

Here the idea of charity in us runs parallel with that in Christ. It is a subtle but true remark, that there is here no logical inferential particle. "Because He laid down His life for us," is not followed by its natural correlative "therefore we," but by a simple connective "and we." The reason is this, that our duty herein is not a mere cold logical deduction. It is all of one piece with The Love. "We know The Love because He laid down His life for us; and we are in duty bound for the brethren to lay down our lives."

Here, then, is the idea of love, as capable of realisation in us. It is continuous unselfishness, to be crowned by voluntary death, if death is necessary. The beautiful

old Church tradition shows that this language was the language of St. John's life. Who has forgotten how the Apostle in his old age is said to have gone on a journey to find the young man who had fled from Ephesus and joined a band of robbers; and to have appealed to the fugitive in words which are the pathetic echo of these—"if needs be I would die for thee as He for us"?

II The idea of charity is then practically illustrated by an incident of its opposite. "But whoso hath this world's good, and gazes upon his brother in need, and shuts up his heart against him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" The reason for this descent in thought is wise and sound. High abstract ideas, expressed in lofty and transcendent language, are at once necessary and dangerous for creatures like us. They are necessary, because without these grand conceptions our moral language and our moral life would be wanting in dignity, in amplitude, in the inspiration and impulse which are often necessary for duty and always for restoration. But they are dangerous in proportion to their grandeur. Men are apt to mistake the emotion awakened by the very sound of these magnificent expressions of duty for the discharge of the duty itself. Hypocrisy delights in sublime speculations, because it has no intention of their costing anything. Some of the most abject creatures embodied by the masters of romance never fail to parade their sonorous generalisations. One of such characters, as the world will long remember, proclaims that sympathy is one of the holiest principles of our common nature, while he shakes his fist at a beggar.

Every large speculative ideal then is liable to this danger; and he who contemplates it requires to be brought down from his transcendental region to the test of some commonplace duty. This is the latent link of connection in this passage. The ideal of love to which St. John points is the loftiest of all the moral and spiritual emotions which belong to the sentiments of man. Its archetype is in the bosom of God, in the eternal relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "God is love." Its home in humanity is Christ's heart of fire and flesh; its example is the Incarnation ending in the Cross.

Now of course the question for all but one in thousands is not the attainment of this lofty ideal—laying down his life for the brethren. Now and then, indeed, the physician pays with his own death for the heroic rashness of drawing out from his patient the fatal matter. Sometimes the pastor is cut off by fever contracted in ministering to the sick, or by voluntarily living and working in an unwholesome atmosphere. Once or twice in a decade some heart is as finely touched by the spirit of love as Father Damien, facing the certainty of death from a long slow putrefaction, that a congregation of lepers may enjoy the consolations of faith. St. John here reminds us that the ordinary test of charity is much more commonplace. It is helpful compassion to a brother who is known to be in need, manifested by giving to him something of this world's "good"—of the "living" of this world which he possesses.

III We have next the characteristics of love in action. "My sons, let us not love in word nor with the tongue; but in work and truth." There is love in its energy and reality; in its effort and sincerity—active and honest, without indolence and without pretence. We may well be reminded here of another familiar story of St. John at Ephesus. When too old to walk himself to the assembly of the Church, he was carried there. The Apostle who had lain upon the breast of Jesus; who had derived from direct communication with Him those words and thoughts which are the life of the elect, was expected to address the faithful. The light of the Ephesian summer fell upon his white hair; perhaps glittered upon the mitre which tradition has assigned to

him. But when he had risen to speak, he only repeated—"little children, love one another." Modern hearers are sometimes tempted to envy the primitive Christians of the Ephesian Church, if for nothing else, yet for the privilege of listening to the shortest sermon upon record in the annals of Christianity. When Christian preachers have behind them the same long series of virgin years, within them the same love of Christ and knowledge of His mysteries; when their very presence evinces the same sad, tender, smiling, weeping, all-embracing sympathy with the wants and sorrows of humanity; they may perhaps venture upon the perilous experiment of contracting their sermons within the same span as St. John's. And when some who, like the hearers. at Ephesus, are not prepared for the repetition of an utterance so brief, begin to ask—"why are you always saying this?"—the answer may well be in the spirit of the reply which the aged Apostle is said to have made—"because it is the commandment of the Lord, and sufficient, if it only be fulfilled indeed."

IV This passage supplies an argument (capable, as we have seen in the Introduction, of much larger expansion from the Epistle as a whole) against mutilated views, fragmentary versions of the Christian life.

There are four such views which are widely prevalent at the present time.

(1) The first of these is emotionalism; which makes the entire Christian life consist in a series or bundle of emotions. Its origin is the desire of having the feelings touched, partly from sheer love of excitement; partly from an idea that if and when we have worked up certain emotions to a fixed point we are saved and safe. This reliance upon feelings is in the last analysis reliance upon self. It is a form of salvation by works; for feelings are inward actions. It is an unhappy anachronism which inverts the order of Scripture; which substitutes peace and grace (the compendious dogma of the heresy of the emotions) for grace and peace, the only order known to St. Paul and St. John. The only spiritual emotions spoken of in this Epistle are "joy, confidence, assuring our hearts before Him": the first as the result of receiving the history of Jesus in the Gospel, the Incarnation, and the blessed communion with God and the Church which it involves; the second as tried by tests of a most practical kind.

(2) The next of these mutilated views of the Christian life is doctrinalism—which makes it consist of a series or bundle of doctrines apprehended and expressed correctly, at least according to certain formulas, generally of a narrow and unauthorised character. According to this view the question to be answered is—has one quite correctly understood, can one verbally formulate certain almost scholastic distinctions in the doctrine of justification? The well known standard—"the Bible only"—must be reduced by the excision of all within the Bible except the writings of St. Paul; and even in this selected portion faith must be entirely guided by certain portions more selected still, so that the question finally may be reduced to this shape—"am I a great deal sounder than St. John and St. James, a little sounder than an unexpurgated St. Paul, as sound as a carefully expurgated edition of the Pauline Epistles?"

(3) The third mutilated view of the Christian life is humanitarianism—which makes it a series or bundle of philanthropic actions.

There are some who work for hospitals, or try to bring more light and sweetness into crowded dwelling houses. Their lives are pure and noble. But the one article of their creed is humanity. Altruism is their highest duty. Their object, so far as they have any object apart from the supreme rule of doing right, is to lay hold on subjective

immortality by living on in the recollection of those whom they have helped, whose existence has been soothed and sweetened by their sympathy. With others the case is different. Certain forms of this busy helpfulness—especially in the laudable provision of recreations for the poor—are an innocent interlude in fashionable life; sometimes, alas! a kind of work of supererogation, to atone for the want of devotion or of purity—possibly an untheological survival of a belief in justification by works.

(4) A fourth fragmentary view of the Christian life is observationism, which makes it to consist in a bundle or series of observances. Frequent services and communions, perhaps with exquisite forms and in beautifully decorated churches, have their dangers as well as their blessings. However closely linked these observances may be, there must still in every life be interstices between them. How are these filled up? What spirit within connects together, vivifies and unifies, this series of external acts of devotion? They are means to an end. What if the means come to interpose between us and the end—just as a great political thinker has observed that with legal minds the forms of business frequently overshadow the substance of business, which is their end, and for which they were called into existence. And what is the end of our Christian calling? A life pardoned; in process of purification; growing in faith, in love of God and man, in quiet joyful service. Certainly a "rage for ceremonials and statistics," a long list of observances, does not infallibly secure such a life, though it may often be not alone the delighted and continuous expression, but the constant food and support of such a life. But assuredly if men trust in any of these things—in their emotions, in their favourite formulas, in their philanthropic works, in their religious observances—in anything but Christ, they greatly need to go back to the simple text, "His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

Now, as we have said above, in distinction from all these fragmentary views, St. John's Epistle is a survey of the completed Christian life, founded upon his Gospel. It is a consummate fruit ripened in the long summers of his experience. It is not a treatise upon the Christian affections, nor a system of doctrine, nor an essay upon works of charity, nor a companion to services.

Yet this wonderful Epistle presupposes at least much that is most precious of all these elements.

(1) It is far from being a burst of emotionalism. Yet almost at the outset it speaks of an emotion as being the natural result of rightly received objective truth. St. John recognises feeling, whether of supernatural or natural origin; but he recognises it with a certain majestic reserve. Once only does he seem to be carried away. In a passage to which reference has just been made, after stating the dogma of the Incarnation, he suffuses it with a wealth of emotional colour. It is Christmas in his soul; the bells ring out good tidings of great joy. "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

(2) This Epistle is no dogmatic summary. Yet combining its proemium with the other of the fourth Gospel, we have the most perfect statement of the dogma of the Incarnation. As we read thoughtfully on, dogma after dogma stands out in relief. The divinity of the Word, the reality of His manhood, the effect of His atonement, His intercession, His continual presence, the personality of the Holy Spirit, His gifts to us, the relation of the Spirit to Christ, the Holy Trinity—all these find their place in these few pages. If St. John is no mere doctrinalist he is yet the greatest theologian the Church has ever seen.

(3) Once more; if the Apostle's Christianity is no mere humanitarian sentiment to encourage the cultivation of miscellaneous acts of good nature, yet it is deeply pervaded by a sense of the integral connection of practical love of man with the love of God. So much is this the case, that a large gathering of the most emotional of modern sects is said to have gone on with a Bible reading in St. John's Epistle until they came to the words—"we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." The reader immediately closed the book, pronouncing with general assent the verse was likely to disturb the peace of the children of God. Still St. John puts humanitarianism in its right place as a result of something higher. "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." As if he would say—"do not sever the law of social life from the law of supernatural life; do not separate the human fraternity from a Divine Fatherhood."

(4) No one can suppose that for St. John religion was a mere string of observances. Indeed, to some his Epistle has given the notion of a man living in an atmosphere where external ordinances and ministries either did not exist at all, or only in almost impalpable forms. Yet in that wonderful manual, "The Imitation of Christ," there is scarcely the faintest trace of any of these external things; while no one could possibly argue that the author was ignorant of, or lightly esteemed, the ordinances and sacraments amongst which his life must have been spent. Certainly the fourth Gospel is deeply sacramental. This Epistle, with its calm, unhesitating conviction of the sonship of all to whom it is addressed; with its view of the Christian life as in idea a continuous growth from a birth the secret of whose origin is given in the Gospel; with its expressive hints of sources of grace and power and of a continual presence of Christ; with its deep mystical realisation of the double flow from the pierced side upon the cross, and its thrice-repeated exchange of the sacramental order "water and blood," for the historical order "blood and water"; unquestionably has the sacramental sense diffused throughout it. The Sacraments are not in obtrusive prominence; yet for those who have eyes to see they lie in deep and tender distances. Such is the view of the Christian life in this letter—a life in which Christ's truth is blended with Christ's love; assimilated by thought, exhaling in worship, softening into sympathy with man's suffering and sorrow. It calls for the believing soul, the devout heart, the helping hand. It is the perfect balance in a saintly soul, of feeling, creed, communion, and work.

For of work for our fellow man it is that the question is asked half despairingly—"whoso hath this world's good, and seeth" (gazes at) "his brother have need, and shutteth up his heart against him, how doth the love of God dwell in him." Some can quietly look at the poor brother; they see him in need. They may belong to "the sluggard Pity's vision-weaving tribe," who expend a sigh of sentiment upon such spectacles, and nothing more. Or they may be hardened professors of the "dismal science," who have learned to consider a sigh as the luxury of ignorance or of feebleness. But for all practical purposes both these classes interpose a too effectual barrier between their heart and their brother's need. But true Christians are made partakers in Christ of the mystery of human suffering. Even when they are not actually in sight of brethren in want, their ears are ever hearing the ceaseless moaning of the sea of human sorrow, with a sympathy which involves its own measure of pain, though a pain which brings with it abundant compensation. Their inner life has not merely won for itself the partly selfish satisfaction of personal escape from punishment, great as that blessing may be. They have caught something of the meaning of the secret of all love—"we love because He first loved us." {1Jo 4:19} In those words is the romance (if we may dare to call it so) of the divine love tale. Under its influence the face once hard and narrow often becomes radiant and softened; it smiles, or is tearful, in the light of the love of His face who first loved.

It is this principle of St. John which is ever at work in Christian lands. In hospitals it tells us that Christ is ever passing down the wards: that He will have no stinted service; that He must have more for His sick, more devotion, a gentler touch, a finer sympathy; that where His hand has broken and blessed, every particle is a sacred thing, and must be treated reverently.

Are there any who are tempted to think that our text has become antiquated; that it no longer holds true in the light of organised charity, of economic science? Let them listen to one who speaks with the weight of years of active benevolence, and with consummate knowledge of its method and duties. "There are men who, in their detestation of roguery, forget that by a wholesale condemnation of charity, they run the risk of driving the honest to despair and of turning them into the very rogues of whom they desire so ardently to be quit. These men are unconsciously playing into the hands of the Socialists and the Anarchists, the only sections of society whose distinct interest it is that misery and starvation should increase. No doubt indiscriminate almsgiving is hurtful to the State as well as to the individual who receives the dole, but not less dangerous would it be to society if the principles of these stern political economists were to be literally accepted by any large number of the rich, and if charity ceased to be practised within the land. We cannot yet afford to shut ourselves up in the castle of philosophic indifference, regardless of the fate of those who have the misfortune to find themselves outside its walls."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 14

BOLDNESS IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT— 1Jo 4:17

IT has been so often repeated that St. John's eschatology is idealised and spiritual, that people now seldom pause to ask what is meant by the words. Those who repeat them most frequently seem to think that the idealised means that which will never come into the region of historical fact, and that the spiritual is best defined as the unreal. Yet, without postulating the Johannic authorship of the Apocalypse—where the Judgment is described with the most awful accompaniments of outward solemnity {Re 20:12,13} -there are two places in this Epistle which are allowed to drop out of view, but which bring us face to face with the visible manifestations of an external Advent. It is a peculiarity of St. John's style (as we have frequently seen) to strike some chord of thought, so to speak, before its time; to allow the prelude note to float away, until suddenly, after a time, it surprises us by coming back again with a fuller and bolder resonance. "And now, my sons," {1Jo 2:29} (had the Apostle said) "abide in Him, that if He shall be manifested, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed, shrinking from Him at His coming." In our text the same thought is resumed, and the reality of the Coming and Judgment in its external manifestation as emphatically given as in any other part of the New Testament.

We may here speak of the conception of the Day of Judgment: of the fear with which that conception is encompassed; and of the sole means of the removal of that fear which St. John recognises.

I We examine the general conception of "the Day of the Judgment," as given in the New Testament.

As there is that which with terrible emphasis is marked off as "the Judgment," "the Parousia," so there are other judgments or advents of a preparatory character. As there are phenomena known as mock suns, or halos round the moon, so there are fainter reflections ringed round the Advent, the Judgment. Thus, in the development of history, there are successive cycles of continuing judgment; preparatory advents; less completed crises, as even the world calls them.

But against one somewhat widely spread way of blotting the Day of the Judgment from the calendar of the future—so far as believers are concerned—we should be on our guard. Some good men think themselves entitled to reason thus—"I am a Christian. I shall be an assessor in the judgment. For me there is, therefore, no judgment day." And it is even held out as an inducement to others to close with this conclusion, that they "shall be delivered from the bugbear of judgment."

The origin of this notion seems to be in certain universal tendencies of modern religious thought.

The idolatry of the immediate—the prompt creation of effect—is the perpetual snare of revivalism. Revivalism is thence fatally bound at once to follow the tide of

emotion, and to increase the volume of the waters by which it is swept along. But the religious emotion of this generation has one characteristic by which it is distinguished from that of previous centuries. The revivalism of the past in all Churches rode upon the dark waves of fear. It worked upon human nature by exaggerated material descriptions of hell, by solemn appeals to the throne of Judgment. Certain schools of biblical criticism have enabled men to steel themselves against this form of preaching. An age of soft humanitarian sentiment—superficial and inclined to forget that perfect Goodness may be a very real cause of fear—must be stirred by emotions of a different kind. The infinite sweetness of our Father's heart—the conclusions, illogically but effectively drawn from this, of an Infinite good nature, with its easy going pardon, reconciliation all round, and exemption from all that is unpleasant—these, and such as these, are the only available materials for creating a great volume of emotion. An invertebrate creed; punishment either annihilated or mitigated; judgment, changed from a solemn and universal assize, a bar at which every soul must stand, to a splendid, and—for all who can say I am saved—a triumphant pageant in which they have no anxious concern; these are the readiest instruments, the most powerful leverage, with which to work extensively upon masses of men at the present time. And the seventh article of the Apostles' Creed must pass into the limbo of exploded superstition.

The only appeal to Scripture which such persons make, with any show of plausibility, is contained in an exposition of our Lord's teaching in a part of the fifth chapter of the fourth Gospel. {Joh 5:21,29} But clearly there are three Resurrection scenes which may be discriminated in those words. The first is spiritual, a present awakening of dead souls, (Ver. 21) in those with whom the Son of Man is brought into contact in His earthly ministry. The second is a department of the same spiritual Resurrection. The Son of God, with that mysterious gift of Life in Himself, (Ver. 26) has within Him a perpetual spring of rejuvenescence for a faded and dying world. A renewal of hearts is in process during all the days of time, a passage for soul after soul out of death into life. The third scene is the general (Ver. 24.) Resurrection and general Judgment. (Ver. 28, 29.) The first was the resurrection of comparatively few; the second of many; the third of all. If it is said that the believer "cometh not into judgment," the word in that place plainly signifies condemnation.

Clear and plain above all such subtleties ring out the awe inspiring words: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment;" "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Reason supplies us with two great arguments for the General Judgment. One from the conscience of history, so to speak; the other from the individual conscience.

1. General history points to a general judgment. If there is no such judgment to come, then there is no one definite moral purpose in human society. Progress would be a melancholy word, a deceptive appearance, a stream that has no issue, a road that leads nowhere. No one who believes that there is a Personal God, Who guides the course of human affairs, can come to the conclusion that the generations of man are to go on forever without a winding up, which shall decide upon the doings of all who take part in human life. In the philosophy of nature, the affirmation or denial of purpose is the affirmation or denial of God. So in the philosophy of history. Society without the General Judgment would be a chaos of random facts, a thing without rational retrospect or definite end—i.e., without God. If man is under the government of God, human history is a drama, long drawn, and of infinite variety, with inconceivably numerous actors. But a drama must have a last act. The last act of the drama of history is "The Day of the Judgment."

2. The other argument is derived from the individual conscience.

Conscience, as a matter of fact, has two voices. One is imperative; it tells us what we are to do. One is prophetic, and warns us of something which we are to receive. If there is to be no Day of the General Judgment, then the million prophecies of conscience will be belied, and our nature prove to be mendacious to its very roots.

There is no essential article of the Christian creed like this which can be isolated from the rest, and treated as if it stood alone. There is a solidarity of each with all the rest. Any which is isolated is in danger itself, and leaves the others exposed. For they have an internal harmony and congruity. They do not form a hotchpot of credenda. They are not so many beliefs, but one belief. Thus the isolation of articles is perilous. For, when we try to grasp and to defend one of them, we have no means left of measuring it but by terms of comparison which are drawn from ourselves, which must therefore be finite, and, by the inadequacy of the scale which they present, appear to render the article of faith thus detached incredible. Moreover, each article of our creed is a revelation of the Divine attributes, which meet together in unity. To divide the attributes by dividing the form in which they are revealed to us, is to belie and falsify the attribute; to give a monstrous development to one by not taking into account some other which is its balance and compensation. Thus, many men deny the truth of a punishment which involves final separation from God. They glory in the legal judgment which "dismisses hell with costs." But they do so by fixing their attention exclusively upon the one dogma which reveals one attribute of God. They isolate it from the Fall, from the Redemption by Christ, from the gravity of sin, from the truth that all whom the message of the Gospel reaches may avoid the penal consequences of sin. It is impossible to face the dogma of eternal separation from God without facing the dogma of Redemption. For Redemption involves in its very idea the intensity of sin, which needed the sacrifice of the Son of God; and further, the fact that the offer of salvation is so free and wide that it cannot be put away without a terrible wilfulness.

In dealing with many of the articles of the creed, there are opposite extremes. Exaggeration leads to a revenge upon them which is, perhaps, more perilous than neglect. Thus, as regards eternal punishment, in one century ghastly exaggerations were prevalent. It was assumed that the vast majority of mankind "are destined to everlasting punishment"; that "the floor of hell is crawled over by hosts of babies a span long." The inconsistency of such views with the love of God, and with the best instincts of man, was victoriously and passionately demonstrated. Then unbelief turned upon the dogma itself, and argued, with wide acceptance, that "with the overthrow of this conception goes the whole redemption plan, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the grand climax of the Church scheme, the General Judgment." But the alleged article of faith was simply an exaggeration of that faith, and the objections lay altogether against the exaggeration of it.

II We have now to speak of the removal of that terror which accompanies the conception of the Day of the Judgment, and of the sole means of that emancipation which St. John recognises. For terror there is in every point of the repeated descriptions of Scripture—in the surroundings, in the summons, in the tribunal, in the trial, in one of the two sentences.

"God is love," writes St. John, "and he that abideth in love abideth in God: and God abideth in him. In this [abiding], love stands perfected with us, and the object is nothing less than this," not that we may be exempted from judgment, but that "we may have boldness in the Day of the Judgment." Boldness! It is the splendid word

which denotes the citizen's right of free speech, the masculine privilege of courageous liberty. It is the tender word which expresses the child's unhesitating confidence, in "saying all out" to the parent. The ground of the boldness is conformity to Christ. Because "as He is," with that vivid idealising sense, frequent in St. John when he uses it of our Lord—"as He is," delineated in the fourth Gospel, seen by "the eye of the heart" {Eph 1:18} with constant reverence in the soul, with adoring wonder in heaven, perfectly true, pure, and righteous—"even so" (not, of course, with any equality in degree to that consummate ideal, but with a likeness ever growing, an aspiration ever advancing)—"so {Cf. Mt 5:48} are we in this world," purifying ourselves as He is pure.

Let us draw to a definite point our considerations upon the Judgment, and the Apostle's sweet encouragement for the "day of wrath, that dreadful day."

It is of the essence of the Christian faith to believe that the Son of God, in the Human Nature which He assumed, and which He has borne into heaven, shall come again, and gather all before Him, and pass sentence of condemnation or of peace according to their works. To hold this is necessary to prevent terrible doubts of the very existence of God; to guard us against sin, in view of that solemn account; to comfort us under affliction. What a thought for us, if we would but meditate upon it! Often we complain of a commonplace life, of mean and petty employment. How can it be so, when at the end we, and those with whom we live, must look upon that great, overwhelming sight! Not an eye that shall not see Him, not a knee that shall not bow, not an ear that shall not hear the sentence. The heart might sink and the imagination quail under the burden of the supernatural existence which we cannot escape. One of two looks we must turn upon the Crucified—one willing as that which we cast on some glorious picture, on the enchantment of the sky; the other unwilling and abject. We should weep first with Zechariah's mourners, with tears at once bitter because they are for sin, and sweet because they are for Christ.

But, above all things, let us hear how St. John sings us the sweet low hymn that breathes consolation through the terrible fall of the triple hammer stroke of the rhyme in the "Dies irae." We must seek to lead upon earth a life laid on the lines of Christ's. Then, when the Day of the Judgment comes; when the cross of fire (so, at least, the early Christians thought) shall stand in the black vault; when the sacred wounds of Him who was pierced shall stream over with a light beyond dawn or sunset; we shall find that the discipline of life is complete, that God's love after all its long working with us stands perfected, so that we shall be able, as citizens of the kingdom, as children of the Father, to say out all. A Christlike character in an un-Christlike world—this is the cure of the disease of terror. Any other is but the medicine of a quack. "There is no fear in love; but the perfect love casteth out fear, because fear brings punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love."

We may well close with that pregnant commentary on this verse which tells us of the four possible conditions of a human soul—"without either fear or love; with fear, without love; with fear and love; with love, without fear."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 15

BIRTH AND VICTORY— 1Jo 5:3,4, 5

ST. JOHN here connects the Christian Birth with Victory. He tells us that of the supernatural life the destined and (so to speak) natural end is Conquest.

Now in this there is a contrast between the law of nature and the law of grace. No doubt the first is marvellous. It may even, if we will, in one sense be termed a victory; for it is the proof of a successful contest with the blind fatalities of natural environment. It is in itself the conquest of a something which has conquered a world below it. The first faint cry of the baby is a wail, no doubt; but in its very utterance there is a half triumphant undertone. Boyhood, youth, opening manhood—at least in those who are physically and intellectually gifted generally possess some share of "the rapture of the strife" with nature and with their contemporaries.

"Youth hath triumphal mornings; its days bound From night as from a victory."

But sooner or later that which pessimists style "the martyrdom of life" sets in. However brightly the drama opens, the last scene is always tragic. Our natural birth inevitably ends in defeat.

A birth and a defeat is thus the epitome of each life which is naturally brought into the field of our present human existence. The defeat is sighed over, sometimes consummated, in every cradle; it is attested by every grave.

But if birth and defeat is the motto of the natural life, birth and victory is the motto of everyone born into the city of God.

This victory is spoken of in our verses as a victory along the whole line. It is the conquest of the collective Church, of the whole mass of regenerate humanity, so far as it has been true to the principle of its birth—the conquest of the Faith which is "The Faith of us," who are knit together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of the Son of God, Christ our Lord. But it is something more than that. The general victory is also a victory in detail. Every true individual believer shares in it. The battle is a battle of soldiers. The abstract ideal victory is realised and made concrete in each life of struggle which is a life of enduring faith. The triumph is not merely one of a school, or of a party. The question rings with a triumphant challenge down the ranks—"who is the ever-conqueror of the world, but the ever-believer that Jesus is the Son of God?"

We are thus brought to two of St. John's great master conceptions, both of which came to him from hearing the Lord who is the Life—both of which are to be read in connection with the fourth Gospel—the Christian's Birth and his victory.

I The Apostle introduces the idea of the Birth which has its origin from God precisely by the same process to which attention has already been more than once

directed.

St. John frequently mentions some great subject; at first like a musician who with perfect command of his instrument touches what seems to be an almost random key, faintly, as if incidentally and half wandering from his theme.

But just as the sound appears to be absorbed by the purpose of the composition, or all but lost in the distance, the same chord is struck again more decidedly; and then, after more or less interval, is brought out with a music so full and sonorous, that we perceive that it has been one of the master's leading ideas from the very first. So, when the subject is first spoken of, we hear—"Everyone that doeth righteousness is born of Him." The subject is suspended for a while; then comes a somewhat more marked reference. "Whosoever is born of God is not a doer of sin; and he cannot continue sinning, because of God he is born." There is yet one more tender recurrence to the favourite theme—"Everyone that loveth is born of God." Then, finally here at last the chord, so often struck, grown bolder since the prelude, gathers all the music round it. It interweaves with itself another strain which has similarly been gaining amplitude of Volume in its course, until we have a great Te Deum, dominated by two chords of Birth and Victory. "This is the conquest that has conquered the world—the Faith which is of us."

We shall never come to any adequate notion of St. John's conception of the Birth of God, without tracing the place in his Gospel to which his asterisk in this place refers. To one passage only can we turn—our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God—except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The germ of the idea of entrance into the city, the kingdom of God, by means of a new birth, is in that storehouse of theological conceptions, the Psalter. There is one psalm of a Korahite seer, enigmatical it may be, shadowed with the darkness of a divine compression, obscure from the glory that rings it round, and from the gush of joy in its few and broken words. The 87th Psalm is the psalm of the font, the hymn of regeneration. The nations once of the world are mentioned among them that know the Lord. They are counted when He writeth up the peoples. Glorious things are spoken of the City of God. Three times over the burden of the song is the new birth by which the aliens were made free of Sion.

This one was born there, This one and that one was born in her, This one was born there.

All joyous life is thus brought into the city of the newborn. "The singers, the solemn dances, the fresh and glancing springs, are in thee." Hence, from the notification of men being born again in order to see and enter into the kingdom, our Lord, as if in surprise, meets the Pharisee's question—"how can these things be?"—with another—"art thou that teacher in Israel, and understandest not these things?" Jesus tells His Church forever that every one of His disciples must be brought into contact with two worlds, with two influences—one outward, the other inward; one material, the other spiritual; one earthly, the other heavenly; one visible and sacramental, the other invisible and divine. Out of these he must come forth newborn.

Of course it may be said that "the water" here coupled with the Spirit is figurative. But let it be observed first, that from the very constitution of St. John's intellectual and moral being things outward and visible were not annihilated by the spiritual transparency which he imparted to them. Water, literal water, is everywhere in his writings. In his Gospel more especially he seems to be ever seeing, ever hearing it.

He loved it from the associations of his own early life, and from the mention made of it by his Master. And as in the Gospel water is, so to speak, one of the three great factors and centres of the book; so now in the Epistle, it still seems to glance and murmur before him. "The water" is one of the three abiding witnesses in the Epistle also. Surely, then, our Apostle would be eminently unlikely to express "the Spirit of God" without the outward water by "water and the Spirit." But above all, Christians should beware of a "licentious and deluding alchemy of interpretation which maketh of anything whatsoever it listeth." In immortal words—"when the letter of the law hath two things plainly and expressly specified, water and the Spirit; water, as a duty required on our part, the Spirit, as a gift which God bestoweth; there is danger in so presuming to interpret it, as if the clause which concerneth ourselves were more than needed. We may by such rare expositions attain perhaps in the end to be thought witty, but with ill advice."

But, it will further be asked, whether we bring the Saviour's saying "except any one be born again of water and the Spirit"—into direct connection with the baptism of infants? Above all, whether we are not encouraging every baptised person to hold that somehow or other he will have a part in the victory of the regenerate?

We need no other answer than that which is implied in the very force of the word here used by St. John—"all that is born of God conquereth the world." "That is born" is the participle perfect. The force of the perfect is not simply past action, but such action lasting on in its effects. Our text, then, speaks only of those who, having been born again into the kingdom, continue in a corresponding condition, and unfold the life which they have received. The Saviour spoke first and chiefly of the initial act. The Apostle's circumstances, now in his old age, naturally led him to look on from that. St. John is no "idolater of the immediate." Has the gift received by his spiritual children worn long and lasted well? What of the new life which should have issued from the New Birth? Regenerate in the past, are they renewed in the present?

This simple piece of exegesis lets us at once perceive that another verse in this Epistle, often considered of almost hopeless perplexity, is in truth only the perfection of sanctified (nay, it may be said, of moral) common sense; an intuition of moral and spiritual instinct. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." We have just seen the real significance of the words "he that is born of God"—he for whom his past birth lasts on in its effects. "He doeth not sin," is not a sin-doer, makes it not his "trade," as an old commentator says. Nay, "he is not able to be" (to keep on) "sinning." "He cannot sin." He cannot! There is no physical impossibility. Angels will not sweep him away upon their resistless pinions. The Spirit will not hold him by the hand as if with a mailed grasp, until the blood spurts from his fingertips, that he may not take the wine cup, or walk out to the guilty assignation. The compulsion of God is like that which is exercised upon us by some pathetic wounded-looking face that gazes after us with a sweet reproach. Tell the honest poor man with a large family of some safe and expeditious way of transferring his neighbour's money to his own pocket. He will answer, "I cannot steal"; that is, "I cannot steal, however much it may physically be within my capacity, without a burning shame, an agony to my nature worse than death." On some day of fierce heat, hold a draught of iced wine to a total abstainer, and invite him to drink. "I cannot," will be his reply. Cannot! He can, so far as his hand goes; he cannot, without doing violence to a conviction, to a promise, to his own sense of truth. And he who continues in the fulness of his God-given Birth "does not do sin," "cannot be sinning." Not that he is sinless, not that he never fails, or does not sometimes fall; not that sin ceases to be sin to him, because he thinks that he has a standing in Christ. But he cannot go on in

sin without being untrue to his birth; without a stain upon that finer, whiter, more sensitive conscience, which is called "spirit" in a son of God; without a convulsion in his whole being which is the precursor of death, or an insensibility which is death actually begun.

How many such texts as these are practically useless to most of us! The armoury of God is full of keen swords which we refrain from handling, because they have been misused by others. None is more neglected than this. The fanatic has shrieked out—"Sin in my case! I cannot sin. I may hold a sin in my bosom; and God may hold me in His arms for all that. At least, I may hold that which would be a sin in you and most others; but to me it is not sin." On the other hand, stupid goodness maunders out some unintelligible paraphrase, until pew and reader yawn from very weariness. Divine truth in its purity and plainness is thus discredited by the exaggeration of the one, or buried in the leaden winding sheet of the stupidity of the other.

In leaving this portion of our subject we may compare the view latent in the very idea of infant baptism with that of the leader of a well known sect upon the beginnings of the spiritual life in children.

"May not children grow up into salvation, without knowing the exact moment of their conversion?" asks "General" Booth. His answer is—"Yes, it may be so; and we trust that in the future this will be the usual way in which children may be brought to Christ." The writer goes on to tell us how the New Birth will take place in future. When the conditions named in the first pages of this volume are complied with—when the parents are godly, and the children are surrounded by holy influences and examples from their birth, and trained up in the spirit of their early dedication—they will doubtless come to know and love and trust their Saviour in the ordinary course of things. The Holy Ghost will take possession of them from the first. Mothers and fathers will, as it were, put them into the Saviour's arms in their swaddling clothes, and He will take them, and bless them, and sanctify them from the very Womb, and make them His own, without their knowing the hour or the place when they pass from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. In fact, with such little ones it shall never be very dark, for their natural birth shall be, as it were, in the spiritual twilight, which begins with the dim dawn, and increases gradually until the noonday brightness is reached; so answering to the prophetic description, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

No one will deny that this is tenderly and beautifully written. But objections to its teaching will crowd upon the mind of thoughtful Christians. It seems to defer to a period in the future, to a new era incalculably distant, when Christendom shall be absorbed in Salvationism, that which St. John in his day contemplated as the normal condition of believers, which the Church has always held to be capable of realisation, which has been actually realised in no few whom most of us must have known. Further, the fountainheads of thought, like those of the Nile, are wrapped in obscurity. By what process grace may work with the very young is an insoluble problem in psychology, which Christianity has not revealed. We know nothing further than that Christ blessed little children. That blessing was impartial, for it was communicated to all who were brought to Him; it was real, otherwise He would not have blessed them at all. That He conveys to them such grace as they are capable of receiving is all that we can know. And yet again; the Salvationist theory exalts parents and surroundings into the place of Christ. It deposes His sacrament, which lies at the root of St. John's language, and boasts that it will secure Christ's end, apparently without any recognition of Christ's means.

II The second great idea in the verses dealt with in this chapter is Victory. The intended issue of the New Birth is conquest—"All that is born of God conquers the world."

The idea of victory is almost exclusively confined to St. John's writings. The idea is first expressed by Jesus—"Be of good cheer: I have conquered the world." The first prelude touch in the Epistle hints at the fulfilment of the Saviour's comfortable word in one class of the Apostle's spiritual children. "I write unto you, young men, because ye have conquered the wicked one. I have written unto you, young men, because ye have conquered the wicked one." Next, a bolder and ampler strain—"Ye are of God, little children, and have conquered them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." Then with a magnificent persistence, the trumpet of Christ wakens echoes to its music all down and round the defile through which the host is passing—"All that is born of God conquereth the world: and this is the conquest that has conquered the world—the Faith which is ours." When, in St. John's other great book, we pass with the seer into Patmos, the air is, indeed, "full of noises and sweet sounds." But dominant over all is a storm of triumph, a passionate exultation of victory. Thus each epistle to each of the seven Churches closes with a promise "to him that conquereth."

The text promises two forms of victory.

1. A victory is promised to the Church universal. "All that is born of God conquereth the world." This conquest is concentrated in, almost identified with "the Faith." Primarily, in this place, the term (here alone found in our Epistle) is not the faith by which we believe, but the Faith which is believed — as in some other places; not faith subjective, but The Faith objectively. Here is the dogmatic principle. The Faith involves definite knowledge of definite principles. The religious knowledge which is not capable of being put into definite propositions we need not trouble ourselves greatly about. But we are guarded from over-dogmatism. The word "of us" which follows "the Faith" is a mediating link between the objective and the subjective. First, we possess this Faith as a common heritage. Then, as in the Apostles' creed, we begin to individualise this common possession by prefixing "I believe" to every article of it. Then the victory contained in the creed, the victory which the creed is (for more truly again than of Duty may it be said of Faith, "thou who art victory"), is made over to each who believes. Each, and each alone, who in soul is ever believing, in practice is ever victorious.

This declaration is full of promise for missionary work. There is no system of error, however ancient, subtle, or highly organised, which must not go down before the strong collective life of the regenerate. No less encouraging is it at home. No form of sin is incapable of being overthrown. No school of antichristian thought is invulnerable or invincible. There are other apostates besides Julian who will cry—"Galilae, vicisti!"

2. The second victory promised is individual, for each of us. Not only where cathedral spires lift high the triumphant cross; on battlefields which have added kingdoms to Christendom; by the martyr's stake, or in the arena of the Coliseum, have these words proved true. The victory comes down to us. In hospitals, in shops, in courts, in ships, in sick rooms, they are fulfilled for us. We see their truth in the patience, sweetness, resignation, of little children, of old men, of weak women. They give a high consecration and a glorious meaning to much of the suffering that we see. What, we are sometimes tempted to cry—is this Christ's Army? are these His soldiers, who can go anywhere and do anything? Poor weary ones with white lips,

and the beads of death sweat on their faces, and the thorns of pain ringed like a crown round their foreheads; so wan, so worn, so tired, so suffering, that even our love dares not pray for them to live a little longer yet. Are these the elect of the elect, the vanguard of the regenerate, who carry the flag of the cross where its folds are waved by the storm of battle; whom St. John sees advancing up the slope with such a burst of cheers and such a swell of music that the words—"this is the conquest" — spring spontaneously from his lips? Perhaps the angels answer with a voice which we cannot hear—"Whatsoever is born of God conquereth the world." May we fight so manfully that each may render if not his "pure" yet his purified

"soul unto his captain Christ, Under whose colours he hath fought so long":—that we may know something of the great text in the Epistle to the Romans, with its matchless translation—"we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"—that arrogance of victory which is at once so splendid and so saintly.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 16

THE GOSPEL AS A GOSPEL OF WITNESS; THE THREE WITNESSES— 1Jo 5:6-10

IT has been said that Apostles and apostolic men were as far as possible removed from common sense, and have no conception of evidence in our acceptation of the word. About this statement there is scarcely even superficial plausibility. Common sense is the measure of ordinary human tact among palpable realities. In relation to human existence it is the balance of the estimative faculties; the instinctive summary of inductions which makes us rightly credulous and rightly incredulous, which teaches us the supreme lesson of life, when to say "yes." and when to say "no." Uncommon sense is superhuman tact among no less real, but at present impalpable realities; the spiritual faculty of forming spiritual inductions aright. So St. John, among the three great canons of primary truth with which he closes his Epistle, writes—"we know that the Son of God hath come and is present, and hath given us understanding, that we know Him who is true." So with evidences. Apostles did not draw them out with the same logical precision, or rather not in the same logical form. Yet they rested their conclusions upon the same abiding principle of evidence, the primary axiom of our entire social life, that there is a degree of human evidence which practically cannot deceive. "If we receive the witness of men." The form of expression implies that we certainly do.

Peculiar difficulty has been felt in understanding the paragraph. And one portion of it remains difficult after any explanation. But we shall succeed in apprehending it as a whole only upon condition of taking one guiding principle of interpretation with us.

The word witness is St. John's central thought here. He is determined to beat it into our thoughts by the most unsparing iteration. He repeats it ten times over, as substantive or verb, in six verses. His object is to turn our attention to his Gospel, and to this distinguishing feature of it—its being from beginning to end a Gospel of witness. This witness he declares to be fivefold.

(1) The witness of the Spirit, of which the fourth Gospel is preeminently full.

(2) The witness of the Divine Humanity, of the God-Man, who is not man deified, but God humanified. This verse is no doubt partly polemical, against heretics of the day, who would clip the great picture of the Gospel, and force it into the petty frame of their theory. This is He (the Apostle urges) who came on the stage of the world's and the Church's history as the Messiah, under the condition, so to speak, of water and blood; bringing with him, accompanied by, not the water only, but the water and the blood. Cerinthus separated the Christ, the divine Aeon, from Jesus the holy but mortal man. The two, the divine potency and the human existence, met at the waters of Jordan, on the day of the Baptism, when the Christ united himself to Jesus. But the union was brief and unessential. Before the crucifixion, the divine ideal Christ withdrew. The man suffered. The impassible immortal potency was far away in

heaven. St. John denies the fortuitous juxtaposition of two accidentally united existences. We worship one Lord Jesus Christ, attested not only by Baptism in Jordan, the witness of water, but by the death on Calvary, the witness of blood. He came by water and blood, as the means by which His office was manifested; but with the water and with the blood, as the sphere in which He exercises that office. When we turn to the Gospel, and look at the pierced side, we read of blood and water, the order of actual history and physiological fact. Here St. John takes the ideal, mystical, sacramental order, water and blood—cleansing and redemption—and the sacraments which perpetually symbolise and convey them. Thus we have Spirit, water, blood. "Three are they who are ever witnessing." These are three great centres round which St. John's Gospel turns. These are the three genuine witnesses, the trinity of witness, the shadow of the Trinity in heaven.

(3) Again the fourth Gospel is a Gospel of human witness, a tissue woven out of many lines of human attestation. It records the cries of human souls overheard and noted down at the supreme crisis moment, from the Baptist, Philip, and Nathanael, to the everlasting spontaneous creed of Christendom on its knees before Jesus, the cry of Thomas ever rushing molten from a heart of fire—"My Lord and my God."

(4) But if we receive, as we assuredly must and do receive, the overpowering and soul-subduing mass of attesting human evidence, how much more must we receive the Divine witness, the witness of God so conspicuously exhibited in the Gospel of St. John! "The witness of God is greater, because this" (even the history in the pages to which he adverts) "is the witness; because" (I say with triumphant reiteration) "He hath witnessed concerning His Son." This witness of God in the last Gospel is given in four forms—by Scripture, by the Father, by the Son Himself, by His works.

(5) This great volume of witness is consummated and brought home by another; He who not merely coldly assents to the word of Christ, but lifts the whole burden of his belief on to the Son of God, hath the witness in him. That which was logical and external becomes internal and experimental.

In this ever-memorable passage, all know that an interpolation has taken place. The words—"in heaven the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth"—are a gloss. A great sentence of one of the first of critics may well reassure any weak believers who dread the candour of Christian criticism, or suppose that it has impaired the evidence for the great dogma of the Trinity. "If the fourth century knew that text, let it come in, in God's name; but if that age did not know it, then Arianism in its height was beaten down without the help of that verse; and, let the fact prove as it will, the doctrine is unshaken." The human material with which they have been clamped should not blind us to the value of the heavenly jewels which seemed to be marred by their earthly setting.

It is constantly said—as we think with considerable misapprehension—that in his Epistle St. John may imply, but does not refer directly to any particular incident in, his Gospel. It is our conviction that St. John very specially includes the Resurrection—the central point of the evidences of Christianity—among the things attested by the witness of men. We propose in another chapter to examine the Resurrection from St. John's point of view.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 17

THE WITNESS OF MEN (APPLIED TO THE RESURRECTION)— 1Jo 5:9

AT an early period in the Christian Church the passage in which these words occur was selected as a fitting Epistle for the First Sunday after Easter, when believers may be supposed to review the whole body of witness to the risen Lord and to triumph in the victory of faith. It will afford one of the best illustrations of that which is covered by the comprehensive canon—"if we receive the witness of men"—if we consider the unity of essential principles in the narratives of the Resurrection, and draw the natural conclusions from them.

I Let us note the unity of essential principles in the narratives of the Resurrection.

St. Matthew hastens on from Jerusalem to the appearance in Galilee. "Behold! He goeth before you into Galilee," is, in some sense, the key of the twenty-eighth chapter. St. Luke, on the other hand, speaks only of manifestations in Jerusalem or its neighbourhood.

Now St. John's Resurrection history falls in the twentieth chapter into four pieces, with three manifestations in Jerusalem. The twenty-first chapter (the appendix chapter) also falls into four pieces, with one manifestation to the seven disciples in Galilee.

St. John makes no profession of telling us all the appearances which were known to the Church, or even all of which he was personally cognisant. In the treasures of the old man's memory there were many more which, for whatever reason, he did not write. But these distinct continuous specimens of a permitted communing with the eternal glorified life (supplemented on subsequent thought by another in the last chapter) are as good as three or four hundred for the great purpose of the Apostle. "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

Throughout St. John's narrative every impartial reader will find delicacy of thought, abundance of matter, minuteness of detail, He will find something more. While he feels that he is not in cloudland or dreamland, he will yet recognise that he walks in a land which is wonderful, because the central figure in it is One whose name is Wonderful. The fact is fact, and yet it is something more. For a short time poetry and history are absolutely coincident. Here, if anywhere, is Herder's saying true, that the fourth Gospel seems to be written with a feather which has dropped from an angel's wing.

The unity in essential principles which has been claimed for these narratives taken together is not a lifeless identity in details. It is scarcely to be worked out by the dissecting maps of elaborate harmonies. It is not the imaginative unity, which is poetry; nor the mechanical unity, which is fabrication; nor the passionless unity, which is commended in a police report. It is not the thin unity of plain song; it is the rich unity of dissimilar tones blended into a figure.

This unity may be considered in two essential agreements of the four Resurrection histories.

1. All the Evangelists agree in reticence on one point—in abstinence from one claim.

If any of us were framing for himself a body of such evidence for the Resurrection as should almost extort acquiescence, he would assuredly insist that the Lord should have been seen and recognised after the Resurrection by miscellaneous crowds—or, at the very least, by hostile individuals. Not only by a tender Mary Magdalene, an impulsive Peter, a rapt John, a Thomas through all his unbelief nervously anxious to be convinced. Let Him be seen by Pilate, by Caiaphas, by some of the Roman soldiers, of the priests, of the Jewish populace. Certainly, if the Evangelists had simply aimed at effective presentation of evidence, they would have put forward statements of this kind.

But the apostolic principle—the apostolic canon of Resurrection evidence—was very different. St. Luke has preserved it for us, as it is given by St. Peter. "Him God raised up the third day, and gave Him to be made manifest after He rose again from the dead, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us." He shall, indeed, appear again to all the people, to every eye; but that shall be at the great Advent. St. John, with his ideal tenderness, has preserved a word of Jesus, which gives us St. Peter's canon of Resurrection evidence, in a lovelier and more spiritual form. Christ as He rose at Easter should be visible, but only to the eye of love, only to the eye which life fills with tears and heaven with light—"Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will manifest Myself to Him." Round that ideal canon St. John's Resurrection history is twined with undying tendrils. Those words may be written by us with our softest pencils over the twentieth and twenty-first chapters of the fourth Gospel. There is—very possibly there can be—under our present human conditions, no manifestation of Him who was dead and now liveth, except to belief, or to that kind of doubt which springs from love.

That which is true of St. John is true of all the Evangelists.

They take that Gospel, which is the life of their life. They bare its bosom to the stab of Celsus, to the bitter sneer plagiarised by Renan—"why did He not appear to all, to His judges and enemies? Why only to one excitable woman, and a circle of His initiated? The hallucination of a hysterical woman endowed Christendom. with a risen God." An apocryphal Gospel unconsciously violates this apostolic, or rather divine canon, by stating that Jesus gave His grave clothes to one of the High Priest's servants. There was every reason but one why St. John and the other Evangelists should have narrated such stories. There was only one reason why they should not, but that was all-sufficient. Their Master was the Truth as well as the Life. They dared not lie.

Here, then, is one essential accordance in the narratives of the Resurrection. They record no appearances of Jesus to enemies or to unbelievers.

2. A second unity of essential principle will be found in the impression produced upon the witnesses.

There was, indeed, a moment of terror at the sepulchre, when they had seen the angel clothed in the long white garment. "They trembled, and were amazed; neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid." So writes St. Mark. And no

such word ever formed the close of a Gospel! On the Easter Sunday evening there was another moment when they were "terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." But this passes away like a shadow. For man, the Risen Jesus turns doubt into faith, faith into joy. For woman, He turns sorrow into joy. From the sacred wounds joy rains over into their souls. "He showed them His hands and His feet while they yet believed not for joy and wondered." "He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." {Lu 24:41 Joh 20:20} Each face of those who beheld Him wore after that a smile through all tears and forms of death. "Come," cried the great Swedish singer, gazing upon the dead face of a holy friend, "come and see this great sight. Here is a woman who has seen Christ." Many of us know what she meant, for we too have looked upon those dear to us who have seen Christ. Over all the awful stillness—under all the cold whiteness as of snow or marble—that strange soft light, that subdued radiance, what shall we call it? wonder, love, sweetness, pardon, purity, rest, worship, discovery. The poor face often dimmed with tears, tears of penitence, of pain, of sorrow, some perhaps which we caused to flow, is looking upon a great sight. Of such the beautiful text is true, written by a sacred poet in a language of which, to many, verbs are pictures. "They looked unto Him, and were lightened." {Ps 34:15} That meeting of lights without a flame it is which makes up what angels call joy. There remained some of that light on all who had seen the Risen Lord. Each might say—"have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"

This effect, like every effect, had a cause.

Scripture implies in the Risen Jesus a form with, all heaviness and suffering lifted off it with the glory, freshness, elasticity, of the new life, overflowing with beauty and power. He had a voice with some of the pathos of affection, making its sweet concession to human sensibility: saying, "Mary," "Thomas," "Simon, son of Jonas." He had a presence at once so majestic that they durst not question Him, yet so full of magnetic attraction that Magdalene clings to His feet, and Peter flings Himself into the waters when he is sure that it is the Lord. (Joh 21:12, cf. 7.)

Now let it be remarked that this consideration entirely disposes of that afterthought of critical ingenuity which has taken the place of the base old Jewish theory—"His disciples came by night, and stole Him away." {Mt 28:13} That theory, indeed, has been blown into space by Christian apologetics. And now not a few are turning to the solution that He did not really die upon the cross, but was taken down alive.

There are other, and more than sufficient refutations. One from the character of the august Sufferer, who would not have deigned to receive adoration upon false pretences. One from the minute observation by St. John of the physiological effect of the thrust of the soldier's lance, to which he also reverts in the context.

But here, we only ask what effect the appearance of the Saviour among His disciples, supposing that He had not died, must unquestionably have had.

He would only have been taken down from the cross something more than thirty hours. His brow punctured with the crown of thorns; the wounds in hands, feet, and side, yet unhealed; the back raw and torn with scourges; the frame cramped by the frightful tension of six long hours—a lacerated and shattered man, awakened to agony by the coolness of the sepulchre and by the pungency of the spices; a spectral, trembling, fevered, lamed, skulking thing—could that have seemed the Prince of Life, the Lord of Glory, the Bright and Morning Star? Those who had seen Him in Gethsemane and on the cross, and then on Easter, and during the forty days, can

scarcely speak of His Resurrection without using language which attains to more than lyrical elevation. Think of St. Peter's anthem like burst. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Think of the words which St. John heard Him utter. "I am the First and the Living, and behold! I became dead, and I am, living unto the ages of ages."

Let us, then, fix our attention upon the unity of all the Resurrection narratives in these two essential principles.

(1) The appearances of the Risen Lord to belief and love only.

(2) The impression common to all the narrators of glory on His part, of joy on theirs.

We shall be ready to believe that this was part of the great body of proof which was in the Apostle's mind, when pointing to the Gospel with which this Epistle was associated, he wrote of this human but most convincing testimony "if we receive," as assuredly we do, "the witness of men"—of evangelists among the number.

II Too often such discussions as these end unpractically enough. Too often

"When the critic has done his best, The pearl of price at reason's test On the Professor's lecture table Lies, dust and ashes levigable."

But, after all, we may well ask: can we afford to dispense with this well-balanced probability? Is it well for us to face life and death without taking it, in some form, into the account? Now at the present moment, it may safely be said that, for the best and noblest intellects imbued with the modern philosophy, as for the best and noblest of old who were imbued with the ancient philosophy, external to Christian revelation, immortality is still, as before, a fair chance, a beautiful "perhaps," a splendid possibility. Evolutionism is growing and maturing somewhere another Butler, who will write in another, and possibly more satisfying chapter, than that least convincing of any in the "Analogy"—"of a Future State."

What has Darwinism to say on the matter?

Much. Natural selection seems to be a pitiless worker; its instrument is death. But, when we broaden our survey, the sum total of the result is everywhere advance—what is mainly worthy of notice, in man the advance of goodness and virtue. For of goodness, as of freedom,

"The battle once begun, Though baffled oft, is always won."

Humanity has had to travel, thousands of miles, inch by inch, towards the light. We have made such progress that we can see that in time, relatively short, we shall be in noonday. After long ages of strife, of victory for hard hearts and strong sinews, Goodness begins to wipe away the sweat of agony from her brow; and will stand, sweet, smiling, triumphant in the world. A gracious life is free for man; generation after generation a softer ideal stands before us, and we can conceive a day when "the meek shall inherit the earth." Do not say that evolution, if proved an outrage, brutalises man. Far from it. It lifts him from below out of the brute creation. What theology calls original sin, modern philosophy the brute inheritance—the ape, and the goat, and the tiger—is dying out of man. The perfecting of human nature and of human society stands out as the goal of creation. In a sense, all creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. Nor need the true Darwinian necessarily fear

materialism. "Livers secrete bile—brains secrete thought," is smart and plausible, but it is shallow. Brain and thought are, no doubt, connected—but the connection is of simultaneousness, of two things in concordance indeed, but not related as cause and effect. If cerebral physiology speaks of annihilation when the brain is destroyed, she speaks ignorantly and without a brief.

The greatest thinkers in the Natural Religion department of the new philosophy seem then to be very much in the same position as those in the same department of the old. For immortality there is a sublime probability. With man, and man's advance in goodness and virtue as the goal of creation, who shall say that the thing so long provided for, the goal of creation, is likely to perish? Annihilation is a hypothesis; immortality is a hypothesis. But immortality is the more likely as well as the more beautiful of the two. We may believe in it, not as a thing demonstrated, but as an act of faith that "God will not put us to permanent intellectual confusion."

But we may well ask whether it is wise and well to refuse to intrench this probability behind another. Is it likely that He who has so much care for us as to make us the goal of a drama a million times more complex than our fathers dreamed of, who lets us see that He has not removed us out of his sight, will leave Himself, and with Himself our hopes, without witness in history? History is especially human; human evidence the branch of moral science of which man is master—for man is the best interpreter of man. The primary axiom of family, of social, of legal, of moral life, is that there is a kind and degree of human evidence which we ought not to refuse; that if credulity is voracious in belief, incredulity is no less voracious in negation; that if there is a credulity which is simple, there is an incredulity which is unreasonable and perilous. Is it then well to grope for the keys of death in darkness, and turn from the hand that holds them out; to face the ugly realities of the pit with less consolation than is the portion of our inheritance in the faith of Christ?

"The disciples," John tells us, "went away again unto their own home. But Mary was standing without at the sepulchre weeping." Weeping! What else is possible while we are outside, while we stand—what else until we stoop down from our proud grief to the sepulchre, humble our speculative pride, and condescend to gaze at the death of Jesus face to face? When we do so, we forget the hundred voices that tell us that the Resurrection is partly invented, partly imagined, partly ideally true. We may not see angels in white, nor hear their "why weepest thou?" But assuredly we shall hear a sweeter voice, and a stronger than theirs; and our name will be on it, and His name will rush to our lips in the language most expressive to us—as Mary said unto Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni." Then we shall find that the grey of morning is passing; that the thin thread of scarlet upon the distant hills is deepening into dawn; that in that world where Christ is the dominant law the ruling principle is not natural selection which works through death, but supernatural selection which works through life; that "because He lives, we shall live also." {Joh 14:19}

With the reception of the witness of men then, and among them of such men as the writer of the fourth Gospel, all follows. For Christ,

"Earth breaks up—time drops away; -In flows Heaven with its new day Of endless life, when He who trod, Very Man and very God, This earth in weakness, shame, and pain, Dying the death whose signs remain Up yonder on the accursed tree; Shall come again, no more to be Of captivity the thrall—But the true God all in all, King of kings, and Lord of lords, As His servant John received the words—'I died, and live for evermore.'"

For us there comes the hope in Paradise—the connection with the living dead—the pulsation through the isthmus of the Church, from sea to sea, from us to them—the tears not without smiles as we think of the long summer day when Christ who is our life shall appear—the manifestation of the sons of God, when "them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." Our resurrection shall be a fact of history, because His is a fact of history; and we receive it as such—partly from the reasonable motive of reasonable human belief on sufficient evidence for practical conviction.

All the long chain of manifold witness to Christ is consummated and crowned when it passes into the inner world of the individual life. "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in him," i.e., in himself! Correlative to this stands a terrible truth. He of whom we must conceive that he believes not God, has made Him a liar—nothing less; for his time for receiving Christ came, and went, and with this crisis his unbelief stands a completed present act as the result of his past; unbelief stretching over to the completed witness of God concerning His Son; human unbelief coextensive with divine witness.

But that sweet witness in a man's self is not merely in books or syllogisms. It is the creed of a living soul. It lies folded within a man's heart, and never dies—part of the great principle of victory fought and won over again, in each true life—until the man dies, and ceasing then only because he sees that which is the object of its witness.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 18

SIN UNTO DEATH— 1Jo 5:17

THE Church has ever spoken of seven deadly sins. Here is the ugly catalogue. Pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, hatred, sloth. Many of us pray often "from fornication and all other deadly sin, Good Lord deliver us." This language rightly understood is sound and true; yet, without careful thought, the term may lead us into two errors.

1. On hearing of deadly sin we are apt instinctively to oppose it to venial. But we cannot define by any quantitative test what venial sin may be for any given soul. To do that we must know the complete history of each soul; and the complete genealogy, conception, birth, and autobiography of each sin. Men catch at the term venial because they love to minimise a thing so tremendous as sin. The world sides with the casuists whom it satirises; and speaks of a "white lie," of a foible, of an inaccuracy, when "the 'white lie' may be that of St. Peter, the foible that of David, and the inaccuracy that of Ananias!"

2. There is a second mistake into which we often fall in speaking of deadly sin. Our imagination nearly always assumes some one definite outward act; some single individual sin. This may partly be due to a seemingly slight mistranslation in the text. It should not run "there is a sin," but "there is sin unto" (e.g., in the direction of, towards) "death."

The text means something deeper and further reaching than any single sin, deadly though it may be justly called.

The author of the fourth Gospel learned a whole mystic language from the life of Jesus. Death, in the great Master's vocabulary, was more than a single action. It was again wholly different from bodily death by the visitation of God. There are two realms for man's soul coextensive with the universe and with itself. One which leads towards God is called Life; one which leads from Him is called Death. There is a radiant passage by which the soul is translated from the death which is death indeed, to the life which is life indeed. There is another passage by which we pass from life to death; i.e., fall back towards spiritual (which is not necessarily eternal) death.

There is then a general condition and contexture; there is an atmosphere and position of soul in which the true life flickers, and is on the way to death. One who visited an island on the coast of Scotland has told how he found in a valley open to the spray of the northwest ocean a clump of fir trees. For a time they grew well, until they became high enough to catch the prevalent blast. They were still standing, but had taken a fixed set, and were reddened as if singed by the breath of fire. The island glen might be "swept on starry nights by balms of spring"; the summer sun as it sank might touch the poor stems with a momentary radiance. The trees were still living, but only with that cortical vitality which is the tree's death in life. Their doom was evident; they could have but a few more seasons. If the traveller cared some years

hence to visit that islet set in stormy waters, he would find the firs blanched like a skeleton's bones. Nothing remained for them but the sure fall, and the fated rottenness.

The analogy indeed is not complete. The tree in such surroundings must die; it can make for itself no new condition of existence; it can hear no sweet question on the breeze that washes through the grove, "why will ye die?" It cannot look upward—as it is scourged by the driving spray, and tormented by the fierce wind—and cry, "O God of my life, give me life." It has no will; it cannot transplant itself. But the human tree can root itself in a happier place. Some divine spring may clothe it with green again. As it was passing from life toward death, so by the grace of God in prayers and sacraments, through penitence and faith, it may pass from death to life.

The Church then is not wrong when she speaks of "deadly sin." The number seven is not merely a mystic fancy. But the seven "deadly sins" are seven attributes of the whole character; seven master ideas; seven general conditions of a human soul alienated from God; seven forms of aversion from true life, and of reversion to true death. The style of St. John has often been called "senile"; it certainly has the oracular and sententious quietude of old age in its almost lapidary repose. Yet a terrible light sometimes leaps from its simple and stately lines. Are there not a hundred hearts among us who know that as years pass they are drifting further and further from Him who is the Life? Will they not allow that St. John was right when, looking round the range of the Church, he asserted that there is such a thing as "sin unto death"?

It may be useful to take that one of the seven deadly sins which people are the most surprised to find in the list.

How and why is sloth deadly sin?

There is a distinction between sloth as vice and sloth as sin. The deadly sin of sloth often exists where the vice has no place. The sleepy music of Thomson's "Castle of Indolence" does not describe the slumber of the spiritual sluggard. Spiritual sloth is want of care and of love for all things in the spiritual order. Its conceptions are shallow and hasty. For it the Church is a department of the civil service; her worship and rites are submitted to, as one submits to a minor surgical operation. Prayer is the waste of a few minutes daily in concession to a sentiment which it might require trouble to eradicate. For the slothful Christian, saints are incorrigibly stupid; martyrs incorrigibly obstinate; clergymen incorrigibly professional; missionaries incorrigibly restless; sisterhoods incorrigibly tender; white lips that can just whisper Jesus incorrigibly awful. For the slothful, God, Christ, death, judgment have no real significance. The Atonement is a plank far away to be clutched by dying fingers in the article of death, that we may gurgle out "yes," when asked "are you happy?" Hell is an ugly word, Heaven a beautiful one which means a sky or a Utopia. Apathy in all spiritual thought, languor in every work of God, fear of injudicious and expensive zeal; secret dislike of those whose fervour puts us to shame, and a miserable adroitness in keeping out of their way; such are the signs of the spirit of sloth. And with this a long series of sins of omission—"slumbering and sleeping while the Bridegroom tarries"—"unprofitable servants."

We have said that the vice of sloth is generally distinct from the sin. There is, however, one day of the week on which the sin is apt to wear the drowsy features of the vice—Sunday. If there is any day on which we might be supposed to do something towards the spiritual world it must be Sunday. Yet what have any of us

done for God on any Sunday? Probably we can scarcely tell. We slept late, we lingered over our dressing, we never thought of Holy Communion; after Church (if we went there) we loitered with friends; we lounged in the Park; we whiled away an hour at lunch; we turned over a novel, with secret dislike of the benevolent arrangements which give the postman some rest. Such have been in the main our past Sundays. Such will be our others, more or fewer, till the arrival of a date written in a calendar which eye hath not seen. The last evening of the closing year is called by an old poet, "the twilight of two years, nor past, nor next." What shall we call the last Sunday of our year of life?

Turn to the first chapter of St. Mark. Think of that day of our Lord's ministry which is recorded more fully than any other. What a day! First that teaching in the Synagogue, when men "were astonished," not at His volubility, but at His "doctrine," drawn from depths of thought. Then the awful meeting with the powers of the world unseen. Next the utterance of the words in the sick room which renovated the fevered frame. Afterwards an interval for the simple festival of home. And then we see the sin, the sorrow, the sufferings crowded at the door. A few hours more, while yet there is but the pale dawn before the meteor sunrise of Syria, He rises from sleep to plunge His wearied brow in the dews of prayer. And finally the intrusion of others upon that sacred solitude, and the work of preaching, helping, pitying, healing closes in upon Him. again with a circle which is of steel, because it is duty—of delight, because it is love. Oh, the divine monotony of one of those golden days of God upon earth! And yet we are offended because He who is the same forever, sends from heaven that message with its terrible plainness—"because thou art lukewarm, I will spew thee out of my mouth." We are angry that the Church classes sloth as deadly sin, when the Church's Master has said—"thou wicked and slothful servant."

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,
The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 19

THE TERRIBLE TRUISM WHICH HAS NO EXCEPTION— 1Jo 5:17

LET US begin by detaching awhile from its context this oracular utterance: "all unrighteousness is sin." Is this true universally, or is it not?

A clear, consistent answer is necessary, because a strange form of the doctrine of indulgences (long whispered in the ears) has lately been proclaimed from the housetops, with a considerable measure of apparent acceptance.

Here is the singular dispensation from St. John's rigorous canon to which we refer.

Three such indulgences have been accorded at various times to certain favoured classes or persons.

(1) "The moral law does not exist for the elect." This was the doctrine of certain Gnostics in St. John's day; of certain fanatics in every age.

(2) "Things absolutely forbidden to the mass of mankind are allowable for people of commanding rank." Accommodating Prelates and accommodating Reformers have left the burden of defending these ignoble concessions to future generations.

(3) A yet baser dispensation has been freely given by very vulgar casuists. "The chosen of Fortune"—the men at whose magic touch every stock seems to rise—may be allowed unusual forms of enjoying the unusual success which has crowned their career.

Such are, or such were, the dispensations from St. John's canon permitted to themselves, or to others, by the elect of Heaven, by the elect of station, and by the elect of fortune.

Another election hath obtained the perilous exception now—the election of genius. Those who endow the world with music, with art, with romance, with poetry, are entitled to the reversion. "All unrighteousness is sin"—except for them.

(1) The indulgence is no longer valid for those who affect intimacy with heaven (partly perhaps because it is suspected that there is no heaven to be intimate with).

(2) The indulgence is not extended to the men who apparently rule over nations, since it has been discovered that nations rule over them.

(3) It is not accorded to the constructors of fortunes; they are too many, and too uninteresting, though possibly figures could be conceived almost capable of buying it. But (generally speaking) men of these three classes must pace along the dust of the narrow road by the signpost of the law, if they would escape the censure of society.

For genius alone there is no such inconvenient restriction. Many men, of course, deliberately prefer the "primrose path," but they can no more avoid indignant hisses by the way than they can extinguish the "everlasting bonfire" at the awful close of their journey. With the man of genius it seems that it is otherwise. He shall "walk in the ways of his heart, and in the sight of his eyes"; but, "for all these things" the tribunals of certain schools of a delicate criticism (delicate criticism can be so indelicate) will never allow him "to be brought into judgment." Some literary oracles, biographers, or reviewers, are not content to keep a reverential silence, and to murmur a secret prayer. They will drag into light the saddest, the meanest, the most selfish doings of genius. Not the least service to his generation, and to English literature, of the true poet and critic lately taken from us, was the superb scorn, the exquisite wit, with which his indignant purity transfixed such doctrines. A strange winged thing, no doubt, genius sometimes is; alternately beating the abyss with splendid pinions, and eating dust which is the "serpent's meat." But for all that, we cannot see with the critic when he tries to prove that the reptile's crawling is part of the angel's flight; and the dust on which he grovels one with the infinite purity of the azure distances.

The arguments of the apologists for moral eccentricity of genius may be thus summed up:—The man of genius bestows upon humanity gifts which are on a different line from any other. He enriches it on the side where it is poorest; the side of the Ideal. But the very temperament in virtue of which a man is capable of such transcendent work makes him passionate and capricious. To be imaginative is to be exceptional; and these exceptional beings live for mankind rather than for themselves. When their conduct comes to be discussed, the only question is whether that conduct was adapted to forward the superb self-development which is of such inestimable value to the world. If the gratification of any desire was necessary for that self-development, genius itself being the judge, the cause is ended. In winning that gratification hearts may be broken, souls defiled, lives wrecked. The daintiest songs of the man of genius may rise to the accompaniment of domestic sobs, and the music which he seems to warble at the gates of heaven may be trilled over the white upturned face of one who has died in misery. What matter! Morality is so icy and so intolerant; its doctrines have the ungentlemanlike rigour of the Athanasian Creed. Genius breaks hearts with such supreme gracefulness, such perfect wit, that they are arrant Philistines who refuse to smile.

We who have the text full in our mind answer all this in the words of the old man of Ephesus. For all that angel softness which he learned from the heart of Christ, his voice is as strong as it is sweet and calm. Over all the storm of passion, over all the babble of successive sophistries, clear and eternal it rings out—"all unrighteousness is sin." To which the apologist, little abashed, replies—"of course we all know that; quite true as a general rule, but then men of genius have bought a splendid dispensation by paying a splendid price, and so their inconsistencies are not sin."

There are two assumptions at the root of this apology for the aberrations of genius which should be examined.

(1) The temperament of men of genius is held to constitute an excuse from which there is no appeal. Such men indeed are sometimes not slow to put forward this plea for themselves. No doubt there are trials peculiar to every temperament. Those of men of genius are probably very great. They are children of the sunshine and of the storm; the grey monotony of ordinary life is distasteful to them. Things which others find it easy to accept convulse their sensitive organisation: Many can produce their finest works only on condition of being sheltered where no bills shall find their way

by the post; where no sound, not even the crowing of cocks, shall break the haunted silence. If the letter comes in one case, and if the cock crows in the other, the first may possibly never be remembered, but the second is never forgotten.

For this, as for every other form of human temperament—that of the dunce, as well as of the genius—allowance must in truth be made. In that one of the lives of the English Poets, where the great moralist has gone nearest to making concessions to this fallacy of temperament, he utters this just warning: "No wise man will easily presume to say, had I been in Savage's condition I should have lived better than Savage." But we must not bring in the temperament of the man of genius as the standard of his conduct, unless we are prepared to admit the same standard in every other case. God is no respecter of persons. For each, conscience is of the same texture, law of the same material. As all have the same cross of infinite mercy, the same judgment of perfect impartiality, so have they the same law of inexorable duty.

(2) The necessary disorder and feverishness of high literary and artistic inspiration is a second postulate of the pleas to which I refer. But, is it true that disorder creates inspiration; or is a condition of it?

All great work is ordered work; and in producing it the faculties must be exercised harmoniously and with order. True inspiration, therefore, should not be caricatured into a flushed and dishevelled thing. Labour always precedes it. It has been prepared for by education. And that education would have been painful but for the glorious efflorescence of materials collected and assimilated, which is the compensation for any toil. The very dissatisfaction with its own performances, the result of the lofty ideal which is inseparable from genius, is at once a stimulus and a balm. The man of genius apparently writes, or paints, as the birds sing, or as the spring colours the flowers; but his subject has long possessed his mind, and the inspiration is the child of thought and of ordered labour. Destroying the peace of one's own family or of another's, being flushed with the preoccupation of guilty passion, will not accelerate, but retard the advent of those happy moments which are not without reason called creative. Thus, the inspiration of genius is akin to the inspiration of prophecy. The prophet tutored himself by a fitting education. He became assimilated to the noble things in the future which he foresaw. Isaiah's heart grew royal; his style wore the majesty of a king, before he sang the King of sorrow with His infinite pathos, and the King of righteousness with His infinite glory. Many prophets attuned their spirits by listening to such music as lulls, not inflames passion. Others walked where "beauty born of murmuring sound" might pass into their strain. Think of Ezekiel by the river of Chebar, with the soft sweep of waters in his ear, and their cool breath upon his cheek. Think of St. John with the shaft of light from heaven's opened door upon his upturned brow, and the boom of the Aegean upon the rocks of Patmos around him. "The note of the heathen seer" (said the greatest preacher of the Greek Church) "is to be contorted, constrained, excited, like a maniac; the note of a prophet is to be wakeful, self-possessed, nobly self-conscious." We may apply this test to the distinction between genius and the dissipated affectation of genius.

Let us then refuse our assent to a doctrine of indulgences applied to genius on the ground of temperament or of literary and artistic inspiration. "Why," we are often asked, "why force your narrow judgment upon an angry or a laughing world?" What have you to do with the conduct of gifted men? Genius means exuberant. Why "blame the Niagara River" because it will not assume the pace and manner of "a Dutch canal"? Never indeed should we force that judgment upon any, unless they force it upon us. Let us avoid, as far as we may, posthumous gossip over the grave of genius. It is an unwholesome curiosity which rewards the blackbird for that

bubbling song of ecstasy in the thicket, by gloating upon the ugly worm which he swallows greedily after the shower. The pen or pencil has dropped from the cold fingers. After all its thought and sin, after all its toil and agony, the soul is with its Judge. Let the painter of the lovely picture, the writer of the deathless words, be for us like the priest. The washing of regeneration is no less wrought through the unworthy minister; the precious gift is no less conveyed when a polluted hand has broken the bread and blessed the cup. But if we are forced to speak, let us refuse to accept an ex post facto morality invented to excuse a worthless absolution. Especially so when the most sacred of all rights is concerned. It is not enough to say that a man of genius dissents from the received standard of conduct. He cannot make fugitive inclination the only principle of a connection which he promised to recognise as paramount. A passage in the Psalms, {See Ps 15. Cf. Ps 24:3-7} has been called "The catechism of Heaven." "The catechism of Fame" differs from "the catechism of Heaven." "Who shall ascend unto the hill of Fame? He that possesses genius." "Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord?" "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; He that hath sworn to his neighbour and disappointeth him not" (or disappointeth her not) "though it were to his own hindrance"—aye, to the hindrance of his self-development. Strange that the rough Hebrew should still have to teach us chivalry as well as religion! In St. John's Epistle we find the two great axioms about sin, in its two essential aspects. "Sin is the transgression of the law": there is its aspect chiefly Godward. "All unrighteousness" (mainly injustice, denial of the rights of others) "is sin": there is its aspect chiefly manward.

Yes, the principle of the text is rigid, inexorable, eternal. Nothing can make its way out of those terrible meshes. It is without favour, without exception. It gives no dispensation, and proclaims no indulgences, to the man of genius, or to any other: If it were otherwise, the righteous God, the Author of creation and redemption, would be dethroned. And that is a graver thing than to dethrone even the author of "Queen Mab," and of "The Epipsychidion." Here is the jurisprudence of the "great white Throne" summed up in four words: "all unrighteousness is sin."

So far, in the last chapter, and in this, we have ventured to isolate these two great principles from their context. But this process is always attended with peculiar loss in St. John's writings. And as some may think perhaps that the promise {1Jo 5:15} is falsified we must here run the risk of bringing in another thread of thought. Yet indeed the whole paragraph has its source in an intense faith in the efficacy of prayer, specially as exercised in intercessory prayer.

(1) The efficacy of prayer. This is the very sign of contrast with, of opposition to, the modern spirit, which is the negation of prayer.

What is the real value of prayer?

Very little, says the modern spirit. Prayer is the stimulant, the Dutch courage of the moral world. Prayer is a power, not because it is efficacious, but because it is believed to be so.

A modern Rabbi, with nothing of his Judaism left but a rabid antipathy to the Founder of the Church, guided by Spinoza and Kant, has turned fiercely upon the Lord's prayer. He takes those petitions which stand alone among the liturgies of earth in being capable of being translated into every language. He cuts off one pearl after another from the string. Take one specimen. "Our Father which art in Heaven." Heaven! the very name has a breath of magic, a suggestion of beauty, of grandeur, of purity in it. It moves us as nothing else can. We instinctively lift our heads; the

brow grows proud of that splendid home, and the eye is wetted with a tear and lighted with a ray, as it looks into those depths of golden sunset which are full for the young of the radiant mystery of life, for the old of the pathetic mystery of death. Yes, but for modern science Heaven means air, or atmosphere, and the address itself is contradictory. "Forgive us." But surely the guilt cannot be forgiven, except by the person against whom it is committed. There is no other forgiveness. A mother (whose daughter went out upon the cruel London streets) carried into execution a thought bestowed upon her by the inexhaustible ingenuity of love. The poor woman got her own photograph taken, and a friend managed to have copies of it hung in several halls and haunts of infamy with these words clearly written below—"come home, I forgive you." The tender subtlety of love was successful at last; and the poor haggard outcast's face was touched by her mother's lips. "But the heart of God," says this enemy of prayer, "is not as a woman's heart." (Pardon the words, O loving Father! Thou who hast said "Yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Pardon, O pierced Human Love! who hast graven the name of every soul on the palms of Thy hands with the nails of the crucifixion.) Repentance subjectively seems a reality when mother and child meet with a burst of passionate tears, and the polluted brow feels purified by their molten downfall; but repentance objectively is seen to be an absurdity by everyone who grasps the conception of law. The penitential Psalms may be the lyrics of repentance, the Gospel for the third Sunday after Trinity its idyll, the cross its symbol, the wounds of Christ its theology and inspiration. But the course of Nature, the hard logic of life is its refutation—the flames that burn, the waves that drown, the machine that crushes, the society that condemns, and that neither can, nor wilt forgive.

Enough, and more than enough of this. The monster of ignorance who has never learnt a prayer has hitherto been looked upon as one of the saddest of sights. But there is something sadder—the monster of over cultivation, the wreck of schools, the priggish fanatic of godlessness. Alas! for the nature which has become like a plant artificially trained and twisted to turn away from the light. Alas! for the heart which has hardened itself into stone until it cannot beat faster, or soar higher, even when men are saying with happy enthusiasm, or when the organ is lifting upward to the heaven of heavens the cry which is at once the creed of an everlasting dogma and the hymn of a triumphant hope—"with Thee is the well of Life, and in Thy light shall we see light." Now having heard the answer of the modern spirit to the question "What is the real value of prayer?" think of the answer of the spirit of the Church as given by St. John in this paragraph. That answer is not drawn out in a syllogism. St. John appeals to our consciousness of a divine life. "That ye may know that ye have eternal life." This knowledge issues in confidence, i.e., literally the sweet possibility of saying out all to God. And this confidence is never disappointed for any believing child of God. "If we know that He hear us, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him."

On the sixteenth verse we need only say, that the greatness of our brother's spiritual need does not cease to be a title to our sympathy. St. John is not speaking of all requests, but of the fulness of brotherly intercession.

One question and one warning in conclusion; and that question is this. Do we take part in this great ministry of love? Is our voice heard in the full music of the prayers of intercession that are ever going up to the Throne, and bringing down the gift of life? Do we pray for others?

In one sense all who know true affection and the sweetness of true prayer do pray for others. We have never loved with supreme affection any for whom we have not

interceded, whose names we have not baptised in the fountain of prayer. Prayer takes up a tablet from the hand of love written over with names; that tablet death itself can only break when the heart has turned Sadducee.

Jesus (we sometimes think) gives one strange proof of the love which yet passeth knowledge. "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus"; "when He had heard therefore" [O that strange therefore!] "that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Ah! sometimes not two days, but two years, and sometimes evermore, He seems to remain. When the income dwindles with the dwindling span of life; when the best beloved must leave us for many years, and carries away our sunshine with him; when the life of a husband is in danger—then we pray; "O Father, for Jesu's sake spare that precious life; enable me to provide for these helpless ones; bless these children in their going out and coming in, and let me see them once again before the night cometh, and my hands are folded for the long rest." Yes, but have we prayed at our Communion "because of that Holy Sacrament in it, and with it," that He would give them the grace which they need—the life which shall save them from sin unto death? Round us, close to us in our homes, there are cold hands, hearts that beat feebly. Let us fulfil St. John's teaching, by praying to Him who is the life that He would chafe those cold hands with His hand of love, and quicken those dying hearts by contact with that wounded heart which is a heart of fire.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,
The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 20

2 John

THEOLOGY AND LIFE IN KYRIA'S LETTER— 2Jo 1:3

OF old God addressed men in tones that were, so to speak, distant. Sometimes He spoke with the stern precision of law or ritual; sometimes in the dark and lofty utterances of prophets; sometimes through the subtle voices of history, which lend themselves to different interpretations. But in the New Testament He whom no man hath seen at any time, "interpreted" {Joh 1:18} Himself with a sweet familiarity. It is of a piece with the dispensation of condescendence, that the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven should come to us in such large measure through epistles. For a letter is just the result of taking up one's pen to converse with one who is absent, a familiar talk with a friend.

Of the epistles in our New Testament, a few are addressed to individuals. The effect of three of these letters upon the Church, and even upon the world, has been great. The Epistles to Timothy and Titus, according to the most prevalent interpretation of them, have been felt in the outward organisation of the Church. The Epistle to Philemon, with its eager tenderness, its softness as of a woman's heart, its chivalrous courtesy, has told in another direction. With all its freedom from the rashness of social revolution; its almost painful abstinence (as abolitionists have sometimes confessed to feeling) from actual invective against slavery in the abstract; that letter is yet pervaded by thoughts whose issue can only be worked out by the liberty of the slave. The word emancipation may not be pronounced, but it hovers upon the Apostle's lips.

The second Epistle is, in our judgment, a letter to an individual. Certainly we are unable to find in its whole contents any probable allusion to a Church personified as a lady. It is, as we read it, addressed to Kyria, an Ephesian lady, or one who lived in the circle of Ephesian influence. It was sent by the Apostle during an absence from Ephesus. That absence might have been for the purpose of one of the visitations of the Churches of Asia Minor, which (as we are told by ancient Church writers) the Apostle was in the habit of holding. Possibly, however, in the case of a writer so brief and so reserved in the expression of personal sentiment as St. John, the gush and sunshine of anticipated joy at the close of this note might tempt us to think of a rift in some sky that had been long darkened; of the close of some protracted separation, soon to be forgotten in a happy meeting. "Having many things to write unto you, I would not do so by means of paper and ink; but I hope to come unto you, and to speak face to face that our joy may be fulfilled." (Ver. 12.) The expression might not seem unsuitable for a return from exile. Several touches of language and feeling in the letter point to the conclusion that Kyria was a widow. There is no mention of her husband, the father of her children. In the case of a writer who uses the names of God with such subtle and tender suitability, the association of Kyria's "children walking in truth" with "even as we received commandment from the Father," may well point to Him who was for them the Father of the fatherless. We

need not with some expositors draw the sad conclusion that St. John affectionately hints that there were others of the family who could not be included in this joyful message. But it would seem highly probable from the language used that there were several sons, and also that Kyria had no daughters. Over these sons who had lost one earthly parent, the Apostle rejoices with the heart of a father in God. He bursts out with his eureka, the eureka not of a philosopher, but of a saint. "I rejoiced exceedingly that I found (ευρηκα ver. 4) certain of the number of thy children walking in truth."

While we may not trace in this little Epistle the same fountain of wide spreading influence as in others to which we have referred; while we feel that, like its author, its work is deep and silent rather than commanding, reflection will also lead us to the conclusion that it is worthy of the Apostle who was looked upon as one of the "pillars" of the faith.

1. Let us reflect that this letter is addressed by the aged Apostle to a widow, and concerns her family.

It is significant that Kyria was, in all probability, a widow of Ephesus.

Too many of us have more or less acquaintance with one department of French literature. A Parisian widow is too often the questionable heroine of some shameful romance, to have read which is enough to taint the virginity of the young imagination. Ephesus was the Paris of Ionia. Petronius was the Daudet or Zola of his day. An Ephesian widow is the heroine of one of the most cynically corrupt of his stories.

But "where sin abounded, grace did more than abound." Strange that first in an epistle to a Bishop of the Church of Ephesus, St. Paul should have presented us with that picture of a Christian widow—"she that is a widow, indeed, and desolate, who hath her hope set on God, and continueth in prayer night and day"—yet who, if she has the devotion, the almost entire absorption in God, of Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, leaves upon the track of her daily road to heaven the trophies of Dorcas—"having brought up children well, used hospitality to strangers, washed the saints' feet, relieved the afflicted, diligently followed every good work." Such widows are the leaders of the long procession of women, veiled or unveiled, with vows or, without them, who have ministered to Jesus through the ages. Christ has a beautiful art of turning the affliction of His daughters into the consolation of suffering. When life's fairest hopes are disappointed by falsehood, by cruel circumstances, by death; the broken heart is soothed by the love of Christ, the only love which is proof against death and change. The consolation thus received is the most unselfish of gifts. It overflows, and is lavishly poured out upon the sick and weary. With St. Paul's picture of a widow of this kind, contrast another by the same hand which hangs close beside it. The younger Ephesian widow, such as Petronius described, was known by St. Paul also. If any count the Apostle as a fanatic, destitute of all knowledge of the world because he lived above it, let them look at those lines, which are full of such caustic power, as they hit off the characteristics of certain idle and wanton affecters of a sorrow which they never felt. {1Ti 5:6-11,12,13} What a distance between such widows and Kyria, "beloved for the truth's sake which abideth in us!" {2Jo 1:2}

But the short letter of St. John is addressed to Kyria's family, as well as to herself. "The elder to the excellent Kyria and her children." (Ver. 1.)

There is one question which we naturally ask about every school and form of religion. It is the question which a great English Professor of Divinity used to ask his pupils to put in a homely form about every religious scheme and mode of utterance—"will it wash well?" Is it an influence which seems to be productive and lasting? Does it abide through time and trials? Is it capable of being passed on to another generation? Are plans, services, organisations, preachings, classes, vital or showy? Are they fads to meet fancies, or works to supply wants? Is that which we hold such sober, solid truth, that wise piety can say of it, half in benediction, half in prophecy—"the truth which abideth in us; yea, and with us it shall be forever"?

2. We turn to the contents of the Epistle.

We shall be better able to appreciate the value of these, if we consider the state of Christian literature at that time.

What had Christians to read and carry about with them? The excellent work of the Bible Society was physically impossible for long centuries to come. No doubt the LXX version of the Old Testament was widely spread. In every great city of the Roman Empire there was a vast population of Jews. Many of these were baptised into the Church, and carried into it with them their passionate belief in the Old Testament. The Christians of the time and place to which we refer could, probably, with little trouble, if not read, yet hear the Old Covenant and able expositions of it. But they had not copies of the entire New Testament. Indeed, if all the New Testament was then written, it certainly was not collected into one volume, nor constituted one supreme authority. "Many barbarous nations," says a very ancient Father, "believe in Christ without written record, having salvation impressed through the Spirit in their hearts, and diligently preserving the old tradition." Possibly a Church or single believer had one synoptical Gospel. At Ephesus Christians had doubtless been catechised in, and were deeply imbued with, St. John's view of the Person, work, and teaching of our Lord. This had now been moulded into shape, and definitely committed to writing in that glorious Gospel, the Church's Holy of Holies, St. John's Gospel. For them and for their contemporaries there was a living realisation of the Gospel. They had heard it from eyewitnesses. They had passed into the wonderland of God. The earth on which Jesus trod had blossomed into miracle. The air was haunted by the echoes of His voice. They had, probably, also a certain number of the Epistles of St. Paul. The Christians of Ephesus would have a special interest in their own Epistle to the Ephesians, and in the two which were written to their first Bishop, Timothy. They had also (whether written or not) impressed upon their memories by their weekly Eucharist, the liturgical Canon of consecration according to the Ephesian usage—from which, and not the Roman, the Spanish and Gallican seem to be derived. The Ephesian Christians had also the first Epistle of St. John, which in some form accompanied the Gospel, and is, indeed, a picture of spiritual life drawn from it. But let us remember that the Epistle is not of a character to be very quickly or readily learned by heart. Its subtle, latent links of connection do not present many grappling hooks for the memory to fasten itself to. Copies also must have been comparatively few.

Now let us see how the second Epistle may well have been related to the first.

Supremely, and above all else, the first Epistle contained three warnings, very necessary for those times.

(1) There was a danger of losing the true Christ, the Word made Flesh, Who for the forgiveness of our sins did shed out of His most precious side both water and blood

—in a false, because shadowy and ideal Christ.

(2) There was danger of losing true love, and therefore spiritual life, with truth.

(3) With the true Christ and true love there was a danger of losing the true commandment—love of God and of the brethren.

Now in the second Epistle these very three warnings were written on a leaflet in a form more calculated for circulation and for remembrance.

(1) Against the peril of faith, of losing the true Christ. "Many deceivers are gone out into the world—they who confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." With the true Christ, the true doctrine of Christ would also vanish, and with it all living hold upon God. Progress was the watchword; but it was in reality regress. "Everyone who abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God."

(2) Against the peril of losing love. "I beseech thee, Kyria that we love one another."

(3) Against the peril of losing the true commandment (the great spiritual principle of charity), or the true commandments (that principle in the details of life). "And this is love, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, that even as ye heard from the beginning ye should walk in it."

Here then were the chief practical elements of the first Epistle contracted into a brief and easily remembered shape.

Easily remembered, too, was the stern, practical prohibition of the intimacies of hospitality with those who came to the home of the Christian, in the capacity of emissaries of the antichrist above indicated. "Receive him not into your house, and good speed salute him not with."

Many are offended with this. No doubt Christianity is the religion of love—"the epiphany of the sweet naturedness and philanthropy of God." We very often look upon heresy or unbelief with the tolerance of curiosity rather than of love. At all events, the Gospel has its intolerance as well as tolerance. St. John certainly had this. It is not a true conception of art which invests him with the mawkish sweetness of perpetual youth. There is a sense in which he was a son of Thunder to the last. He who believes and knows must formulate a dogma. A dogma frozen by formality, or soured by hate, or narrowed by stupidity, makes a bigot. In reading the Church History of the first four centuries we are often tempted to ask, why all this subtlety, this theology spinning, this dogma hammering? The answer stands out clear above the mists of controversy. Without all this the Church would have lost the conception of Christ, and thus finally Christ Himself. St. John's denunciations have had a function in Christendom as well as his love.

3. There are two most precious indications of the highest Christian truth with which we may conclude.

We have prefixed to this Epistle that beautiful Apostolic salutation which is found in two only among the Epistles of St. Paul. After that simple, but exquisite expression of blessing merged in prophecy—"the truth which abideth in us—yes! and with us it shall be forever"—there comes another verse in the same key. "There shall be with us grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, in truth" of thought, "and love" of life.

This rush and reduplication of words is not very like the usual reserve and absence of emotional excitement in St. John's style. Can it be that something (possibly the glorious death of martyrdom by which Timothy died) led St. John to use words which were probably familiar to Ephesian Christians?

However this may be, let us live by, and learn from, those lovely words. Our poverty wants grace, our guilt wants mercy, our misery wants peace: Let us ever keep the Apostle's order. Do not let us put peace, our feeling of peace, first. The emotionalists' is a topsy turvy theology. Apostles do not say "peace and grace," but "grace and peace."

Once more—in an age which substitutes an ideal something called the spirit of Christianity for Christ, let us hold fast to that which is the essence of the Gospel and the kernel of our three creeds. "To confess Jesus Christ coming in flesh." Couple with this a canon of the First Epistle—"confesseth Jesus Christ come in flesh." The second is the Incarnation fact with its abiding consequences; the first, the Incarnation principle ever living in a Person, Who will also be personally manifested. This is the substance of the Gospels; this the life of prayers, and sacraments; this the expectation of the saints.

The Expositor's Bible

William Alexander, D.D., D.C.L.,

The Epistles of St. John

Chapter 21

3 John

THE QUIETNESS OF TRUE RELIGION— 3Jo 1:11

THE mere analysis of this note must necessarily present a meagre outline. There is a brief expression of pleasure at the tidings of the sweet and gracious hospitality of Gaius which was brought by certain missionary brethren to Ephesus, coupled with the assurance of the truth and consistency of his whole walk. The haughty rejection of Apostolic letters of communion by Diotrephes is mentioned with a burst of indignation. A contrast to Diotrephes is found in Demetrius, with the threefold witness to a life so worthy of imitation. A brief greeting—and we have done with the last written words of St. John which the Church possesses.

I Let us first see whether, without passing over the bounds of historical probability, we can fill up this bare outline with some colouring of circumstance.

To two of the three individuals named in this Epistle we seem to have some clue.

The Gaius addressed is, of course, Caius in Latin, a very common praenomen, no doubt.

Three persons of the name appear in the New Testament—unless we suppose St. John's Caius to be a fourth. But the generous and beautiful hospitality adverted to in this note is entirely of a piece with the character of him of whom St. Paul had written, "Gaius, mine host, and of the whole Church." We know further, from one of the most ancient and authentic documents of Christian literature, that the Church of Corinth (to which this Caius belonged) was, just at the period when St. John wrote, in a lamentable state of schismatic confusion. Diotrephes may, at such a period, have been aspiring to put forward his claim at Corinth; and may, in his ambitious proceedings, have rejected from communion the brethren whom St. John had sent to Caius. A yet more interesting reflection is suggested by a writing of considerable authority. The writer of the "Synopsis of Holy Scripture," which stands amongst the Works of Athanasius, says—"the Gospel according to John was both dictated by John the Apostle and beloved when in exile at Patmos, and by him was published in Ephesus, through Caius the beloved and friend of the Apostles, of whom Paul also writing to the Romans saith, Caius mine host, and of the whole Church." This would give a very marked significance to one touch in this Third Epistle of St. John. The phrase here "and we bear witness also, and ye know that our witness is true"—clearly points back to the closing attestation of the Gospel—"and we know that his witness is true." He counts upon a quick recognition of a common memory.

Demetrius is, of course, a name redolent of the worship of Demeter the Earth-Mother, and of Ephesian surroundings. No reader of the New Testament needs to be reminded of the riot at Ephesus, which is told at such length in the history of St. Paul's voyages by St. Luke. The conjecture that the agitator of the turbulent guild of

silversmiths who made silver shrines of Diana may have become the Demetrius, the object of St. John's lofty commendation, is by no means improbable. There is a peculiar fulness, in the narrative of the Acts, and an amplitude and exactness in the reports of the speeches of Demetrius and of the town clerk which betray both unusually detailed information, and a feeling on the part of the writer that the subject was one of much interest for many readers, The very words of Demetrius about Paul evince that uneasy sense of the powers of fascination possessed by the Apostle which is often the first timid witness of reluctant conviction. The whole story would be of thrilling interest to those who, knowing well what Demetrius had become, were here told what he once had been. In a very ancient document (the so called "Apostolic Constitutions") (7:46) we read that "Demetrius was appointed Bishop of Philadelphia by me," i.e., by the Apostle John. To the Bishop of that city, so often shaken by the earthquakes of that volcanic city, came the commendation—"I know thy works that thou didst keep My word"; and the assuring promise that he should, when the victory was won, have the solidity and permanence of "a pillar" in a "temple" {Re 3:7,8,12} that no convulsion could shake down. The witness, then, which stands on record for the Bishop of Philadelphia, is threefold; the threefold witness of the First Epistle on a reduced scale—the witness of the world; the witness of the Truth itself, even of Jesus; the witness of the Church—including John.

II We may now advert to the contents and general style of this letter.

1. As to its contents: It supplies us with a valuable test of Christian life, in what may be called the Christian instinct of missionary affection, possessed in such full measure by Caius. {3Jo 1:5,6,7}

This, indeed, is an ingredient of Christian character. Do we admire and feel attracted by missionaries? They are knight errants of the Faith; leaders of the "forlorn hope" of Christ's cause; bearers of the flag of the cross through the storms of battle. Do we wish to honour and to help them, and feel ennobled by doing so? He who has no almost enthusiastic regard for missionaries has not the spirit of primitive Christianity within his breast.

The Church is beset with different dangers from very different quarters. The Second Epistle of St. John has its bold unmistakable warning of danger from the philosophical atmosphere which is not only round the Church, but necessarily finds its way within. Those who assume to be leaders of intellectual and even of spiritual progress sometimes lead away from Christ. The test of scientific truth is accordance with the proposition which embodies the last discovery; the test of religious truth is accordance with the proposition which embodies the first discovery, i.e., "the doctrine of Christ." Progress outside this is regress; it is desertion first of Christ, ultimately of God. {2Jo 1:9} As the Second Epistle warns the Church of peril from speculative ambition, so the third Epistle marks a danger from personal ambition, {3Jo 1:9,10} arrogating to itself undue authority within the Church. Diotrephes in all probability was a bishop. At Rome there has been a permanent Diotrephes in the office of the Papacy; how much this has had to say to the dislocation of Christendom, God knows. But there are other smaller and more vulgar continuators of Diotrephes, who occupy no Vatican. Priests! But there are priests in different senses. The priest who stands to minister in holy things, the true Leitourgos, is rightly so called. But there is an arrogant priestship which would do violence to conscience, and interpose rudely between God and the soul. Priests in this sense are called by different names. They are clad in different dresses—some in chasubles, some in frock coats, some in petticoats. "Down with priestcraft," is even the cry of many of them. The priest who stands to offer sacrifice may or may not be a priest in

the evil sense; the priest (who abjures the name) who is a master of religious small talk of the popular kind, and winds people to his own ends round his little finger by using them deftly, is often the modern edition of Diotrephes.

This brief Epistle contains one of those apparently mere spiritual truisms, which make St. John the most powerful and comprehensive of all spiritual teachers. He had suggested a warning to Caius, which serves as the link to connect the example of Diotrephes which he has denounced, with that of Demetrius which he is about to commend. "Beloved!" he cries "imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good." A glorious little "Imitation of Christ," a compression of his own Gospel, the record of the Great Example in three words! Then follows this absolutely exhaustive division, which covers the whole moral and spiritual world. "He that doeth good" (the whole principle of whose moral life is this) "is of," has his origin from, "God"; "He that doeth evil hath not seen God," sees him not as a consequence of having spiritually looked upon Him. Here, at last, we have the flight of the eagle's wing, the glance of the eagle's eye. Especially valuable are these words, almost at the close of the Apostolic age and of the New Testament Scripture. They help us to keep the delicate balance of truth; they guard us against all abuse of the precious doctrines of grace. Several texts are mutilated; more are conveniently dropped out. How seldom does one see the whole context quoted, in tracts and sheets, of that most blessed passage—"if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin?" How often do we see these words at all—"he that doeth good is of God, but he that doeth evil hath not seen God?" Perhaps it may be a lingering suspicion that a text which comes out of a very short Epistle is worth very little. Perhaps doctrinalism an outrance considers that the sentiment "savours of works." But, at all events, there is terrible decisiveness about these antithetic propositions. For each life is described in section and in plan by one or other of the two. The whole complicated series of thought, actions, habits, purposes, summed up in the words life and character, is a continuous stream issuing from the man who does every moment of his existence. The stream is either pure, bright, cleansing, gladdening, capable of being tracked by a thread of emerald wherever it flows; or it carries with it on its course, blackness, bitterness, and barrenness. Men must be plainly dealt with. They may hold any creed, or follow any round of religious practices. There are creeds which are nobly true, others which are false and feeble—practices which are beautiful and elevating, others which are petty and unprofitable. They may repeat the shibboleth ever so accurately; and follow the observances ever so closely. They may sing hymns until their throats are hoarse, and beat drums until their wrists are sore.

But St. John's propositions ring out, loud and clear, and syllable themselves in questions, which one day or other the conscience will put to us with terrible distinctness. Are you one who is ever doing good; or one who is not doing good? "God be merciful to me a sinner!" may well rush to our lips. But that, when opportunity is given, must be followed by another prayer. Not only—"wash away my sins." Something more. "Fill and purify me with Thy Spirit, that, pardoned and renewed, I may become good, and be doing good." It is sometimes said that the Church is full of souls "dying of their morality." Is it not at least equally true to say that the Church is full of souls dying of their spirituality? That is—souls dying in one case of unreal morality; in the other of unreal spirituality, which juggles with spiritual words, making a sham out of them. Morality which is not spiritual is imperfect; spirituality which is not moralised through and through is of the spirit of evil.

It is a great thing in these last sentences, written with a trembling hand, which

shrank from the labour of pen and ink, the Apostle should have lifted a word (probably current in the social atmosphere of Ephesus among spiritualists and astrologers) from the low associations with which it was undeservedly associated; and should have rung out high and clear the Gospel's everlasting justification, the final harmony of the teaching of grace—"he that doeth good is of God."

2. The style of the Third Epistle of St. John is certainly that of an old man. It is reserved in language and in doctrine. God is thrice and thrice only mentioned. Jesus is not once expressly uttered. But

"They are not empty-hearted whose low sound Reverbs no hollowness."

In religion, as in everything else, we are earnest, not by aiming at earnestness, but by aiming at an object. Religious language should be deep and real, rather than demonstrative. It is not safe to play with sacred names. To pronounce them at random for the purpose of being effective and impressive is to take them in vain. What a wealth of reverential love there is in that—"for the sake of the Name!" Old copyists some times thought to improve upon the impressiveness of Apostles by cramming in sacred names. They only maimed what they touched with clumsy hand. A deeper sense of the Sacramental Presence is in the hushed, awful, reverence of "not discerning the Body," than in the interpolated "not discerning of the Lord's Body." Even so "The Name," perhaps, speaks more to the heart, and implies more than "His Name." It is, indeed, the "beautiful Name," by the which we are called. And sometimes in sermons, or in Eucharistic "Gloria in Excelsis," or in hymns that have come from such as St. Bernard, or in sick rooms, it shall go up without sweetest music, and waken our tenderest thoughts, and be "as ointment poured forth." But what an underlying Gospel, what an intense suppressed flame there is behind these quiet words! This letter says nothing of rapture, of prophecy, of miracle. It lies in the atmosphere of the Church, as we find it even now. It has a word for friendship. It seeks to individualise its benediction. A hush of evening rests upon the note. May such an evening close upon our old age!