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HALF HOUR  
WITH  
ST JOHN'S EPISTLES  
DANIEL STEELE D.D.

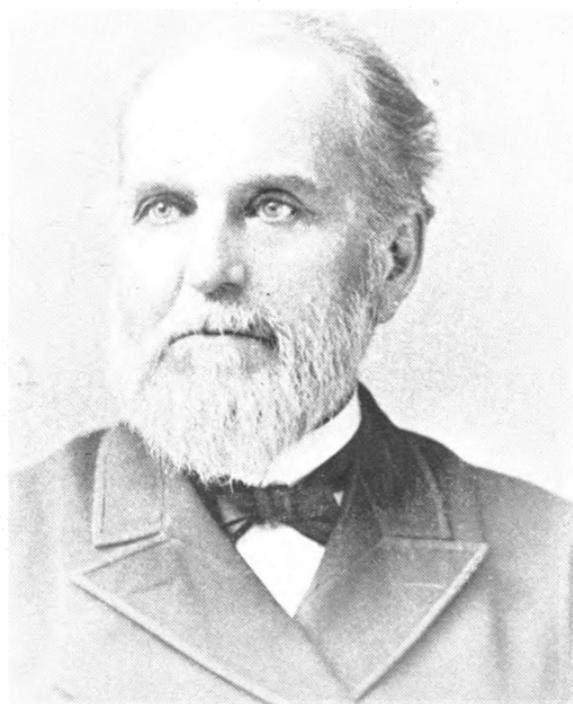
A decorative illustration in gold ink. It features two palm trees on the left side, with their fronds overlapping the text. Below the trees is a silhouette of a building or a cityscape with a jagged roofline. The entire illustration is rendered in a simple, line-art style.



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**DANIEL STEELE.**



DAVID STELLI

# HALF-HOURS

WITH

# ST. JOHN'S EPISTLES

BY

**DANIEL STEELE, D. D.**

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Author of "Love Enthroned," "Milestone Papers," "A Substitute for Holiness or Antinomianism Revived," "Commentaries on Leviticus, Numbers, and Joshua," "Half-Hours with St. Paul," "Defense of Christian Perfection," "Gospel of the Comforter," "Jesus Exultant," and Co-author of "People's Commentary," and Reviser of "Binney's Theological Compend Improved"

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## **Dedictory**

**TO MY PUPILS, WHICH ARE DEACONESSES OF THE  
CHURCH WHICH IS AT BOSTON, THE  
SUCCORERS OF MANY**



## PREFACE.

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THE writer of this volume confesses that he finds the best nutriment of his spiritual life in John's Gospel and Epistles. I have not used the verb "confess" as a preface to an apology for having a favorite among inspired authors, for I remember that Jesus Christ, my adorable Saviour, had His favorite apostle among the Twelve whom He had chosen. As He made no apology for His partiality, I will follow His example, and I will do so more gladly in view of the fact that His favorite and mine is the same person. I acknowledge that in this eighth decade of my life I have chosen the study of these Epistles because of their brevity and of the possibility of their completion by the same hand. I now exceedingly regret that I could not twenty-five years ago comply with the earnest request of Dr. William Nast, of blessed memory, to assist him in his projected exegesis of the New Testament, by taking John's Gospel as my part of his work. Perhaps it would have encouraged this venerable German scholar to complete the task which he so nobly began. It was with great pain that in the midst

▼

of work on the Old Testament I was constrained to decline an offer so agreeable to my inclinations. I have used the Revised Version, which embodies the advanced scholarship of our age. Writing for English readers I have avoided the insertion of words in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

It would be useless to enumerate all the exiges from whom I have borrowed ideas and sometimes expressions.

I have had occasion to refer frequently to Bengel's Gnomon, Whedon's Commentary and Wesley's Notes. I have not so often consulted Alford's voluminous Greek Testament. He has lost the key to the First Epistle by his denial that it is aimed at the Docetic errors of Gnosticism. I have made an extensive use of the very valuable work of Dr. A. Plummer in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges. Above all others I have derived help from the model commentary of Bishop Westcott, whose thoroughness in tracing out the use of a word or a form; in comparing phrases often held to be synonymous; in pointing out the emphatic word as indicated by the order in the Greek; and in estimating the force of different tenses of the same verb in regard to the contexts, is little short of a revolution in exegesis. I regard his lifelong work on John's epistles as a faultless example to all exiges, of tireless patience in exhaustive scholarly research and exactness.

Haupt, whom I have also consulted, is remarkable for

divining from John's words his unexpressed thoughts. In this respect he might be truthfully called a mind-reader. But I have been cautious in quoting him, since there are attending the exercise of his peculiar gift tempting fields for a disporting imagination.

It has been well said that the surest way to an earthly immortality is to link your name with God's eternal Word, which is destined to live forever on earth. But God is my witness that this is not the motive of the writing of this book, but rather to elucidate the Holy Scriptures for the benefit of my fellow men. D. S.

MILTON, October 24, 1900.



# INTRODUCTION.

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## 1. LIFE OF ST. JOHN IN OUTLINE.

THE facts relating to this eminent apostle which are recorded in the New Testament are soon told. He was the son, apparently the youngest son, of Zebedee and Salome, the sister of the Virgin Mary, "the mother of the Lord." Hence he was a first cousin to Jesus, the Messiah. There is reason for the widely spread belief that he was the junior of the other apostles, and by reason of his near kinship, his youth and his natural enthusiasm, his intensity of thought, of speech, of insight, and of life, he became the special favorite of our Lord Jesus. Like the other apostles, except Judas, the traitor, John was a Galilean. This fact has a moral value, inasmuch as it separated him from the political intrigues and demoralizing speculations rife in Jerusalem. He retained the simple faith and stern heroism of earlier times. With his brother James he shared the ardor of the Galilean temperament fitly described by the epithet Boaner-

ges, sons of thunder, which their Master early applied to them. From this we understand that they were very effective speakers, swift, startling and vehement in the utterance of the truth like fire shut up in their bones. John regards everything on its divine side. He sees all events, the past and the future, contributing to the manifestation of the sons of God, the sole hope of the world. Of this he had himself been assured by ocular evidence and inward revelation of the Son of God, like that which thrust Paul into the Christian ministry. He could say: "We have seen and do testify." He produced conviction not by labored argument, but by confident affirmation.

## 2. THE OLD AGE OF JOHN THE APOSTLE.

After the ascension of Christ the history of the apostles whom He had trained is left in the utmost obscurity. Except James, who was early killed with the persecutors' sword in Jerusalem, we know not when, or where, or how any of the Eleven died. The Acts of the Apostles briefly speaks of them collectively in its first few chapters, then it drops all except Peter and John. Soon it drops the beloved apostle and describes Peter's career only. Then it takes up the biography of Paul and continues it through the remaining fifteen chapters to his imprisonment, where the narrative abruptly and tantalizingly ends. Ask any ecclesiastical historian to desig-

nate the point where the records of the early church leave him to grope in Egyptian darkness, and he will unhesitatingly put his finger on the period following the end of the Acts of the Apostles, of which Neander says that "we have no information, nor can the total want of sources for this part of church history be at all surprising." Says Dean Farrar, "The facts of the corporate history of the early Christians, and even the closing details in the biographies of their greatest teachers, are plunged in entire uncertainty." Of this period Renan says: "Black darkness falls upon the scene; and a grim and brooding silence, like the silence of an impending storm, holds in hushed expectation of the 'day of the Lord' the awe-struck breathless church. No more books are written; no more messengers are sent; the very voice of tradition is still." We doubt the truth of the last clause. The voice of tradition was not still. It tried to fill the vacuum with its swarms of puerile conjectures and manifest falsehoods. It represents John at Rome reduced to the humble occupation of a fireman tending the furnace fire of a woman's bath-house, and on one occasion immersed in a caldron of boiling oil and handling deadly serpents without bodily harm; and Peter the apostle to the Jews for twenty-five years poaching in Paul's Gentile preserve in Rome, when there is not an atom of Scriptural proof, nor a particle of credible, contemporaneous testimony to this statement to be found in

history, sacred or profane, during the first Christian century. (See *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vols. XV and XVI, "Was Peter in Rome and Bishop of the Church?" for a negative answer which cannot be controverted.) We should be glad to believe the touching and beautiful tradition of John's reclaiming for Christ a convert who had so far apostatized as to become the leader of a band of robbers, but the story lacks a historic basis, as does the story of his hasty exit from a bath, lest the structure should fall upon his head by reason of the presence of the heresiarch, Cerinthus. It was widely believed after his burial that he was not dead, but sleeping in his grave till Christ should come. Tradition alleged that "the dust was stirred by the breath of the saint." This vain tradition was not needed as a fulfilment of Christ's words, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" He did tarry among the living till Christ came. It is impossible for us to realize fully what was involved in the destruction of the Holy City for those who had been trained in Judaism. It was nothing else than the close of a divine drama, an end of the world. The old sanctuary, "the joy of the whole earth," was abandoned. Henceforth the Christian church was the sole appointed seat of the presence of God. When Jerusalem fell—an event most favorable to Christianity—Christ came, and with His coming came also the work of St. John. During the period described by John in the Apocalypse, the

period of conflict and fear and shaking of nations—"things which must shortly come to pass"—before the last catastrophe, St. John had waited patiently, having doubtless fulfilled his filial office to the mother of the Lord in his own home in Galilee unto the end of her earthly sojourn.

### 3. ST. JOHN'S LITERARY ACTIVITY.

His authorship is a striking characteristic of his old age. Sacred scholars now quite generally agree that his first book, the Apocalypse, was written early in the seventh decade of the first century, at about 64 to 67 A. D., describing the events of the following few years ending with the destruction of the Holy City and the subversion of the Jewish polity in A. D. 70. The style is that of one familiar with the Hebrew attempting to write Greek for the first time. There are many deviations from accurate Greek composition. This is one of the proofs that the Revelation is St. John's first essay in the Greek language.

In the tenth decade, at about 96 or 97 A. D., he wrote his Gospel, it is supposed, at the urgent solicitation of his hearers, to whom he had often rehearsed it in his preaching. His style after a residence of probably twenty years in the Greek-speaking city of Antioch is much improved. Though still using Hebrew idioms he writes with grammatical accuracy and simplicity. His Gospel

is rather polemic than narrative. He begins by stating a proposition to be proven—the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thus we have one dogmatic Gospel.

HIS FIRST EPISTLE was written probably in the same year, to meet the error of the denial of the real humanity of Christ through the prevalence of the Gnostic philosophy. Modern Biblical scholars, with the exception of Alford, now believe this to be the purpose of this Epistle, or treatise, as it might be styled. For a more extended account of this philosophy see the note on Gnosticism at the end of the comments on Chapter I.

HIS SECOND EPISTLE, second in arrangement in the New Testament volume, not necessarily in the order of time, is enigmatic in its address. It may have been entitled either “to an elect Lady” or “to the elect Kyria,” or “to Electa Kyria.” The general tenor of the letter inclines us to believe that it was sent not to one believer, but to a community of saints, here metaphorically addressed as a Lady just as elsewhere the church is styled “the Bride of Christ.” It is hortatory rather than doctrinal, and in John’s style, and is filled with his idioms respecting love, the commandments, deceivers and antichrist, Paraclete, darkness, light, life, witness, world and Word.

HIS THIRD EPISTLE has the appearance of a brief, private and confidential note addressed to an individual in some local church, severely denouncing by name a sec-

ond individual and highly naming and highly commending a third. We cannot think that John ever intended that a letter so filled with personalities should be published. But the Providence which presided over the formation of the Holy Scriptures has for some good ends permitted its incorporation into the Sacred Canon. These purposes may have been (1) the inculcation of respect, honor and love for preachers who "for His name's sake" proclaim saving and fundamental truths, and (2) a needful safeguard of the pastor against discouragement because some ambitious brother Longpurse has assumed to dictate who shall be received as members or workers, and who shall be excommunicated, and (3) the need of a general superintendent to commend the humiliated pastor, and to teach such an usurper better manners.

#### 4. THE PLACE WHERE THIS EPISTLE WAS WRITTEN.

There is in the New Testament no hint of John's residence in Ephesus, but there is ample indirect proof of this fact. Christianity from the beginning of its conquest of the world entrenched itself in those great centres of influence, the great cities of the Orient, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Corinth and Rome. Paul found a small society of Christians in Ephesus, and by his years of labor greatly enlarged and strengthened it. The place was of sufficient importance to attract one

of the Twelve to succeed the apostle to the Gentiles. The trade of the Ægean Sea was concentrated in its port. Since Patmos, the place of John's exile, is only a day's sail from Ephesus, "the metropolis of Asia," it is quite probable that this city was the place of his abode both before and after his sojourn on that rugged island; and doubtless he was recalling the scenes he had looked upon in the Ephesian markets when he gave that gorgeous description of the merchandise of Babylon in Rev. xviii. 12, 13, "of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet; and all thyine wood, and every vessel of ivory, and of brass, and iron, and marble; and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle and sheep; and merchandise of horses and chariots and slaves, and souls of men." The last two items intimate the terrible wickedness of the times, especially in great commercial cities. While no contemporary writer testifies to John's residence in Ephesus, there is testimony to this fact by a number of subsequent writers, such as Justin Martyr, probably within fifty years of John's death, Irenæus, Polycrates, Polycarp and Apollonius. We will not multiply witnesses to prove what few, if any, deny.

The church in Ephesus in John's day must have been quite large, since it had enjoyed the labors of Apollos, Paul, Aquila and Priscilla, Trophimus, Timothy and

the family of Onesiphorus. Paul left it well organized under presbyters, whom he afterwards addressed at Miletus. Such was the environment of John in his last days. For the splendor and magnificence of idolatry in Ephesus see our note on the last words of this Epistle, "Guard yourselves from idols."

5. THE RELATION OF THE EPISTLES TO THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

The relation of the First Epistle to the Fourth Gospel is that of an application to a sermon, or that of a comment to a history. The Epistle presupposes that the persons addressed possessed a knowledge of the Gospel communicated either by John's voice or his pen. The Gospel is a summary of his sermons to audiences ignorant of the facts and truths of Christianity. The First Epistle is a summary of his exhortations to believers to practise the precepts of Christ stated in such a way as to guard them against the evils of religious error. There are numerous and manifest resemblances, both in the thought and the form, between this Epistle and the Gospel of John. There are also striking differences. The theme of the Gospel, clearly and concisely stated in the first verse, is the supreme divinity (doxa) of the Logos, who "was with God," hence distinct in personality, and who "was God," being identical with Him in nature. The burden of the Epistle is the real and perfect humanity

(sarx) of Jesus Christ announced in its opening sentence, which appeals to three of the five senses, in proof that he was not a phantom, but a man composed of flesh, blood and bones,—a veritable man, the God-man. It has been well said that the proposition demonstrated in the evangel is “Jesus is the Christ,” and that proved in the Letter is “the Christ is Jesus.” In the latter case the apostle presses his argument from the divine to the human, from the spiritual and ideal to the historical, the natural position of an evangelist and historian; in the former the writer argues from the human to the divine, from the historical to the ideal and spiritual, which is the natural position of the preacher.

With respect to the doctrine of the last things there is this fundamental difference: “In the Gospel the doctrine of the ‘coming’ of the Lord (xxi. 22, xvi. 3) and of ‘the last day’ (vi. 40, 44) and of ‘the judgment’ (v. 28, 29), are touched upon generally. In the Epistle the ‘manifestation’ of Christ (ii. 28) and His ‘presence’ stand out as clear facts in the history of the world. He comes, even as he came ‘in flesh’ (2 John 7); and ‘antichrists’ precede his coming (1 John ii. 18, 19).” (Bishop Westcott.)

Still more full and distinct in the Epistle than in the Gospel is the doctrine of the atonement. This is in harmony with the general law of the progress of doctrine in the New Testament that doctrines which are in germ

form in the Gospels are fully developed in the Epistles of Paul and the other apostles. For an extended exhibition of the doctrine of atonement see concluding note to chapter fifth.

Another difference exists in the fact that the Lord's words are in the First Epistle moulded by His disciple into aphorisms, their historic setting having entirely vanished. The Epistle is generally direct, abstract and destitute of rhetorical imagery. There is also what Bishop Westcott styles "a decisive difference in the atmosphere of the two books. The Epistle deals freely with the truths of the Gospel in direct conflict with the characteristic perils of his own time; in the Gospel he lives again in the presence of Christ and of the immediate enemies of Christ, while he brings out the universal significance of events and teachings not fully understood at the time."

The similarity of the Epistle and the Gospel and their dissimilarity also will be seen when we study a passage in each containing the same fundamental truth: "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." (John xvii. 3.) Here eternal life is the progressive recognition of God through an increasing knowledge of His Son. The Gospel gives the historic revelation of God. But the Epistle goes further, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him

that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." (1 John v. 20.) Here we have the revelation as it has been apprehended in the life of the individual believer and of the church through the vitalizing power of the great gift of the risen Christ, the Holy Spirit, first in regeneration and secondly in perfect love.

Nearly all the versions make a difference between the meaning of Paraclete in the Gospel and in the Epistle. John is the only Scriptural writer who uses this Greek word. It occurs four times in the Gospel and is translated "Comforter," from a Latin word signifying strengthener. But the best Greek scholars insist that the form of the word indicates a passive meaning, "the near called one," or the one "called to" our aid. The word "advocate" from the Latin "ad," to, and "voco," to call, is the exact equivalent of Paraclete, from "para," to, and "kaleo," to call. "Advocate" is the rendering in 1 John ii. 1, as it also should be rendered in all places in the Gospel.

The classical use of "paraclete" in this passive sense is beyond all dispute. If the term were uniformly translated "advocate" we would ever make prominent the beautiful and affecting idea that the Holy Spirit advocates God's cause with us below, and the ascended Christ pleads our cause with God above.

**6. PURPOSE AND HISTORICAL SETTING.**

In the estimation of deeply spiritual minds the First Epistle of John holds the highest place in that series of inspired writings which constitute the Bible. In the order of divine revelations it is probably the last. It may very properly be regarded as the interpreter of the whole series. It not only awakens the highest hopes of the believer, but it also confirms and satisfies them by showing our privilege of fellowship with the choicest spirits on the earth and our cloudless and continuous communion with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit given to all who here and now unwaveringly trust in our risen Saviour and Lord. The Epistle furnishes a lofty ideal of that Christian society or brotherhood called the Church, and it insists that its present realization is a glorious possibility. If the love of God and man which flames throughout this book were burning brightly—not smouldering—in the heart of every professor of faith in Christ, all secular sodalities would lose their attraction, disintegrate and disappear before the superior magnetism of the Bride of Christ, the Church.

While in all versions of the New Testament this product of John's pen is called an epistle, it has no characteristics of an epistle. It has no date, no place of writing, no address, no salutation, no subscription, no trace of the author except by inference and no hint of any special destination. Yet it is brimful and running over with

personal feeling such as would characterize a large and warm heart of a retired, aged pastor writing a farewell, pastoral address to his beloved flock exposed to destructive errors. It is commonly believed that this Epistle and the Fourth Gospel were written at the same time, or nearly the same, in the last decade of the first century, probably at Ephesus, after the destruction of Jerusalem. The tone of it is not dread of the hostility of the world, but of its seductions. The historical setting of this book must have been when the battles between the law and the gospel had already become ancient history. But the still more vital question was pressing for an answer—the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some took the advanced, liberalistic view of to-day, that our God-man had no valid claim to supreme divinity, that He was a mere man, while others admitting His Godhead, denied the reality of His humanity and pronounced Him a mere phantom, that He only seemed to be a man with a material organism. These were called the *Docetæ* or seemers. Still another class, Cerinthus and his followers, supposed that Jesus had two human parents and was a common man till His baptism, when the divinity was united with Him in so loose a way that it left Him before He died. John living to see the time when both the divinity and the humanity of his Master were publicly denied, wrote the Fourth Gospel to meet the first error, and this pastoral address to counteract the second. To

protect the church against these deadly errors, John does not directly assail them by name, but he indirectly meets them by unfolding the truth respecting Christ's person and mission. He does not formally construct an argument, but rather announces the truths intuitively seen and felt. He repeats with emphasis that the Son of God *came in the flesh*. This is the key of this Epistle. John shows that the bottom drops out of Christianity if Christ's body was not real. The outcome would be a phantom Saviour, nailed to a sham cross, dying only a seeming death, and then rising from the dead only in appearance.

No wonder that John should declare that the denial of the Incarnate Son amounts to a denial of the Father.

In modern times we have substantially the same errors to combat. Realism in philosophy reduces Christianity to mere humanitarianism, while idealism, such as the so-called Christian Science, when applied to the incarnation, makes it a mere seeming. Thus the corner stone of the Christian evidences, the resurrection of Christ, is undermined, while the central Christian doctrine, the atonement, on which all the hopes of the penitent believer are built, evaporates in thin air, because there was no real body to suffer and die. In addition to these pernicious errors which would subvert fundamentals, we in modern times must oppose a most deadly perversion of a passage in this very Epistle making the saintly John

teach the monstrous contradiction that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, but if any testifies to the experience of such a perfect riddance of sin, he deceives himself and the truth is not in him. Thus John, who writes this pastoral address, "that ye sin not," is made to plead for continuance in sin and to rate as deceived, if not deceivers, all teachers of the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life and all professors of its blessed experience.

To present a harmonious interpretation of the First Epistle of John is our purpose, in order that it may realize the aim of the beloved apostle, the promotion of Christian holiness on the earth.

#### 7. OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE.

It is exceedingly difficult to analyze the Epistle and discover the author's plan. Some scholars think that he had no clear and systematic arrangement of his ideas when he began to write. They assert that it is "an unmethodized effusion of the pious sentiments and reflections of a prattling old man." Even so keen an intellect as Calvin's found it impossible to find any distinct lines of cleavage in what he regarded as a confused compound of doctrine and exhortation. But modern scholars, deeming this opinion derogatory to this great apostle, have set about the work of discovering the subtle links of thought which constitute divisions into orderly

parts. They do not announce the result of their labors with much confidence, but admit that the transitions from one section of the subject to another, even in the main divisions, are very gradual, "like the changes in dissolving views." Few writers have been perfectly satisfied with the plan (of the Epistle) which they profess to have discovered; and still fewer have satisfied their readers. It is like finding exact boundaries between the constellations. But most students will agree that it is better to read the Epistle with some scheme which is tolerably correct than without the guidance of any.

Finding a superior scheme already prepared, I have thought it best to borrow it, with the slight addition of the bracketed words, to indicate pre-Christian sins.

Plan of Dr. A. Plummer in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges:

#### 1-4. INTRODUCTION.

1. The subject-matter of the Gospel employed in the Epistle (i. 1-3).
2. The purpose of the Epistle (i. 4).

#### i. 5-ii. 28. GOD IS LIGHT.

##### a. 1. 5-ii. 11. **What Walking in the Light involves: the Condition and Conduct of the Believer.**

1. Fellowship with God and with the Brethren (i. 5-7)
2. Consciousness and confession of sin [committed before forgiveness] (i. 8-10).
3. Obedience to God by Imitation of Christ (ii. 1-6).
4. Love of the Brethren (ii. 7-11).

**b. ii. 12-28. What Walking in the Light excludes: the Things and Persons to be avoided.**

1. Three-fold Statement of Reasons for Writing (ii. 12-14).
2. Things to be avoided: the World and its Ways (ii. 15-17).
3. Persons to be avoided: Antichrists (ii. 18-26).
4. [Transitional.] The Place of Safety: Christ (ii. 27, 28)

**ii. 29-v. 12. GOD IS LOVE.**

**c. ii. 29-iii. 24. The Evidence of Sonship: Deeds of Righteousness before God.**

1. The Children of God and the Children of the Devil (ii. 29-iii. 12).
2. Love and Hate: Life and Death (iii. 13-24).

**d. iv. 1-v. 12. The Sources of Sonship: Possession of the Spirit as shown by Confession of the Incarnation.**

1. The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error (iv. 1-6).
2. Love is the Mark of the Children of Him who is Love (iv. 7-21).
3. Faith is the Source of Love, the Victory over the World, and the Possession of Life (v. 1-12).

**v. 13-21. CONCLUSION.**

1. Intercessory Love the Fruit of Faith (v. 13-17).
2. The Sum of the Christian's Knowledge (v. 18-20).
3. Final Injunction (v. 21).

As a key to this plan we are to consider that the confession and conscious pardon of sin and obedience to God are necessary to fellowship with God and love to Him and to the brethren which excludes love of the world.

This is passing away, as is shown by the appearance of antichrists. Abiding in Christ insures against passing away. The words "begotten of God" suggest the sonship of believers, implying mutual love, and the indwelling of Christ to which the spirit testifies. The mention of spirit suggests that there are bad spirits which must be distinguished from the good. The topic of mutual love suggests faith as its original source, especially as shown in intercessory prayer. The whole closes with a summary of the knowledge on which the ethics of the Epistle is based and with a caveat against idolatry.

#### 8. RHETORICAL STYLE.

The most marked feature of the style is the constant occurrence of moral and spiritual antitheses, each thought has its opposite, each affirmative its negative; light and darkness, life and death, love and hate, truth and falsehood, children of God and children of the devil, sin unto death and sin not unto death, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, love of the Father and love of the world.

#### 9. THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL VALUE.

The Epistle is not a designed compendium of systematic theology or handbook of Christian doctrine for catechetical training, being written not for the instruction of the ignorant, but expressly for those who "know

the truth." Yet "in no other book in the Bible are so many cardinal doctrines touched with so firm a hand." No other book gives a formal definition of sin, and none so often alludes to the atonement in the blood of Christ presented in its various phases, no other so magnifies love and identifies it with the divine essence, and no other so distinctly teaches Christian perfection attainable by all believers who here and now claim their full heritage in Christ, perfect love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. John writes as if conscious that he is writing the last statement of Christian truth in epistolary form, just as he had written the last of the Gospels. "Each point is laid before us with the awe-inspiring solemnity of one who writes under the profound conviction that 'it is the last hour.' None but an apostle, perhaps none but the last surviving apostle, could have such magisterial authority in the utterance of Christian truth. Every sentence seems to tell of the conscious authority and resistless, though unexerted, strength of one who has 'seen, and heard, and handled the Eternal Word, and who knows that his witness is true.'"

# HALF-HOURS WITH JOHN'S EPISTLES.

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## FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### PRELIMINARY NOTE.

THE words which open this First Epistle of St. John—an appeal to three of the five senses in proof of the reality of Christ's body—show that it turns upon the Person of the Son of God incarnate. But why was the reality of Christ's humanity so stoutly denied? It was necessary in order to meet the demands of the false philosophy which some Christians had adopted in order to harmonize that doctrine with the sinlessness of the man Jesus Christ. Dualism asserts the existence of two gods or two original principles, one good and the other evil, one spirit and the other matter; spirit being perfectly holy, and matter incorrigibly evil, only evil and that continually and forever. Spirit can never become unholy because there can be no real contact, no mixture with matter. The spirits of sensual, gluttonous, licentious and drunken men are perfectly free from moral evil which can exist in the body only. Hence there is no need of an atonement for the real self, the spirit in man. The

moral leprosy touched only the body, the envelope of the spirit. A golden jewel may be encompassed for years in the filth of a pigsty without the least defilement from its environment. It would still be pure gold. This was the favorite illustration of this philosophy. The moral effect of such teaching may be easily imagined when professing Christians could consort with harlots and claim fellowship with God, have their bodies filled with the spirit of wine and their souls filled with the Spirit Divine. The ethics of the Gospel would have been totally subverted if this pernicious teaching had prevailed. John realized the greatness of the impending ruin and assailed it in this pastoral address.

When the heresy arose that sin exists only in the material organism, and the spirit which acts through it is perfectly pure and always must be, the orthodox disciples under the leadership of John opposed this false doctrine imported from the pagan Orient. One of their arguments was that it denied the sinlessness of Jesus Christ who had a material body. His sinfulness must follow if matter is always evil. The Dualists, who are also called Gnostics, evaded this necessary inference by denying the reality of Christ's body. They boldly asserted that he was a phantom, like the various theophanies, or appearances of God, in human form in the Old Testament. In other words, the incarnation was a sham. This removes the corner stone of Christian theology,

1. That which was from the beginning, that which we have

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Christ's mediatorship, for He was in no sense human; His atonement in His own blood was an illusion, since He had only the appearance of death; and His resurrection must be unreal, if He died only in appearance. Hence the whole controversy of John with the Dualists was centred in the question, was the body of Jesus real flesh and bones? This accounts for the emphasis John so often in this Epistle puts upon believing on "Christ come in the flesh." This accounts for the very first words of the Epistle which contain the theme which John proposes to amplify, namely, the real humanity of his divine Master, just as he states the proposition to be proved by his Gospel, namely, the Supreme Divinity of the Son of God, the Logos, who was with God, and thus distinct in personality, and who was God, being one in nature. We have one dogmatic Gospel and one polemic Epistle, both by the same author, and both announcing their subject in the first sentence of their treatises.

To put the purpose of each in an epigrammatic form the theme of the Gospel is, Jesus is the Christ; *i. e.*, very God; the theme of the Epistle is, the Christ is Jesus; *i. e.*, very Man.

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1. The subject-matter of the Gospel employed in the Epistle (i. 1-3).
  2. The purpose of the Epistle (i. 4).
1. "From the beginning." As in John i. 1, before

heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life

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the world was. But in ii. 7, 13, 14, iii. 11, it signifies from the commencement of preaching the Gospel.

The first verse of the Epistle declares the reality of Christ's body, as attested by all the special senses which in the nature of the case can be applied. Taste and smell are not related to this demonstration. But the eyes, the ears and the hands are summoned as witnesses in proof that the important witness is emphasized by the use of two verbs, that which we have seen with our eyes and continuously, calmly and intently "contemplated" or surveyed. The phrase "with our eyes" is not redundant, for it accentuates the direct, outward experience of a matter so marvellous in itself and in its basal relation to vital Christian truths. It was no mere trance or vision of the soul alone. "Your eyes have seen" is the formula for assured certitude in Deut. iii. 21, xi. 7, xxi. 7.

"Our hands handled." Referring to the challenge of Christ, after His resurrection, in John xx. 27, and Luke xxiv. 39. "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." This is the only intimation of the resurrection of Jesus found in this Epistle. Handling marks the solid ground of the apostolic knowledge, says Theophylact, "we have not given our assent to a mere momentary chance vision,"

2. (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear

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“The Word of life.” The Logos (John i. 1), the whole Gospel revelation of God to man in the Person and teaching of His Son in the flesh. The sum of God’s message is that life, spiritual and eternal, is in His Son and in all who perseveringly keep their union with Him by faith. See v. 13. This life is not bare existence, as the annihilationists contend. It is not mere being, but well-being, fellowship with God and with man in God, through faith in Jesus Christ the embodied ideal of life made visible. Compare 1 John v. 11, 12, 20; Rom. v. 10, vi. 23; 2 Cor. iv. 10; Col. iii. 4; 2 Tim. i. 1. “I am the resurrection and the life,” John xi. 25. See also John vi. 57, xiv. 6, 19. But the strongest self-assertion of Christ that He is not only the bearer of life, but its independent source, is found in John v. 26, “For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son also to have life in Himself.” As having anything in one’s self precludes the causality of another, we are justified in the declaration that the Son is not merely the channel of life, but its independent, coördinate source. He is the self-dependent principle of a creative spiritual life. Life is Christ’s immanent spiritual possession.

2. “Was manifested.” The Son of God in three ways is made known as “the life,” as His first coming was manifested, 1 John i. 2-9; after His resurrection, when

witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us);

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He breathed on His disciples and imparted the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life (John xx. 22); and at His second coming (1 John ii. 28), when as the judge He will reward the righteous with eternal life. (Matt. xxv. 46.)

“We have seen.” Personal experience. “Bear witness.” Responsible affirmation.

“And declare.” Authoritative and dogmatic announcement. This is the logical order in which the Gospel of Christ will conquer the world.

“The eternal life.” This special gift of Christ to believers—eternal felicity—is not to be confounded with an unending continuance in Heb. vii. 16. “Eternal life,” found in the Old Testament only once (Dan. xii. 2), is eminently a New Testament phrase, occurring forty-three times.

“The Father.” This simple title is always used with reference to the Son. “The simplest conception of God having a moral character, essentially love, includes an object loved from eternity, before the creation of any being. The person loved—for the proper object of love is a person—not being a creature must be divine. Hence the title, “the Father,” on the lips of Him who shared God’s glory and love before the world was implies more than one person in the unity of the divine nature.

3. that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ:

4. and these things we write, that our joy may be fulfilled.

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3. "We announce unto you also." The reception of a revelation from God, outward in the form of a book, or inward in a joyful experience of love revealed and perfect, lays us under the obligation to publish it as widely as possible. There is no copyright or patent right to the blessedness of the Gospel. It is diffusive in its nature. It will not abide with him who seeks its exclusive possession. It evaporates if monopolized.

"Fellowship." The conscious realization of harmony with God and of communion with Him and conformity to His moral attributes. What the twelve apostles gained in outward intercourse with Christ, John desires that we may enjoy to the uttermost, by an inward and spiritual apprehension of the invisible and glorified Saviour.

"With the Father and the Son." Such coördination implies sameness of essence in these two Persons. Moreover fellowship with the Father is involved in fellowship with the Son. "He that hath the Son hath the Father."

4. "That our joy may be full." The Revision and most of the critics read "our joy." No believer's joy is complete till he has declared to others his faith in Christ. Mute Christians have imperfect joy. John gives two

5. And this is the message which we have heard from him, and

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recipes for fulness of joy. The first is, "Ask and ye shall receive" (John xvi. 24), and the second is the confession of Christ's power to save. Neither Christ nor John taught the popular modern doctrine of indifference to feelings—that we must tie down the safety-valve of our sensibilities and choke down our hallelujahs.

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1. 5-II. 28. GOD IS LIGHT.

a. 1. 5-II. 11. **What Walking in the Light Involves: the Condition and Conduct of the Believer.**

1. Fellowship with God and with the Brethren (i. 5-7).
2. Consciousness and confession of sin [committed before forgiveness] (i. 8-10).
3. Obedience to God by Imitation of Christ (ii. 1-6).
4. Love of the Brethren (ii. 7-11).

5. "This is the message." The revelation of God's moral character, which must be known before we can be assimilated to its beauty and purity. Harmony must rest on a mutual knowledge and a moral likeness and sympathy. This constitutes true spiritual fellowship. The incarnation brings God to the knowledge of men. The work of the Spirit in the believer conforms him to the image of God revealed in Christ.

"God is light." Absolutely pure and self-communicating from His very nature, like the sun in the heavens. The holiness of God and the implied obligation of men to be like Him is the underlying truth of the Gospel mes-

announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

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sage, and the theme of the preacher. No moral evil is in Him. Here in the words "light" and "darkness" we have a strong proof that John is opposing Zoroastrian dualism which identified light and spirit with moral goodness, and darkness and matter with moral evil, both principles being self-existent and from eternity. The announcement of God's character is not a discovery of human genius, but a personal revelation. Only in this way can man know God. The reception of this revelation requires faith, without which man is an agnostic, without God, or, as Paul says, "atheos, an atheist in the world." This atheism, under the full light of the New Testament, has not an intellectual, but a moral cause. Against the requirement to become like God the depraved will rebels. This voluntary moral element in unbelief renders it culpable. Every revelation of God's nature enjoins a duty. "God is spirit," therefore we must worship Him in spirit. "God is love," therefore we must have love as a proof that we are His children, *i. e.*, to show that we are facsimiles of God. "God is light," therefore we must walk in the light or be ensphered in holiness. But there is a great temptation to profess a likeness to God when there is no such similarity to his moral character. This temptation takes on a three-fold

form: (1.) To say we have fellowship with the Light and walk in darkness, or sin. (2.) To say, "We have no sin," no guilt needing atonement. (3.) To say we have not sinned, making God a liar and evincing that His truth is not in us. In these three cases John considers three classes of spurious professors of Christianity. Says Bishop Westcott, "In doing this he unites himself with those whom he addresses; and recognizes the fact that he no less than his fellow-Christians has to guard against the temptations to which the three types of false doctrine correspond." The words quoted afford no foundation to the grave error of Dean Alford, who, because John says, "if we," says, "This state of needing cleansing from all present sin is veritably that of all of us; and that our recognition and confession of it is the very essential of walking in the light." But if such a genuine case of confession followed by walking in the light should occur, and the person thus walking in the light should declare this fact for the benefit of those stumbling in the dark, our logical dean must insist that this victorious soul is deceived and the truth is not in him. He must also aver that the saintly John, while penning these words, could not truthfully say that he was walking in the light and that he had no present guilt. That exegesis of "we," in these three hypothetical sentences, which declares that it refers not to false professors but to real Christians living at their spiritual

6. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

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climax in this world, makes John the most self-contradictory writer to be found in the whole range of secular and sacred literature. For he declares the purpose of his writing to be "that ye sin not" once (aorist tense), and "that he that is born of God does not sin." Then he is made to say that all who obey God's prohibition and by grace abstain from sin and say so, should be branded as deluded or lying, or both duped and duping. But we have not finished the chapter of contradictions involved in the erroneous interpretation of "we."

6. "Walk in darkness." Ensphere ourselves in darkness or sin by our own choice. Such persons seek to hide those acts which their consciences condemn from themselves, from their fellow men and from God. (See John iii. 19, 20.) Religious fanatics in all ages have endeavored to combine loose morals with the possession of true Christian faith. It seems that John found such persons among the Gnostics in the church at Ephesus. He says that they lie and do not the truth. They affirm what they know to be positively false when they profess fellowship with the holy God and are wilfully choosing darkness and sin. (See James iii. 14.) Such a choice is fatal to fellowship with God.

7. but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

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7. "Walk in the light." By believing on Him who is the light we become "sons of light" and "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," having become ourselves "light in the Lord." (John xii. 36; Luke xvi. 8; Eph. v. 8; Col. i. 12; 1 Thess. v. 5.) This choice of light as the sphere of life is a state of justification. They who are in this state and they only are candidates for perfect cleansing from all sin. "This," says Haupt, "must not be understood of forgiveness of sins past, but of sanctification," *i. e.*, initial sanctification in the new birth. To say that this cleansing is a judicial clearance from the guilt of sin, is to deny that God "justifies the ungodly" and to set up rectitude of previous life as the condition of pardon as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. On this ground no sinner can be forgiven. Good works instead of trust in Christ cannot save, but good works as the fruit of faith are well pleasing to God. The present tense "cleanseth" here denotes continuousness, not on one individual, but on the human family, one after another being wholly purified, as in Rom. iii. 24, one after another is instantaneously justified. When one leper is cleansed as in Matt. viii. 3, the aorist tense is used, but when many in succession are to be cleansed as in Matt. x. 8, the present tense is used.

8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

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8. "If we say we have no sin." "Because," said the Gnostics, "sin never defiles the soul but the body only, and hence we need no cleansing, having in our spirits no sin to be cleansed from." Bengel, Bishop B. F. Westcott, and others have noted that the phrase, "to have sin," is found only in John's writings (John ix. 41, xv. 22, 24, xix. 11), and that it expresses guilt. "To have sin" is distinguished from "to sin" as the sinful principle is distinguished from the sinful act in itself. It includes the idea of "personal guilt." If the pronoun "we," as many affirm, in the conditional clause, "if we say we have no sin," means all genuine Christians including the author of this Epistle, we must impeach the truthfulness of Paul when he declares respecting the justified soul, "There is therefore now no condemnation;" for condemnation is inseparable from "guilt" involved in John's idiomatic phrase "to have sin." We must impeach John as well as Paul, for he says, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. If guilt still remains for future ineffectual cleansing till physical death, it follows that John's words are untrue so far as this present life is concerned, and there is no deliverance from guilt in this world, and the only holy persons on earth are in the graveyard. We must also impeach truth, the heavenly maiden. "The truth shall make you

free" from guilt and its penalty. And finally we must either put some new interpretation upon the words of the infallible Teacher himself, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed," from the guilt of sin and the love of sin, or we must say that they have no relation to man's deepest present need. Such are some of the irresistible inferences from the interpretation of "we" as including all Christians in their present character after grace has done its best to purify them. To whom does John refer? To the dualists or agnostics in the church who imagined that their spirits were untouched of sin which inheres in matter only and cannot stain the soul. It belongs to the body and will perish with the body in the grave. These people were indulging in the grossest sensual sins—gluttony, drunkenness, sodomy, fornication and adultery—and were professing to walk in the light, to have fellowship with the holy God, to have no guilt upon their souls and hence no need of the blood of Christ. John in defence of the truth deals faithfully with these men either deluded by their false philosophy or downright liars wilfully maligning the Gospel. Many religious teachers who discard the Gnostic philosophy as a system retain its essence in the idea that there is impurity in the body which divine power cannot expel without the aid of death. Hence they oppose the doctrine of entire sanctification in this life as rank fanaticism, forgetful of the

9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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scripture that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound" and "that ye may know the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe." (See notes on verses 5, 6, 7, and concluding note 5, at the end of Chapter I, and Chapter II, concluding note.)

9. "Confess our sins." To God and to men when the sins have been in public, and to individuals when they have been wronged by our evil deeds. It is not necessary to confess publicly grossly shameful acts. Confession must be attended by an eternal abandonment of sin. Restitution when it is possible characterizes genuine confession. Confession implies repentance, a word not found in this Epistle nor in the Fourth Gospel. For this reason some teach that it is not required but faith only. But evangelical faith is possible only for a truly penitent and contrite soul.

"He is faithful." Not fickle, capricious and arbitrary, but immutable in the principles of his moral government. He can always be depended upon. His word is as good as his oath.

"And righteous to forgive us our sins." To render what is due from one to another is the essence of righteousness. Under the atonement it is due to the Son of God that his Father should forgive all who sue for pardon in His name. It is true that mercy is at the

10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

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bottom of the atonement, so that the righteousness of God in forgiveness is removed but a step from mercy.

“And cleanse from all unrighteousness.” The character is purified after the past sins have been forgiven, as a definite momentary act in the mind of God. The cleansing in its completion is also a definite work instantaneously wrought by the Holy Spirit in the believer. It is to be noted that both “forgive” and “cleanse” are in that tense which denotes not a continuous, but a decisive, single act. Says Alford, “In verse 9 ‘to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ is plainly distinguished from ‘to forgive us our sins;’ distinguished as a further process; as, in a word, sanctification, distinct from justification. The two verbs are aorists, because the purpose of the faithfulness and justice of God is to do each as one great complex act—to justify and to sanctify wholly and entirely.” He says, “to do,” not both, but “each” as one great act. This is what the Wesleys discovered in 1737 “that men are justified before they are sanctified.” Again, justification is a work done for us, and entire cleansing is a work wrought in us.

10. “If we say we have not sinned.” This verse elucidates verse 8, showing that sins before the new birth are spoken of in both passages and not the daily sins of

believers, if such a phrase is not a self-contradiction. The Gnostic professed Christians absolutely denied the fact of past sin. Hence, if they denied past sinful acts, they could deny that they had sin. To have no sin refers to a sinful state. The whole context shows that both these verses described refer to sins before the experience of regeneration or to those who had in heart so far backslidden as to lose their sonship to God by ceasing to bear His moral likeness.

“We make him a liar.” It is manifest that John does not include himself in this word “we,” but that he means “any one” or “he who.” John uses the editorial “we,” as James does in James iii. 1-3, 9, wherein he does not mean that he personally is guilty of moral “offences,” nor that he is a horse trainer, nor that he blesses God and at the same time curses men, nor that he should “receive the greater condemnation.”

“His word is not in us.” John and faithful Christians are not included in “us.” What John does mean is that God’s word is not in any man who makes him a liar by denying that he never did sin, since God has said that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

#### CONCLUDING NOTES.

1. The Fatherhood of God and the sonship of men.

In verse 2 God is spoken of as “the Father.” (1.) The Old Testament conception of Fatherhood is national.

"Israel is my son, even my first born." (Ex. iv. 22, 23.) The relationship is still national, not personal, when God addresses the Hebrew king, the representative head of the nation, thus: "Thou art my son, this day (of solemn consecration) I have begotten thee." (Ps. ii. 7.) The individual Israelite did not dare to call himself a son of God. The Jews were shocked at what they deemed blasphemy when Jesus called himself the Son of God, and they took up stones to stone him. (2.) The Gentile idea of sonship is purely physical. Homer calls Zeus or Jupiter, "father of gods and men." To this physical conception Paul alludes on Mars Hill when he quotes a Greek poet as saying, "For we are also his offspring." (3.) But in the Gospels and Epistles the conception of sonship is spiritual and personal, being limited to those only who have been born from above, born of the Spirit. To such has the Son of God given the right, the privilege, the prerogative "to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John i. 12.) Spiritual sonship relates to confidence, obedience, love, holiness and a predominant similarity of moral character, hating what He hates and loving what He loves. There is nothing saving in either national or physical sonship. It must be personal and spiritual: "Ye must be born again." The denial of this is the taproot of modern liberalism, which rejects those Scriptures which teach that the wicked are children of the devil.

(Matt. xiii. 38; John viii. 44; Acts xiii. 10; 1 John iii. 10.)

2. "The blood of Jesus Christ" "brings about that real sinlessness which is essential to union with God" (Bishop Westcott), who also says "the question is not of justification, but of sanctification." As ritual purity was required of all who would approach to God under the old covenant, so moral cleanness of conscience through the blood of Christ is required of all who would serve the living God in New Testament times. (Eph. v. 26, 27; Tit. ii. 14; Heb. ix. 13, 14, 22-24.) Two distinct ideas were included in the sacrifice of a victim on the Jewish altar, the death of the animal, and the liberation of the life so as to become available for the offerer. Thus the blood of Christ represents His life as rendered in free self-sacrifice to God for men, and also as brought into fellowship with God after being set free by death. The blood of Christ is, as shed, the life of Christ given for all men, but as applied, it becomes the life of those only who by believing on Him are incorporated "in Christ." Participation in His blood is sharing His life. (John vi. 53-56.) The following texts have predominant reference to justification: Acts xx. 28; Rom. v. 9; Eph. i. 7, ii. 13; Col. i. 20; Heb. ix. 14, x. 19, xii. 24; 1 Pet. i. 2, 18. The two elements, Christ's death, the blood shed, and Christ's life set free, the blood offered, are clearly indicated in the double cure in verse 9. God is faithful

and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, *i. e.*, to make holy and keep holy.

3. "Self-deception." Says Haupt: "The word 'deceive' used by John in verse 8 occurs in no other document of the New Testament so often as in the Apocalypse. But in all the passages it is employed with a very definitely stamped meaning, never for mere error with express limitations as such, but always for fundamental departure from the truth. It occurs concerning the artifices of Satan, of antichrist, of the beast, and once of the false teachers in Thyatira (Rev. ii. 20), whose work, however, is expressly marked by its signs as fundamental deception." It is employed in the same sense when the natural, unregenerate man declares, under the hallucination of Gnostic error, that he has no sin to be washed away and no need of the atonement in the blood of the Son of God.

Haupt calls attention to the correspondence of verse 8 with verse 6 and verse 9 with verse 7. "If the cleansing from sin is an essential of our walking in light, so the denial of its necessity is a token of being in darkness." Dark and desperate, indeed, must be the condition of that hardened sinner who, under the delusion of false philosophy, can declare that he has no consciousness of sin.

4. "Gnosticism." Its name is Grecian (*gnosis*), but

its origin is Asiatic. It is difficult to define this heresy. It is a conglomerate. Arising in the East, it rolled westward, incorporating into itself both Hebrew and Grecian elements. It is not a proper philosophy, a patient collection and study of facts. It ignores facts when, after the manner of all the Greek philosophies, it assumes a theory by an effort of the imagination and in *a priori* style arrives at fanciful conclusions, instead of patiently accumulating and studying facts and reasoning backward *a posteriori* to the fundamental principles. "While professing to have no hostility to the Gospel, Gnosticism proved one of the subtlest and most dangerous enemies which it has ever encountered. On the plea of interpreting Christian doctrines from a higher standpoint, it really disintegrated and demolished them; in explaining them, it explained them away. With the promise of giving the Gospel a broader and more catholic basis, it cut away the very foundations on which it rested—the reality of sin, and the reality of redemption." It is a series of imaginative speculations respecting the origin of the universe and its relation to the Supreme Being. Its idea of the sinfulness of man's physical organism still clings to a large section of Protestantism and is the doctrinal ground of their hostility to perfect holiness as a present experience. In addition to the utter and incurable evil of the material universe, the second element

of Gnosticism was esoteric knowledge. This was regarded as the main thing, and indeed, the only requisite to Christianity of the highest type. Hence the advocates of this error felt much flattered by the name, Gnostic, a knowing one, as some modern sceptics are pleased to style themselves Agnostics, ignoramuses. Their pride of knowledge was exceedingly offensive, making them supercilious and contemptuous toward the unlearned mass of believers in Christ within the reach of whose humble intellectual powers were the facts, truths and moral precepts of his Gospel. This explains Paul's declaration that "knowledge puffeth up," for even as early as his day the Gnostic microbe was in the very air of Palestine and Asia Minor. In the estimation of these brain worshippers spiritual excellence did not consist in a holy life, but in being initiated into the mysteries of this esoteric knowledge and in belonging to the high caste of intellects who "knew the depths" and could say in a self-gratulatory style, "This is profound." They not only placed knowledge above virtue, but they knew that the moral code which ordinary believers understood literally was to be so transcendently and vaguely interpreted as to mean little or nothing. They insisted that the benefits of revelation were the exclusive privilege of a select band of philosophers, because they alone had the key to the true meaning of the Scriptures. John

was in strong sympathy with the common people whom, in his old age, he called "my little children." It was his love for them that prompted the epithets liar, deceiver and children of the devil when speaking of this unnamed and arrogant set of disturbers and corrupters of the church of Christ.

The moral effects of this doctrine were indeed deplorable. Sin existed only in the body while the soul was perfectly holy, hence all kinds of sin could be committed with impunity. The golden jewel in the dung-hill was not defiled. Thus was it with the soul of the glutton, the drunkard, and the adulterer. None of these needed cleansing, for the spirit, the real personality, was sinless.

5. "The law of non-contradiction." This is one of the fixed and cardinal rules of interpretation. The words of an author must be so explained as not to make him contradict himself in the same letter, the same page, the same paragraph. Some understand John to say that every Christian has sin in the sense of guilt in verse 8. But this contradicts: (1.) The preceding sentence, the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth from all sin. If he has sin he is not cleansed from it. If he is cleansed from sin and gives Christ the glory by declaring his deliverance he deceives himself and the truth is not in him. An infallible cure for pulmonary disease is advertised. If the healed consumptive testifies to his cure, do not

believe him for he is a liar. This is a jumble of contradictions into which this erroneous interpretation leads.

(2.) It contradicts the design of this Epistle—"that ye sin not." If divine grace is unable to lift a soul out of the miry pit of sin, and keep him out, by establishing his goings farther and farther away from this bottomless quagmire, why does a man wise enough to be one of the twelve apostles deliberately sit down to perform an impossibility?

(3.) It contradicts the whole tenor of this Epistle as found in numerous declarations scattered from beginning to end. In verse 9 we are cheered by the assurance of the double cure, "forgiveness of sins and cleansing from all unrighteousness."

In ii. 3, 5 there is implied the possibility of keeping continuously God's commands which exclude every sin and introduce us into the state in which love toward God is perfected. This is inconsistent with sin. John in ii. 14 of his First Epistle writes to the young men because the Word of God abides in them and they have overcome the wicked one. How can this be made to quadrate with constant sinning? We are told in iii. 6 that "whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth seeth him not neither knoweth him." (Alford.) We know that it is said that it is the old man that sins and the new man does not and cannot. But the old man, if he sins, becomes the ego, the sinning subject under

the wrath of God. "Generally," says Haupt, "this view cannot be psychologically sustained which would introduce a total cleavage of the one human constitution, making half the man a sinner—that is, the old man—at the very time that the other half is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. All subterfuges of this and similar kinds are exploded by a touch of this passage itself." It follows that every sin sunders the soul from God and makes communion with him and sonship or assimilation to him impossible.

Again, in iii. 8 John solemnly avers that "he that committeth sin is of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Finally this is the great criterion by which men are classified as children of God or children of the devil, sinning or abstaining from sin. Age after age, many mistaken scholars have toiled to harmonize John's alleged contradictions and have failed.

(4.) Yet not a few exegetes have found that there is not the least contradiction in this Epistle, that John has been sadly slandered by the failure to note that in the first chapter antinomian objectors appear with the plea that as all sin exists in the body, the soul is perfectly pure and needs no hyssop branch, nor bleeding beast, nor sprinkling priest. Thus the contradictions which were found clouding John's crystal style evaporate when we consider the historical setting of this precious love letter

of John to believers in all coming generations. The exegetes who avoid self-contradiction in this Epistle by noting its anti-Gnostic aim are Hammond, Grotius, Bengel, A. Clarke, Bishop Westcott, Dr. A. Plummer, Haupt, Whedon and others. In general it may be said that annotators who have inherited a freedom from the bias of predestinarianism find in this Epistle nothing inconsistent with perfect holiness in him who claims his full heritage in Christ. On the other hand those who have imbibed the five points of Calvinism will be found insisting with the Gnostics that men must sin so long as they are in the body.

## CHAPTER II.

THUS far John has treated sin as a reality, and has exposed the fallacies by which its repugnance to the character of God is concealed, and its significance is vainly done away by a false philosophy. He now proceeds to show that the purpose of this Epistle is the prevention and the cure of sin.

1. "That ye may not sin." This implies that sin is not a necessity, that under the dispensation of grace the believer may be always victorious over temptation. We know that he is addressing those who profess to be Christians by the endearing style of address, "My little children," and also by the fact that God is spoken of as Father, which is in the New Testament a relationship purely spiritual and belonging only to those who have been born of the Spirit. It is as evident as the cloudless midday sun that John does not regard sin as a normal element of the Christian life. In aiming to produce complete and constant victory over sin he was not endeavoring to set forth an abnormal character. An un-sinful Christian was in his estimation neither an impossibility nor an anomaly. John was not visionary but

1. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye may
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sober in his endeavor to edify and purify the church. He plainly asserts that sinlessness is the aim of his teaching, and that this is not gained by efforts on the plane of natural ability, but by the grace of our Lord Jesus who sends the Paraclete to "cleanse from all unrighteousness." We call attention to the aorist tense, "may not sin," that ye may not commit a single sin. Says Bishop Westcott, "The thought is of the single act, not of the state (present tense). The tense is decisive against the idea that the apostle is simply warning his disciples not to draw encouragement for license from the doctrine of forgiveness. His aim is to produce the completeness of the Christ-like life. (Verse 6.)" Says Alford, "That ye may not sin (at all) implies the absence not only of the habit, but of any single acts of sin. The aorist tense alone refutes the supposition that John is exhorting the unconverted."

"And if any man sin." Here again the tense indicates a single act into which the regenerate person may be suddenly carried against the real purpose and tenor of his life (i. 7), in contrast with a career or habitual state of sin. The possibility of a sinless Christian life is still implied. We call attention to the peculiar form of the protasis or conditional part of this sentence as contrasted with the apodosis or conclusion. It begins with the third

not sin. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

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person singular intimating the rarity of a sin in a company of normal believers, and also the fact that John shrank from saying "if we sin," thus seemingly identifying himself with sin. But he changes to the first person plural in the conclusion, "we have a Paraclete," because sinless believers need the constant intercessions of Jesus Christ to keep them victorious over every temptation, and to plead their cause against their accuser, the devil. The form of the sentence implies that the writer was not conscious of any single sin, much less of a state of sin; also it indicates that he and his saintly brethren had constant resort to the Paraclete above for effectual spiritual help.

"We have an Advocate." Greek, Paraclete. This is the only text in which this term is applied to Christ, although it is implied in John xiv. 16, "he shall give you another Paraclete." The most common meaning in classic Greek is advocate. Jesus pleads our cause with the Father, and the Holy Spirit pleads the Father's cause with us. The priestly office of the Advocate was typified by the entrance of the high priest into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. (Heb. vii. 25, ix. 11-24.) Augustine thus sets forth the legal aspect of the Advocate with the Father, "If a man sometimes in this

2. and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

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life commits himself to an eloquent tongue and does not perish, will you perish if you commit yourself to the Logos, the Word?"

"With the Father." Greek "pros, face to face with" Him, addressing Him with continued pleadings in that divine nature which still retains the humanity taken to itself on the earth. This is expressed by His name "Jesus Christ" combining His manhood and divinity as Saviour and King.

"The righteous." That quality needful to give the strongest efficacy to His advocacy of the weak and the erring, whom He wishes to save, not by setting aside the righteous law, but by magnifying it in His own human character and in His atoning death voluntarily endured for all in fellowship with Him through an obedient faith. This exaltation of the divine righteousness is a peculiarity of John. See i. 9, ii. 29, iii. 7; compare Rom. iii. 26. Bishop Westcott thinks that the manner of Christ's pleading "is a subject wholly beyond our present powers." It is certain that in His so-called high priestly prayer for His disciples in John xvii. are revealed the essence of His present plea, its spirit and arguments.

2. "He is the propitiation." The Greek pronoun "Himself" magnifies the efficacy of both His

atonement and His intercession. Note the present tense as denoting the propitiation as eternally existing, and not as past. See Rev. iv. 6, where Christ in heaven is the Lamb newly slain. His garments still retain their bloody hue. He is not called our propitiator, but our propitiation, to emphasize the fact that He does not use means outside of Himself, but is in His own person the propitiatory offering as well as the high priest. The Greek word for propitiation in the New Testament occurs only here and in the parallel text iv. 10. It is found more frequently in the Old Testament.

“For our sins.” The atonement is efficacious unto eternal salvation, in the case of responsible moral agents, only on the condition of persevering faith.

“But also for the whole world.” The atonement is objectively for all alike, extending as far as the need of it extends in time and place. The only limitation to its saving power is in human free agency. Hence the propitiation is in its subjective efficacy limited to those who accept it as their only plea. Hence John says it is not only for us who have appropriated it by faith, but also for all the sinners in the world on the same terms. The omission of the word “sins” before “of the whole world” has its parallel in Heb. vii. 27. It has not the least doctrinal significance, as some assert who teach that the atonement is limited to those who are unconditionally elected to eternal life.

3. And hereby know we that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

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3. "In this we perceive that we know Him." Every believer may know that he is saved, first, intuitively by the unction of the Holy Spirit, as in ii. 20, 27, and secondly, inferentially from our consciousness of obedience. "If we are (continually) keeping His commandments." The words "In this" sometimes refer to what has been just said; sometimes, as in this case, these words point forward to the next utterance. Knowledge of God involves personal sympathy and aspiration after a perfect conformity to His moral character. "To know God as God is to be in vital fellowship with Him, to love Him, to fulfil that relation toward Him for which we are born." (Westcott.) Whether the object of knowledge expressed by the pronoun "Him" is the Son of God or the Father is unknown. It is no mean argument in proof of the Divinity of Jesus Christ that an inspired apostle should confound his personality with that of the Father. It is quite evident that in John's conception Jesus Christ is the God-man, the revelation of God to men and possibly to all moral intelligences. As a general usage of John's epistles, "that one" refers to the Son of God, and "He himself" to the Father. It is in the Son that the Father is known. (John xiv. 9.)

"If we keep His commandments." The scrupulous

4. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him:

5. but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected. Hereby know we that we are in him:

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observance of definite instructions, a cheerful service not of the letter but of the spirit, prompted not by fear of the law, but by love to the lawgiver. A frequent perusal of this Epistle is an effectual preventive of antinomian tendencies.

4. "He that saith." An individualizing statement of the contents of the comprehensive form before used, "If we say" (i. 6, 8, 10), and (Greek) used again in verse 5. These two forms, with two others, "if any one says" and "whosoever says," are interchangeable.

"A liar." To be a liar is worse than to lie. The noun denotes a more permanent state of depravity than the verb. The statement is strengthened by adding "the truth is not in him." The whole character is manifestly false.

The Gnostic error here antagonized by John is this, that an intellectual knowledge of God, a philosophical theism, without obedience, is all that is required of Christians. Light can never be a substitute for love, even if it could exist independent of love.

5. "Whosoever keepeth his word." The Word of God is kept where it is not only remembered, but continually obeyed. This constancy is expressed here by

the present tense. Here, as in i. 7, the importance of the possession of true godliness is urged as opposed to the mere semblance and profession of it. The whole revelation of God in Christ must be scrupulously regarded. The Word of God answers to the spirit and not to the letter, and thus binds up into unity His many commandments. For the full meaning of these words study John xiv. 21-24.

“The love of God is perfected.” We are not sure of the meaning of this equivocal phrase, “the love of God,” whether it is His love to us or our love toward Him. But when perfection is predicated of the love of God it seems to imply that it relates to our love toward God, since our love is capable of imperfection, while His is always perfect, and it seems to be a truism to assert its perfection, and a paradox to say that it is “perfected.” It is true that our love is enkindled by His love as a spark dropped from the skies. God is said to give His love to us when by His Spirit He announces our adoption. (Gal. iv. 6.) Then love responsive to that of our great Benefactor springs up in our hearts as the first throb of spiritual life. In a sense it is God’s love throbbing in our bosoms, because it is originated, or rather occasioned, by Him. But in an important sense it is human, because it is the activity of our spiritual susceptibilities unfolding according to the laws of mind, as gratitude toward a benefactor.

“In itself it is not a startling or revolting thought, that the love of God should dwell in us in its full measure and in its simple perfection.” (Haupt.) St. Paul teaches the doctrine of Christian perfection in various terms, such as 2 Cor. vii. 1, “perfecting holiness;” xiii. 8, “be perfect;” Rom. xiii. 10, “love is the fulfilling of the law;” Eph. iii. 19, “that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God;” iv. 13, “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;” Heb. vii. 25, “he is able to save unto the uttermost;” Heb. xiii. 20, 21, “Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect.” See notes on 1 John iv. 12, 17, 18. In the Apostolic Fathers we find the following: “Those who in love were perfected” (aorist), Clemens Romanus 1 Cor. 50; and Doctrine of the Apostles, x. 5, “Remember, O Lord, thy church to perfect it in the love of Thee.” It is a state of “absolute readiness to learn and to do God’s will” (Westcott.) It is entered through heart-circumcision. “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.” (Deut. xxx. 6.) “The real and eternal life.” (1 Tim. vi. 12, 19.) Perfect love is completed holiness which dwells in the sphere of love. (Eph. i. 4, iii. 17-19; 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13; 1 Tim. i. 5.)

“Hereby we know.” Obedience is the infallible sign of the union of believers with God. “By this we know”

occurs very often in this Epistle (verse 3, ii. 3, 18, iii. 16, 19, 24, iv. 2, 6, 13, v. 2), reminding us of the test tubes of a chemist used to ascertain the nature of the substances in his crucible. With so many easily applied practical tests it would be impossible for an earnest and honest person to misjudge his own character and to infer that he is a child of God when he is disobeying His commandments.

“We are in Him.” A favorite expression in John’s writings, denoting the union of the believer with God or with Christ, derived from Christ’s metaphor of the vine and the branches. (John xv. 1-10.) More frequently it is “abiding in God,” which expresses the personal determination and effort of trust. See verses 24, 27, 28, iii. 6, 24, iv. 12, 13, 15, 16. Beware of the theory of the incorporation of the believer in the body of the glorified Jesus at his first act of saving faith to be forever afterward viewed by God as absolutely sinless and perfect in his standing in Christ, though in his state he is wallowing in the mire of the foulest sins. This imputed personal righteousness is antinomianism, which John Wesley defines as “the substitution of faith for holiness.” Bengel calls attention to the near, nearer, nearest relation expressed in the progressive phrases in this section, “to know him,” “to be in him,” “to abide in him,” “cognition,” “communion,” and “constancy.”

6. he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked.

7. Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old

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6. "Ought." This expresses a special, personal obligation "to walk" after the pattern of Him who stands out as the one model seen in the faultless perfection of His humanity. This walk is in a narrow path, through obloquy, reproach, abandonment by opposing friends and unbelieving kindred, loss of reputation—"He made himself of no reputation"—humiliation, sacrifice, suffering, poverty, betrayal and crucifixion. We must count the cost and be prepared to be baptized with a baptism of manifold woes. While His feet were nailed to the cross they were walking in the way of love. This is the type of the Christian's life. There is no other road to heaven.

7. "Beloved." While enforcing the commandment to love, St. John gives expression to love by this endearing epithet.

"From the beginning." He probably means from the commencement of the Christian faith of the readers. "The new commandment" of love is ever new, because it has new sanctions daily with our increasing knowledge of Christ. It was new when the disciples saw Him on the cross and heard Him pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It was new when they

commandment which ye had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard.

8. Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing

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saw Him after His resurrection, and again after the cloud received Him out of their sight. It had an especial newness when the Paraclete on the day of pentecost came into their hearts, flooding them with love. As we have an ever-increasing ability to apprehend with fresh power the beauty of Christ's character, so the command to love Him and all who bear His image will be new. "While life advances and our spiritual life unfolds the Gospel must be always new." Hence there is no irksomeness, no theadbareness in real, hearty Christian service. To stationary Christians this commandment is always old, but to advancing believers, who have through the inner revelation of Christ by the Holy Spirit, more and more perfect vision of Him, love is more and more abundantly shed abroad in their hearts.

8. "Which is true in him and in you." Doubly true as well as new. First, is always a more attractive object; and, second, the normal, progressive disciples have always enlarged capacity for loving the adorable Christ and all who bear His image. "The fact that the commandment is new as well as old is proved true in Christ, so far as His words and works have become more fully known; and 'in you,' so far as the actual experience of

is true in him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth.

9. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now.

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life has shown this duty of love in a new light, more comprehensive and constraining." (Westcott.)

"Because the darkness is past." Rather is passing away, is on the wane and the true light is showing its increasing splendor; therefore you are under a stronger obligation to walk in the light by fellowship with God, obedience to His Son, imitation of Christ's example and a progressive love of the brethren. Light symbolizes intelligence and holiness.

"The true light." As opposed to the spurious phosphorescence of Gnostic philosophy and the dim and unsteady light of the Old Testament.

9. "In the light, and hateth." An impossible combination. Saving knowledge is always sympathetic and involves love to God and man. It is a very common mistake to put intellectual knowledge for a spiritual knowledge of Christ. It is easy to substitute an orthodox head for a regenerate heart. It is the business of the faithful pastor to show the disastrous consequences and to secure a genuine transformation. "Where sympathy exists hatred is impossible" (John vii. 7); "where sympathy does not exist hatred is inevitable" (John xv. 18-20). (Bishop Westcott.) Yet hatred of iniquity is a

10. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

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moral duty. The English language is unfortunate in having the verb "hate" signify abhorrence of evil and antipathy to a fellow Christian. The latter is the meaning of John.

"His brother." This is the New Testament idea of brotherhood. (Acts iii. 17, vi. 3, ix. 30; Rom. i. 13.) The title thus limited is used throughout the Epistles. Says Westcott, "There is, as far as it appears, no case where a fellow-man, as man, is called a brother in the New Testament." We are, according to Augustine, "So to love our enemies as to make them friends; for Christ so loved, who, while hanging on the cross, said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

"In darkness even until now." He is not merely false in profession, but is in a state of sin, or darkness the exact opposite to his profession, a spiritual darkness to which there is no sunrise.

10. "Abideth in the light." He not only is in the light, but he also permanently dwells in this delightful element.

"None occasion of stumbling." Through coldness toward a fellow Christian a man may not only be a stumbling block to others, but he may also, as we infer

11. But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.

12. I write unto you, *my* little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.

from verse 11, make his own path dark and difficult, for "he knoweth not whither he goes," having lost his assurance which requires love as well as light. Hence "his whole life is a continual error." (Howe.) The darkness of a lack of love, like physical darkness, destroys the organ of spiritual vision. See Is. vi. 10; 2 Cor. iv. 4. The English "blinded," in the sense of blindfolded, is not the exact meaning of the Greek "to make blind," or to produce a state of blindness.

**b. ii. 12-28. What Walking in the Light excludes: the Things and Persons to be avoided.**

1. Three-fold Statement of Reasons for Writing (ii. 12-14).
2. Things to be avoided: the World and its Ways (ii. 15-17).
3. Persons to be avoided: Antichrists (ii. 18-26).
4. [Transitional.] The Place of Safety: Christ (ii. 27, 28).

12. "Little children." This is a title of endearment addressed to all St. John's readers, and not to children in age.

"Your sins are forgiven." The Greek perfect tense implies not repeated forgiveness up to the present hour, but rather the unbroken continuance of a conscious freedom from guilt as the result of pardon.

13. I write unto you, fathers, because ye know him which is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye

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“His name’s sake.” The antecedent to “His” is Christ, the thought of whom has been present in the mind of John since the last mention of His name in verse 2, and the last reference to Him in verse 6. His name implies all that is contained in His personality, His sinless example, atoning death, glorious resurrection and mediatorial intercession at the right hand of the Father. They who believe in His name not only assent to Christian truths, but also wholly cast themselves upon His atoning merit for the assured possession of eternal life. The declaration of the purpose of the Gospel in John xx. 31 is, “that believing ye may have life through His name.” This corresponds very closely with the purpose of this Epistle, “that ye also may have fellowship with us,” *i. e.*, divine fellowship implies divine life.

13. “Fathers.” Persons eminent in the church and clothed with responsible authority. This title implies maturity of Christian life. It is applied in the Old Testament to prophets (2 Kings ii. 12, vi. 21), priests (Jud. xvii. 10), teachers (Prov. i. 8), and in the Roman Catholic Church to the whole body of pastors. “The whole course of history is, where rightly understood, the manifestation of one will. To know this in Christ is the prerogative of a ‘father,’ and the knowledge is the opportunity for the completest life.” (Bishop Westcott.)

have overcome the evil one. I have written unto you, little children, because ye know the Father.

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“From the beginning.” Him that is from the beginning, the Logos or Word who was (not was created) in the beginning (John i. 1-14); this is from eternity and within time-limits became flesh, by assuming human nature, soul and body.

“Young men.” Believers, in the full vigor of their physical and mental powers.

“Have overcome.” Not a momentary triumph, but a permanent victory, remaining effective to the present moment, like that of Christ, “I have overcome the world.” (John xvi. 33.) Such a victory is the heritage of every perfect and persevering believer.

“The evil one.” A personal adversary in the spiritual realm with whom the Christian must have an inevitable conflict, ending in victory, or a shameful defeat through culpable cowardice. In John’s writings he is called “the serpent,” “the ancient serpent,” “the dragon,” who is called “the devil and Satan,” “the accuser,” and the “ruler of this world,” whom Paul calls “the (usurping) god of this world.” Of his origin we know very little, but enough to know that he was once upright, but voluntarily fell into sin. (John viii. 44.) This excludes dualism, the notion of two co-eternal beings or principles, good and evil, the one inhering in spirit and the other in matter.

14. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye know him which is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one.

15. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

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14. At the close of verse 13, John seems to have laid down his pen for a season. On resuming it again he reads the last verse written in the present tense and proceeds to repeat his address in the use of the past tense, as if explaining his former advice to the same three classes.

“Because ye know him.” This knowledge implies the new birth, establishing a direct spiritual connection through the agency of both the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. For “no man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” The fatherhood of God is a spiritual relation made known only by a supernatural revelation, through the Holy Spirit, by whom the new birth is accomplished, and by whom, as the Spirit of adoption, crying in our hearts, “Abba, Father,” it is revealed. St. John says much about the knowledge of God as the privilege of the believer. The phrase “ye have known” occurs three times in these two verses; “ye know” occurs eight times, and “we know” is found seventeen times in this Epistle. He teaches a knowable salvation more emphatically than John Wesley. There is involved in the knowledge of

16. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the

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the Father, sympathy, love and submission. It dwells not so much in the sphere of the intellect as in that of the heart.

“Have overcome.” The perfect tense implies past triumph continuing to the present time. The true Christian is always young. He has the habit of victory, like Napoleon and Grant. Each successive victory makes him stronger for the next conflict. What could stand before a church composed of such members? To conserve this all-conquering strength John now proceeds to warn believers against the enervating effects of worldliness.

16. “Love not the world.” The sum of secular influences hostile to God, “the world is the order of finite being regarded as apart from God. Whatever is treated as complete without reference to God is so far a rival to God” (Westcott), instead of being the true expression of God’s will under the conditions of its creation. Some exegetes harmonize this prohibition, “love not the world,” with the statement, “God so loved the world” (John iii. 16), by saying, “That which man may not do, being what he is, God can do, because He looks through the surface of things by which man is misled to the very being which He created.” A better harmony of these Scriptures is found in the fact that love has two

lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

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meanings: (1) a love of pity, and (2) a love of complacency and delight. In the first meaning we not only may love the world, but we ought to love the world, if we are in sympathy with God, and we are under obligation to evince our pitying love by godlike self-sacrifice for the salvation of the fallen world. The more Christ-like we are the more perfectly will we fulfil this obligation. But this material world, as an object of delight in preference to its Creator, we may not love. Augustine finely illustrates this point: "If the bridegroom should make for his bride a ring and give it to her, and if she should love the ring more than her husband who made it for her, would not an adulterous disposition be detected by means of this very gift of her bridegroom, although she was loving what he gave to her?"

"The love of the Father is not in him." One heart cannot contain two loves so hostile to each other as the love of light and the love of darkness. John assumes that there can be no vacuum in the soul. Says Augustine to the young convert, "Thou art a vessel, but hitherto thou hast been full. Pour out what thou hast that thou mayest receive what thou hast not. Exclude the evil love of the world, that thou mayest be filled with the love of God." All other loves must be second-

17. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

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ary, must be in harmony with love to God, and must be referred to Him. But supreme love to the finite is antagonistic to love of the infinite One, because the sense of personal relationship to Him is lost. The exact order of the Greek is remarkably suggestive: "There exists not (whatever he may say) the love of the Father in him." Says Philo, as quoted by John of Damascus, "It is as impossible for love toward the world to co-exist with love toward God as it is impossible for light and darkness to dwell with each other." The philosophy of this negation is given in the next verse.

17. "Because everything in the world . . . is passing away."

The stream never rises higher than the fountain. Supreme love to the world being limited by the perishing world is incompatible with love toward the eternal Father. This incongruity relates not only to the inequality in the duration of the two objects of love, but also to their characters. Supreme love to a finite object is a degrading idolatry; supreme love to God is a most elevating and transforming virtue. Hence the prohibition of love toward the world is prompted by a benevolent desire in the heart of God to avert from us an unspeakable evil and to bestow that happiness which shall be as lasting as His own eternal existence.

“The lust of the flesh.” The flesh is the subject in which the desire dwells. It seeks to appropriate that which is like itself, material rather than spiritual. It is not sin, but has a natural leaning toward sin in fallen humanity. But all unlawful pleasures are sinful and lawful gratifications of sense may become sinful by being excessive, as gluttony. St. John rarely uses the term “flesh” in the same way that St. Paul generally does, to denote that portion of man’s nature which has an hereditary proclivity toward sin. The removal of it by entire sanctification is called “the crucifixion of the flesh.” Rarely, if ever, is “the body” thus used. The phrase “vile body” is an erroneous translation of “the body of our humiliation.” (Phil. iii. 21, R. V.) The body is not to be crucified or flagellated, but sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, otherwise it will be polluted and degraded by the tyranny of the flesh.

“The lust of the eyes.” The eye is the inlet of much innocent pleasure. But this pleasure becomes idle and prurient curiosity, when it craves unlawful sights, inflaming pictures, nude statuary, polluting scenic displays, the foul exhibitions of the circus, the cruel and savage exhibitions of the ancient amphitheatre and the murderous excitements of the modern prize fight. The college regattas, baseball matches and deadly football contests make their appeals, through the eyes of myriads of spectators, to the bestial rather

than the angelic in human nature. The public competitions of modern athleticism have degenerated into what Augustine aptly styles, "sacraments of the devil." The lust of the eyes also includes the leprous novel, in which scenes of debauchery are spread out before the imagination, the eye of the mind. The lust of the flesh seeks to appropriate the object of its desire, while the lust of the eyes is satisfied by enjoyment under the form of contemplation. The first is physical, the second is mental. Both are hostile to true spirituality, which lives only in the atmosphere of holiness.

"The vainglory of life." Priding one's self on a false view of what things are in themselves, empty, unstable and unsatisfying. The Greek word for "life" frequently signifies, as it does here, "the means of life." (Mark xii. 44; Luke viii. 43, xv. 12, 30; 1 John iii. 17.)

17. "Is of the world." This is the derivation of the perversities just named. From it they take their moral character; they inherit the destiny of the world, the fashion of which "is passing away." "Not only is the love of the world irreconcilable with the love of the Father, but also yet further, the fate of the world is included in its essential character." (Westcott.) The world is a screen which hides from unbelievers the presence of God. They have eyes to see not spiritual realities, but their perishable material semblances.

"And the lust thereof." The desire for the world is

18. Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that

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as unsubstantial as the world itself, which awakened it. But the desire will remain forever an aching void in the spirit bereft of its idol by death.

“But he that doeth . . . abideth.” Doing God’s will is the strongest proof of supreme love. The contrast of a world loved as an idol is not God, as we might expect, but the obedient believer brought into vital sympathy with Him, so that he partakes of His eternal blessedness as a kinsman of His eternal Son. (Mark iii. 35.)

18. “It is the last hour.” This expression denotes a crisis and not the end of the world. Christianity is the last dispensation in human history. It will be a period of suffering and conflict ending in victory over all the foes of Christ. Of these the most subtle and the most difficult to conquer is that evil power which antagonizes Christ by proposing to take His name and to continue His work while denying Him. This hypocrisy on the part of men professing faith in Christ is personified under the name of antichrist, a word meaning far more than an adversary of Christ. Says Bishop Westcott, “The essential character of antichrist lies in the denial of the true humanity of Messiah, as in verse 22, in iv. 3, and 2 John 7.” To refute the Gnostic denial of the reality of Christ’s body is the purpose of this Epistle.

antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour.

19. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but *they*

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If He is not the God-man, very God and very man, there is an impassable gulf between God and the world. It is not bridged by the incarnate Son, if He is not a real man. If His body was a phantom, His incarnation, atoning death and resurrection are unreal. God is still unknown and unknowable, and all men are, and ever must be, agnostics groaning under the burden of unforgiven sins.

“Even now . . . many antichrists” have arisen in foreshadowings of one great future antichrist.

19. “They were not of us.” This means that these false teachers were not in sympathy with the church at the time of their withdrawal. It does not signify that they were never genuine Christians. The fact that there are withered and fruitless branches now in the true vine (John xv. 2) does not prove that those branches were never alive, but, rather, it proves their former life. It is a case of manifest apostasy, beginning in the spirit and ending in the flesh. They remained awhile in the church after the extinction of their spiritual life, “as evil humors in the body of Christ. (Augustine.) The clear revelation of their changed character was a divine safeguard against further harm;

went out, that they might be made manifest how that they all are not of us.

20. And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

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for by going out they neutralized their future bad influence within the church.

20. "But ye have an unction." The word "ye" is emphatic. The outward symbol of the Old Testament, the sacred oil compounded, as in Ex. xxx. 22-25, is here used to signify the gift of the Spirit, the characteristic endowment of every believer who aspires to his full heritage in Christ, "the Holy One." Jesus was called in the Hebrew Messiah, anointed, and in the Greek, Christos, because he received the chrisma, or unction of the Holy Spirit, inducting Him into His three-fold office of prophet, priest and king. (1 Kings xix. 16; Ex. xl. 15; 1 Sam. ix. 16.) This chrism is used by John in contrast to the antichrists, who, because they had either not received or had lost the sanctifying and illuminating chrism, were in revolt against their Teacher, Saviour and Lord. The Holy Spirit is the conservator of orthodoxy and of loyalty to Christ. Since Christ sends the Paraclete it seems to be more natural to refer "the Holy One" to the Second Person of the Trinity.

"Ye know all things." The text of Westcott and Hort is, "Ye all know," *i. e.*, the truth. Hence no false teaching respecting fundamentals can deceive you, so

21. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

22. Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?

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long as ye dwell under the anointing by the exercise of a persevering faith in the incarnate Son of God. The anointing with oil as a part of the ceremony of baptism is a human invention having no scriptural authority.

21. "No lie is of the truth." This truism is John's way of expressing the eternal distinction between truth and falsehood. He had no notion that he could be of use to believers in Christ unless there was in them a capacity of distinguishing truth from a lie and of recognizing intuitively and feeling instinctively the everlasting opposition of one to the other. The most hopeless case is that of a person who has lost this capacity, who enjoys the rainbow hues of error and regards it as truth, and despises the granitic reality of truth and treats it as fiction.

"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.)

22. "Who is the liar?" This is the exact original. The word "lie" suggests to John the biggest liar in the universe who sums up in his own person all that is false. "The denial of the fact 'Jesus is the Christ,' when grasped in its full significance—intellectual, moral, spiritual—includes all falsehood; it reduces

This is the antichrist, *even* he that denieth the Father and the Son.

23. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.

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all knowledge of necessity to a knowledge of phenomena; it takes away the highest ideal of sacrifice; it destroys the connection of God and man." (Westcott.) There are no liars if he who denies that Jesus is the Christ is not one. This is parallel to Abraham Lincoln's terse expression, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." "These Gnostic teachers, who profess to be in the possession of the higher truth, are really possessed by one of the worst of lies." (The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.)

"Denieth the Father." This follows the denial of the Son, who is the only personal revelation of the Father. The Supreme Divinity of Christ is our only safeguard against polytheism on the one hand and pantheism on the other. Our knowledge of the unity, the personality and the moral perfections of God is revealed in Jesus Christ, and in Him only.

23. "Hath the Father also." The sentence of which these words are a part for no good reason is in italics in the A. V. There is no doubt of the genuineness of the original. It is correctly printed in the R. V. The confession of the Son is more than an intellectual act; it is the surrender of the will and the reliance of the

24. As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father.

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heart on Him alone for salvation. To such a person says he, "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him."

24. "Let that abide in you." The emphatic word is "you." "As for you" in contrast with the Gnostic errorists spoken of in verse 22. The strength of the Christian is not in his good resolutions, but in the Holy Spirit, the author of life abiding within the believer. In iv. 15 this strength is still more emphatically expressed in the mutual indwelling—a double mystery, "God in us, we in God." We let the Spirit abide when we with a right attitude of the will exercise an appropriating faith in His promises. "Looking unto Jesus" is the conquering attitude of the soul. In modern phrase the exhortation of John is this, "Hold fast the Gospel which ye first heard, and reject the innovations of these false teachers." From the beginning Christianity is perfect and incapable of improvement.

"Ye also." Divine life is the source of divine fellowship.

"Shall abide in the Son and in the Father." Through faith in the Son we mount up to the knowledge of the Father. How my spirit can interpenetrate and abide in

25. And this is the promise which he promised us, *even* the life eternal.

26. These things have I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray.

27. And as for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as

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the personality of the Son and that of the Father is a mystery next to the mystery of Three Persons in one Divine nature. But the heart can feel what the intellect cannot comprehend.

25. "Eternal life" is only another view of abiding in the Son and in the Father. It is the heart knowledge of God. "And this is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." It was the mission of Christ to offer spiritual life and lead men to seek it through faith in Himself.

26. An experimental knowledge of Christ is the best safeguard against the Gnostics, "them that would lead you astray." This knowledge no human instruction can teach. The Holy Spirit, here called "the anointing," imparts life to the penitent believer and the power of spiritual perception. These fundamental facts are revealed only by the Holy Spirit—regeneration, forgiveness, adoption and entire sanctification. In minor particulars teachers are helpful, but in respect to these fundamentals and experimentals "Christians needed not fresh teaching, even from apostles, still less from those

his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him.

28. And now, *my* little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

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who professed to guide them into new 'depths' " (Westcott), who made spiritual excellence to consist, not in a holy life, but in knowledge of an esoteric kind open only to the initiated, who boasted that they "knew the depths" and could say, "this is profound." Says Augustine, "He who teaches hearts has His chair in heaven."

28. At this point John turns from the ideal to the practical view of Christian truth and duty, the sum of which is "abide in Him," and give proof of it by your conduct.

"When He shall appear." Better, "if He shall be manifested." The "if" implies doubt as to the time, not as to the future facts of Christ's final coming to the general judgment.

"We may have boldness." A word which in the Greek always implies unreserved utterance or freedom of speech. No word could be found in that language which so strongly expresses deliverance, not only from guilty fear, but also from speechless awe.

"Not be ashamed before Him." Not shrink back with shame or dread from His presence as the judge of all men. It is the privilege of every Christian to live

29. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him.

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on the earth every day with love to Christ so pure and perfect as to prompt him, if possible, to meet the descending Judge more than halfway. See iv. 17, note.

ii. 29-v. 12. GOD IS LOVE.

c. ii. 29-iii. 24. **The Evidence of Sonship: Deeds of Righteousness before God.**

1. The Children of God and the Children of the Devil (ii. 29-iii. 12).
2. Love and Hate: Life and Death (iii. 13-24).

29. "He is righteous . . . begotten of Him." The difficulty is to determine the antecedent of the pronouns "he" and "him." The last person mentioned is Christ the Judge. But "to be born of Christ" is not a scriptural idea. It is evident that John so firmly believed that the Father reveals Himself in His co-equal Son that he made the transition from one Divine Person to the other almost unwittingly.

"Is begotten of Him." He who in his character is like God is in Hebrew phrase begotten of Him. The habitually righteous man is a true son of the righteous God. Other points of likeness are faith and love.

#### CONCLUDING NOTE TO CHAPTER II.

The connection of thought in the first verse, expressed by "these things," reflects light upon the treat-

ment of sin in Chapter I. Some earnestly contend that verses 8 and 10 teach the absolute presence of sin in every believer's heart after forgiveness has been bestowed and the new birth and purification by the Holy Spirit procured by the blood of Christ have been experienced. In other words, after grace has done its utmost the Christian has sin which he should confess. Now the natural effect of the doctrine that sin is inevitable is to give up the struggle against it and to yield ourselves unresistingly to its lusts. In fact, one exegete tells us, in view of the inevitableness of sin, that John was constrained to put in this caveat: These things I do not write that ye may sin. But he did not write thus, but in view of the turpitude of sin rendering the sinner false hearted and accusing God of lying, and considering the effectual provisions of grace in the atonement to transform and entirely sanctify the believer, so that sin is now in every case avoidable, "I write unto you that ye do not sin even once" (aorist tense denoting a single act). No bulwark against sin can be made out of the statement that the holiest saints on earth are sinners. But a positive restraint from sin exists in forgiveness, regeneration and entire sanctification by the Holy Spirit initiating us into a state of perfected holiness.

"If we say." "This 'if we' continues in almost every verse until ii. 3, after which it is changed into its equivalent 'he that,' which continues down to ii. 11; after that

neither form is used." (Cambridge Bible for Schools.) Mark this, that "if we" is the exact equivalent of "he that." Substitute the latter for the former and the fallacy of the assertion that John includes himself where he says, "If we say we have no sin," immediately appears. Ebrard suggests "that 'if we say' is quite analogous to the 'though a man say,' " in James ii. 14. On that account we must not lay too much stress on the first person plural; it serves only to express the general "one," and only so far represents the universal application of the saying announced in verses 6, 7 (he might have said verses 8, 9 and 10 also); not as if St. John had meant to say, "even if I, the apostle, were to say this, and nevertheless walk in darkness, I should be a liar." Ebrard then argues extendedly that there is a radical difference between "having sin" and walking in darkness: "For the latter is assumed to be entirely excluded from the condition of a Christian, while the former must be acknowledged as present in every Christian" (the first person plural). Such contradiction and sophistication mar a great scholar and exegete who admits that "the Gnosticism of a Cerinthus, that enemy of the truth who was living in the same city with John himself, was confronting the apostle with the root of all the heresies—doctetic, pantheistic Gnosticism," which denied the existence of sin in the human spirit, insisting that it pollutes the body only, and hence that the unregenerated Gnos-

tics had no need of the blood of Christ in atonement because they had before their professed conversion to Christ no sins to be expiated. If we admit with Episcopius, Grotius, Whedon and others that the phrase "to have no sin" denies the guilt of sins before conversion, we relieve the Epistle from the most glaring inconsistency and manifest contradiction, in asserting that a soul can be forgiven its sins and cleansed from all unrighteousness, and at the same time have sin entailing guilt such as is implied by John's idiomatic phrase, "to have sin."

### CHAPTER III.

THE third chapter should begin with the last verse of the second, which speaks of being begotten of God. Then naturally the author describes the present character and future position of the children of God when their real glory, now unappreciated by the world, shall be outwardly manifested.

1. "Behold." This is not a mere interjection of surprise, but a verb in the plural number calling on all to gaze upon something actually visible now to eyes anointed by the Holy Spirit, and destined to be transcendently glorious hereafter.

"What manner of love." Love is the very essence of Christianity distinguishing it from all false religions. Its origin is not earthly, but heavenly. It is a spark dropped from the skies, not to consume sinners, but to illumine and purify believers.

"The Father." This title and its correlative, child or son, always in the New Testament denotes a spiritual relation. To treat the Fatherhood of God as natural, including all men, irrespective of character, is the fundamental error of the so-called liberalism which in mod-

1. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and *such* we are.

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ern times wears the mark of Christianity. See John i. 12, 13.

“Hath given to us.” Subjective love cannot be given, but it bestows such gifts as shall awaken responsive love in the heart of its object. The gift of God’s only begotten Son is designed to produce this effect in every sinner who hears and believes the gospel. True believers are thus inspired with a love which is like the love of God, and by its transforming power they are enabled to claim the title of children of God, because they have become like Him in moral character. In Hebrew phrase a wise man is a son of wisdom and a godlike man is a son of God.

The pronouns “we” and “us” throughout this Epistle refer to believers. “That we (literally, in order that we) should be called.” Adoption into the family of God, not only nominal, but real, is the purpose of that love which manifests itself in the unspeakable gift of His Son.

“Called.” Divinely acknowledged.

“The children of God.” The A. V. erroneously has “sons.” Community of nature is denoted by “children,” and privilege and maturity are implied in “sons.” The only place in John’s writings where “son” is used

For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

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of man's relation to God is Rev. xxi. 7. "Son" is a favorite word with Paul.

"And such we are." Two precious Greek words, "kai esmen," have been recovered by sacred scholarship since the A. V. was made in 1611 A. D. The author seems to have inserted these words parenthetically as his own personal testimony to a realized fact corresponding to the reputed historic position of members of Christ's church.

"Therefore the world knoweth us not." For the good reason that it was so spiritually blind as totally to fail to recognize God revealed in Jesus Christ, and to crucify Him between two thieves.

"The world" is recognized as the power hostile to God and to all who bear His image. The believer in Christ is the object of two opposite forces, the one drawing toward sin and perdition and the other toward holiness and heaven. The result is determined by his persistent choice.

His preference of things not seen to things seen, of grace over gold, of self-denial instead of self-indulgence, is to the world an insoluble mystery, because the spring of action cannot be understood.

"Him." God in Christ is the person totally unknown to the world. Says Augustine, "By loving the pleasures of sin men ignore God; by loving what the fever craves

2. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made

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men damage the reputation of the physician." Unbelief counteracts the remedies of the Great Physician.

2. "It is not yet made manifest" . . . "if he shall be manifested." The chief difficulty is in the last clause. It may be rendered "if it shall be manifested," having for its subject the impersonal "it," as in the first clause. But this interpretation, though it seems to be natural, obscures the meaning by making the certainty that we shall be like Him dependent on its manifestation to our minds. But this certainty is absolute, and conditioned upon no such future contingency; we know that we who perseveringly believe shall be like Him when He appears. This knowledge that we shall be like Christ cannot be said to depend upon the manifestation of what we shall be. Our exegesis is confirmed by the rendering of the same phrase in ii. 28, "if he shall be manifested;" a personal subject is also used in iii. 8.

"Because we shall see." Here "because" is ambiguous. "The likeness to God may be either (1) the necessary condition, or (2) the actual consequence of the Divine Vision. The argument may be: We shall see God, and, therefore, since this is possible, we must be like Him; or, We shall see God, and in that presence we shall reflect His glory, and be transformed into His likeness." (Bishop Westcott.)

manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is.

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If in the light of the beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," we accept the first exegesis, the likeness is the condition of the vision. If the second exegesis had been the idea in the mind of John, the expression would have been "we shall become like Him" instead of "shall be like Him." "We see that which we have the sympathetic power of seeing." Says Augustine, "The entire life of a good Christian is holy desire. But what you desire you do not yet see; but by desiring you will be rendered capacious, so that when He comes you will be filled with what you see. . . . God by deferring enlarges desire, by desiring He extends the mind, by extending He makes its receptivity larger. This is our whole life that we may be educated by desiring." Hence John in this verse appears to mark a state which co-exists with the Divine manifestation at the first, and does not follow from it. There are texts (2 Cor. iii. 18, v. 4) which teach the transfiguring virtue of the inner revelation of God in Christ by the Holy Ghost. The chief element of the vision of God is knowledge, real, intuitive and continuous, a preparation and incentive to joyful service. "His servants render religious service to Him and they shall see His face and His name shall be in their foreheads." (Rev. xxii. 4.)

3. And every one that hath this hope *set* on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

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Beware of the doctrine of the possibility of acquiring moral purity after the second coming of Christ. Holiness is never in the Holy Scriptures an object of hope, for the good reason that its present possession by the believer is always assumed.

The schoolmen discussed the question whether the human intellect will ever become able to see God in essence. We believe that we will always see Him only in His glorified Son. Augustine thus portrays this Divine vision: "Therefore we are about to gaze upon a certain vision . . . transcending all terrestrial beauties of gold, of silver, of groves and plains, of the sea and of the air, the beauty of the sun and moon and stars, the beauty of the angels, surpassing all things, because all things are beautiful on account of this vision itself. What therefore shall we be when we see this? What has been promised to us? Like Him shall we be, because we shall see Him as He is. The tongue has spoken in what manner it could; let the rest be pondered in the heart."

3. "Every one that hath this hope on Him." The practical lesson of the Divine vision and its antecedent condition of likeness to Him is the motive to perseverance in holy living. Sin weaves a film over the spiritual eye. Sanctification removes that film, and per-

sistence in that faith which retains the indwelling Sanctifier keeps it from returning to darken the soul. Thus faith requires constant personal effort directed to this definite point, "purifieth himself." This can be done by the believer only indirectly, since purification is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is ours constantly to fulfil the conditions on which He sanctifies entirely and abides permanently. Says Augustine, "Who but God purifies us? But God does not purify thee against thy will. Therefore, so far as you adjust your will to God you purify yourself. . . . Because in that matter you do something by your own voluntary act, on this account this something is ascribed to yourself." The practice of ceremonial purification which was required before appearing in God's presence in the temple (John xi. 55) explains this form of expression. See Heb. x. 19-22. "He of whom it is said that he purifies himself not only keeps himself actually 'pure,' but disciplines and trains himself that he may move more surely among the defilements of the world." (1 Tim. v. 22; 1 Pet. iii. 2.) (Bishop Westcott.)

"Even as that one (Christ) is pure." The pronoun "that one" in this Epistle refers to Jesus as a man, and the Greek word for "pure" applies only to a virtue attained by human discipline. It is chosen here to emphasize the reference to the Lord's life on the earth. In iv. 17, "as he is so are we in this world," the likeness of

4. Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness: and sin is lawlessness.

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Christians to Christ is to His character as it is at present and eternally, and not only to its historical manifestation.

John now comes to a description of Gnostic teachers suggested by the idea of purification. The basal thought of these false teachers, who called themselves "the gnostic or knowing ones," is salvation in knowledge. This idea is everywhere present.

Sin is now considered in its manifestation, and defined in its essence.

4. "Every one that doeth sin," despite his philosophic theories and the intensity of his fancied illumination and superior knowledge, "doeth also lawlessness." Sin cannot be concealed by fine sounding phrases, such as an innocent misstep, a pardonable error. Every voluntary violation of the known law of God is a realization of sin in its completeness (Greek—"the" sin).

"Sin is lawlessness." These are convertible terms, and with equal truth the sentence may be read backwards. Sin is a wilful collision of a finite will with the highest authority in the universe. A failure to fulfil the law which man was created to keep, on which his happiness is suspended, is more than a disaster, it is a sin. Duty is threefold, to God, to men and to self.

5. And ye know that he was manifested to take away sins; and in him is no sin.

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Hence there are three forms of sin. In each form there may be the doing of what is forbidden, which is a sin of commission, and the failure to do what is required, which is the sin of omission. In the last analysis sin may be traced to selfishness. See James i. 14, 15, for the first form of sin as selfishness, and James iv. 17 for the second form, a selfish failure in duty to others, which is emphasized by Christ in His description of the final judgment. (Matt. xxv. 31-46.) Sin reaches its climax when, having heard of the mission of Christ, the sinner sets Him at naught in His purpose "to take away sins." This He does, says Bede, "by forgiving sins, by helping us to keep from committing sins, and by reason of our moral inability to sin wilfully (Gen. xxix. 9) against one whom we love with the whole heart. Deliverance from punishment is the least part of Christ's work of taking away sins. He takes away the disposition to sin from every one who by faith claims His full heritage of divine grace. "He came to remove all sins, even as He was Himself sinless." (Bishop Westcott.) This explains how sin is utterly incompatible with fellowship with Him. It implies a rebuke of the Gnostic teachers, for the practice of sin, and it proved their professed knowledge of Christ to be unreal and hypocritical.

6. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him.

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· 6. "Abiding in Him." This is more than simply "being" in Christ, because it expresses effort, and the present tense denotes that it is continuous.

"Sinneth not," literally "is not sinning." Character and fixed habit are here predicated, and not an isolated act contrary to the general trend of a holy life. The possibility of such a single wrong act under a sudden temptation is implied in ii. 1. It does interrupt fellowship, but it does not necessarily extinguish spiritual life and forfeit sonship to God, if there is an immediate resort to the "Advocate with the Father." The essence of the new life is love flowing Godward and manward. Anything which stops the flow of this current is fatal to the divine life. A single inadvertent sin, like a backward eddy, does not arrest the onward moving river, though it impedes its progress. Yet it remains true that there cannot be—what the agnostics professed—a sinning companionship with the sinless Christ. "He receiveth sinners" for conversion and not for complacent communion.

"Hath not seen Him." This seems to indicate that some teachers were giving authority to their destructive errors by appealing to the fact that they had looked upon the person of Christ. But Paul teaches us that there is no saving effect of such a sight. (2 Cor. v. 16.)

7. *My* little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous:

8. he that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from

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“Neither knoweth Him.” “The point regarded,” say Dean Alford and Bishop Westcott, “is present and not past.” Whatever sympathetic intimacy with Christ he may have formerly had, it is certain that he who is now in a course of sin is a stranger to Him.

7. “Let no man lead you astray.” This caveat relates especially to such misconceptions of Christian truth as lead to unrighteous conduct. Action follows opinion. “As a man thinketh in his heart so is he.” This is seen in the derivation of the word “miscreant” from two Latin words, “minus” and “credo,” signifying misbeliever. Orthodoxy is not saving, but it is the appointed medium of salvation.

“He that doeth righteousness.” Whose entire activity is prompted by righteousness in its completeness and unity. Character underlies conduct.

“Even as He (Christ) is righteous.” Well says Bishop Westcott: “The Christian’s righteousness, of which Christ is the perfect type, must extend to the fulness of life.” (John xiii. 15, xv. 12, xvii. 14, and notes on ii. 6, iv. 17.) Christ’s earthly life is the complete model of right action under all possible conditions. .

8. “Is of the devil.” Not by creation; nor by generation, for the devil has neither created nor begotten any-

the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

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body. But he who imitates the devil in his disposition and deeds, in Hebrew phrase, is of him, or by a still stronger metaphor, he is a child of the devil. Paul in his genesis of sin traces it back to Adam, but John goes back of the first parent, to the first tempter, Satan.

“Sinneth from the beginning.” The present tense denotes incessant action. The first human being soon discovered that he was between two antagonistic forces—sin and holiness—and that he could not maintain a neutral position, but must link his destiny with one or the other of these hostile powers. He must affiliate with light or darkness. He cannot by combining them create a medium element in which to dwell.

“Destroy the works of the devil.” The bent to sinning which Satan by tempting Adam and Eve to disobedience, induced in all their descendants. We cannot accept the declaration of some persons that “the works of the devil are the sins which he causes men to commit.” Every sinner is the first cause, the cause uncaused, of his own sins. Hence his guilt is his own. The agency of Satan in giving a downward trend to human nature in the fall of Adam is the occasion of the voluntary sins of his posterity. The removal of this proclivity to sin, called in theology original sin, or de-

9. Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.

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pravity, through faith in the blood of the Son of God producing entire sanctification is the destruction of the works of the devil. These are summed up in "original sin," which is their occasion. When men sin they indorse the devil's works and make them their own, from the guilt of which their only release is through the atonement in Christ as a conditional substitute for punishment.

9. "Whosoever is begotten of God." Literally "has been begotten," implying that he still remains a child of God, his faith retaining the continuous efficacy of the divine birth.

"Doeth no sin." Literally "is not committing sin." Says Athenagoras: "Know ye that those whose ideal standard of life is the character of God will never enter upon the purpose of even the least sin."

"He cannot sin." Rather, "be sinning." A course of wilful sin is incompatible with continued sonship or likeness to God. Moral contradictions cannot co-exist in one person. He cannot be a thief and an honest man at the same time; neither can he be sinning and a true child of God at the same instant. Persistence in sinning extinguishes sonship or similarity to God, loving what He loves and hating what He hates. So long as

love to God is the undiminished motive there can be no career of sin. But faith may become weak and love may decline. Then under the pressure of temptation the child of God may commit a single sin, as ii. 1 implies, and have recourse to the righteous Advocate with the Father, and thus retain his birthright in the kingdom of God. Or he may with Judas pass out of the light into so total an eclipse of faith as to enter upon a returnless course of sin entirely sundering him from the family of God, and enrolling him as a "son of perdition," a "child of the devil," whose characteristics he has permanently taken on. Says Bishop Westcott: "The ideas of divine sonship and sin are mutually exclusive. As long as the relationship with God is real, sinful acts are but accidents." Sin in the proper acceptation of the term always implies the consent of the will, and therefore can never be an accident. Yet it is possible that an improper word may leap suddenly from the tongue of a true child of God or a sinful act which does not proceed from love may escape the will, while the deliberate purpose is righteous, and the ruling principle is love. This explains the dangerous phrase, "accidental sin," an isolated act contrary to the tenor of a holy life. This comes very near to Wesley's definition of an infirmity, an omission, or inadvertent wrong act springing from some weakness, or defect in a person whose character is rooted in love to God and man. Says Augustine:

10. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

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“There is a certain sin which he who has been born of God cannot commit, and because this is not committed the rest are excused. What is this sin? It is to do contrary to the command of Christ, contrary to the New Testament.” So far as love, the new commandment (John xiii. 34) is the determining element in Christian character, Augustine agrees with Wesley that a thousand infirmities, errors of judgment and so called sins of ignorance may consist with perfect love, and are daily covered by the blood of Christ.

10. “In this the children of God are manifest.” They are known by their victory over sin. Absence of sinning is their characteristic mark. “The children of the devil” are known by sinning. They who by evil conduct take on a likeness to the devil are called in this unique phrase children of the devil.

“Doeth not righteousness.” This negation of doing implies that a Christian cannot be passive; he must be active in deed and in word. A nominal Christian is a delusion. “To do righteousness is a necessity for him who has been born of God.”

“He that loveth not his brother”—his spiritual brother who wears, at least in outline, the image of

11. For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another:

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Christ whom no one can love while failing to love him who bears His image, whether rich or poor, learned or ignorant, white or black. "If you fail to possess love and have everything else, nothing is profitable to thee. If you have not other things, have love and you have fulfilled the law." (Augustine.) Righteousness is the fulfilment of the divine law in its requirement of duties to God and to man. Holiness is conformity to the divine character. Perfect love is the root and loftiest embodiment of both righteousness and holiness.

11. "This is the message." The mandatory announcement. "That we love." In order that we love one another. Love is not merely the content of the message, but its purpose to incite self-sacrificing love in the hearts of believers. Christ's incarnation, life, preaching, example and death all aim to implant in human hearts that love which proves its genuineness by self-sacrifice. A self-indulgent disciple of Christ is a contradiction.

"Heard from the beginning." Of Christ's public teaching. "If the world hateth you." The "if" does not intimate a doubt; it assumes a fact. The emphatic word in the original is "hateth." In his banishment to Patmos John had fathomed its meaning.

12. not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13. Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you.

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12. "Not as Cain was of the evil one." The words "who" and "that" in the A. V. are not in the Greek. John goes back of Adam and Eve, the first human sinners, to the first angelic sinner. Paul traces sin only to Adam. Cain manifested the Satanic spirit of hatred. Hence he belonged to the party of the wicked one, and, unless he sought forgiveness he will share the punishment of the devil. (Matt. xxv. 41.)

"Slew his brother." This is a terrible verb, literally signifying "to cut the throat," to butcher as an animal.

"And wherefore?" When one hates another because he has wronged him we call it a human sin, because it has an apparent reason; but hatred on account of righteousness is diabolism. Augustine traces the temptation of Cain to envy, a human sin most closely bordering on the Satanic: "He who envies does not love. The sin of the devil is in him. . . . For he fell and envies him who stands, not because he wishes to hurl him down in order that he himself may stand, but in order that he may not fall alone."

13. "Marvel not . . . if the world hate you." In the order of the original the word "hate" is accented. That there should be hatred of holiness in-

14. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death.

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stead of admiring love would awaken astonishment in all unfallen beings. This hatred of goodness shows the depth of the world's depravity. The "if" does not intimate a doubt, but rather it announces an existing fact. Hatred is the characteristic of the world. The connection of thought is that terrible as Cain's history is, it is a syllabus of the history of the world, a conspectus of its follies and crimes.

"Brethren." This endearing title is used nowhere else in this Epistle. In ii. 7 the R. V. has "beloved." "Brethren" expresses equality; "children," dependence; and "little ones," subordination, immaturity and prospective growth.

"We know." The stress in the Greek is upon the pronoun "we." This knowledge is experimental and intuitive under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual sensibilities feel the chill of the dead world—dead because of the absence of love divine, the principle of spiritual life. True Christians know that they have passed out of this deadly chill into the warmth and sunshine of the new life. The verb is in the present tense. The new sphere of being begins this side of the grave, as well as the knowledge that we have entered into it.

14. "Death . . . life." There are but two

spheres, death and life. There is no middle condition. All men are spiritually dead or spiritually alive. The dead will remain dead until they actively pass out of death by laying hold of Christ, the resurrection and the life. In probation the dead have the gracious ability to hear the voice of the Son of God, and "they that hear (obey) shall live." Persevering obedience is life everlasting. All power in the sinner to move Godward is of grace through the atonement, and this power is bestowed upon all. (Luke xxiv. 47; Acts xvii. 30.) The other terms used by John which admit of no middle term are the truth and a lie, light and darkness, believing and unbelief, or disobedience, children of God and children of the devil, love of the world and love of God, denying Christ and confessing Him. This use of mutually exclusive terms John learned from his Master, who declared that all who heard His words would build on the rock or on the sand, and would arise from their graves unto the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of damnation, and be separated into only two classes, the sheep and the goats, and receive one of two sentences, eternal life or eternal punishment. The destiny of the entire human family is represented by the wheat gathered into the garner and the tares thrust into the furnace, the good fish cast into vessels and the bad cast away, the wise virgins admitted to the feast and the foolish inexorably shut out,

15. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

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“The brethren.” We know because we love. The heart is the organ of a more excellent knowledge than the intellect. Says Pascal, “The things of this world must be known in order to be loved, but the things of God must be loved in order to be known.” “It is significant that the first title given to the body of believers after the ascension is ‘the brethren’ (Acts i. 15, R. V.); and from this time onwards it occurs in all the groups of apostolic writings.” (Westcott.) Because of the many infirmities which obscure the glory of brotherly love Augustine says, “It flourishes as yet in the winter; the root is vigorous, but its branches are dry. It is the inner pith which flourishes; within are the leaves and the fruit, but they await the summer.” “Abideth in death.” John assumes that Christian love and spiritual life are convertible terms, the absence of one proves the non-existence of the other. An ancient writer pertinently inquires, “If he who loves not abides in death, in what kind of a death does he who hates abide?” John has just emphasized the hatred of the world toward the Christian brotherhood.

15. Every one that hateth.” Irrespective of his Christian profession hatred of his brother in Christ is essentially murder, according to Christ’s definition in

16. Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

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Matt. v. 22, the R. V. omitting "without cause." Bede intimates that this crime evidently lurks not only in him who pursues his brother with a sword, but also in him who pursues him with hatred.

"Eternal life . . . abiding." This implies what is often expressed, that eternal life begins in the present life of the persevering believer. (John v. 24, vi. 40, 47, 54; 1 John v. 11, 12.) These texts, proving the unbroken continuity of eternal life, broken by nothing except wilful sin, afford a convincing answer to the doctrine of unconsciousness of the dead, for to have life is to have conscious well-being or happiness and not mere existence.

16. "We know love." The Greek word is "agape," love founded on the perception of excellent qualities. This word belongs to the Bible exclusively. It was invented for use in Revelation because the other Greek words had been degraded and polluted. Eros was so completely debased as to be expressive of the foulest lust; and philia, the love of kindred and of marriage, had become too much tainted to express the holy and disinterested love of God for his Son, and of both for men created in the divine image. Love is evinced by self-denial. Love sacrifices itself to its object, while

lust sacrifices its object to itself. "Laid down his life." This phrase in the New Testament is found only in John's writings. See John x. 11, 15, 17, xiii. 37, 38, xv. 13. It may have been derived from the custom of laying down the price of purchased goods, or for the ransom of a captive. (Matt. xx. 28.) Another aspect of the voluntary surrender of life is that it was necessary in order to become conditionally the life of the world. (John vi. 51.) The life of the God-man could be appropriated by faith and become eternal in the believer only after death had set it free.

"Our lives for the brethren." If by this means we can save them. This does not imply the possibility of one man's making an atonement for another, but rather the duty of interposing in his behalf even at the risk of losing his own life. When a promising convert in whom John felt a deep interest backslid and at last joined a band of robbers, there is a credible tradition that John mounted a horse and went to the mountains to find and reclaim the young apostate, and tearfully and successfully entreated him, saying, "Could you be saved in no other way I would willingly undergo thy death as Jesus Christ underwent ours; in behalf of thee will I give my life." The argument seems to require that so great a sacrifice as life itself, if needful to save anybody, whether a brother in Christ, a Jew, or a pagan, is required of those who follow the example of Him who

17. But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?

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died for us "while we were yet sinners." But since this is a test of our love which lies out of the way of common experience, John suggests a more practicable test in the next verse, the distribution of our money and goods for the relief of the needy brother.

17. "But whoso hath the world's goods." Smaller sacrifices than that of the life will be often required. How do we endure this every-day test in a world made poor by sin?

"Shutteth up his compassion." A. V., "bowels." The ancients, who located the various mental activities in different bodily organs, ascribed pity to the bowels. Wherever it is thus figuratively used the R. V. has the mental affection instead of the physical organ as in Luke i. 78; 2 Cor. vi. 12, vii. 15; Phil. i. 8, ii. 1; Col. iii. 12; Philemon 7, 12, 20. To shut up the bowels is to tighten the purse strings against a fellow Christian in undoubted need of food, raiment, shelter or passage money to the distant home. This does not require indiscriminate giving to all those strangers known as tramps who, with narcotic or alcoholic breath, profess to be members of the same religious denomination with yourself. Says Wesley on Matt. v. 42, "Give and lend to

18. *My* little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth.

19. Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him,

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any so far (but no farther, for God never contradicts Himself) as is consistent with thy engagements to thy creditors, thy family, and the household of faith."

Hence St. John's test of a true Christian is sometimes quite complicated and difficult of application, and it may in some instances sorely distress a highly sensitive Christian. For the relief of such the twentieth verse was written.

18. "Neither with the tongue," which is here marked by the article as the special instrument of hypocritical love. Love "in word" may be genuine, but too weak to prompt to self-sacrificing acts.

19. "Hereby shall we know." The future tense implies a condition soon to be expressed in the next verse. "That we are of the truth." That we have appropriated Christ who is the truth, the reality in contrast with all illusions; the antitype answering to all the Old Testament types, the substance as opposed to all shadows; the Life standing over against all kinds of deaths, whether physical or spiritual. To be of the truth is the same as to be a child of God, which is a concrete statement of the identical fact.

"And shall assure our hearts." We shall persuade

20. whereinsoever our heart condemn us; because God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

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our hearts is the Greek, in the sense of "still and tranquillize their fears and misgivings."

20. "Whereinsoever our hearts condemn us" because we are in fellowship with God, and that fact assures us of His sovereign mercy, as implied in the words, "because God is greater." "The context requires that God's supreme sovereignty over the whole man should be regarded under the aspect of love, as exercised for the calming of human doubts. The supposition that 'greater' means more searching and authoritative than the heart is at variance with the tenor of the passage and also with the natural sense of 'greater.'" (Bishop Westcott.) The perplexities which arise in a sensitive Christian conscience in the matter of administering to the necessities of saints have already been spoken of in our note on verse 17. Says Jelf, "A Christian heart burdened with a sense of its own unworthiness forms an unfavorable opinion of the state of the soul and pronounces against its salvation. If we are conscious of practically loving the brethren, we can adduce this as evidence of the contrary, and give the heart ground to change its opinion, and to reassure itself. Any one who has had experience of the doubts and fears which spring up in a believer's heart from time to time,

21. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God;

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of whether he is or is not in a state of condemnation, will feel the need and the efficacy of this test of faith and means of assurance."

This exegesis proceeds upon the supposition that a morbid or unenlightened conscience may erroneously condemn itself in some sophistical or false reasoning respecting some question, especially in withholding alms from a doubtful applicant professing to be a Christian. Under such circumstances the accusing conscience may find relief in the thought that God, who in His greatness reads the secrets of the heart, sees that the intention of that heart is to love God supremely and his fellow-man as himself. "According to the explanation given, we are supposed to have in the consciousness of brotherly love the means whereby we may allay the reproaches of our conscience. The expression 'because God is greater' must, as containing matter of consolation, exhibit not the greater strictness of God, but His greater tenderness." (Haupt.) It is true that the gentleness of God is not in all cases regarded as a valid ground of consolation, but it is such when we consider the divine omniscience scanning the motives of those weakened and errant yet true Christians who have mistakenly made themselves worse than they really are.

21. "Beloved." An appropriate form of address

22. and whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because

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where brotherly love is the special topic, and the fears, doubts and questionings of Christians anxious to ascertain their true standing before God's law are under consideration.

"Condemn us not." This does not result from insensibility to the guilt of sin and a light estimate of its heinousness, nor does it imply sinlessness, a term strictly applicable to no man on whom forgiven sin has left its scar in the form of crippled moral powers. But it does include conscious pardon and a sense of sonship to God through "the Spirit of the adoption crying in the heart, Abba, Father," imparting peace and assurance.

"We have boldness," as in iv. 17; Acts iv. 13, 29, 31; Eph. iii. 12; Phil. i. 20; 1 Tim. iii. 13; Heb. x. 19. The Greek is a word composed of two, "all" and "say"—express all your wants without reserve. "Toward God." The thought is of the freedom of a dutiful son in his approach to his loving father, and not of the reluctance of the accused to appear before his judge.

22. So closely connected is this verse with the twenty-first that only a comma should separate them, as in Westcott and Hort, Alford and others. We would call attention to the fact that this verse is not a description of saving faith, but rather the faith of assurance. A

we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.

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penitent sinner seeking forgiveness cannot exercise a faith which is stimulated by reflecting on a previous obedient life, for he comes confessing that he is ungodly unto Him "who justifieth the ungodly." (Rom. iv. 5.)

"Whatsoever we ask we receive." Both verbs are in the present tense, denoting what is continuous and habitual in the actual present experience of believers. Without exception every prayer is answered and every request is granted. Says Augustine, "Let us note a difference between God's answers. For we find certain persons not answered according to their wish are answered in a way which promotes their best good, and others answered as they desire are not answered according to their best good."

"Because we keep His commandments." "Obedience is not alleged as the ground, but as the assurance, of the fulfilment. The answer to prayer is given not as a reward for meritorious action, but because the prayer itself rightly understood coincides with God's will. Comp. John viii. 29, xi. 42. The sole object of the believer is to do thoroughly the part which has been assigned to him; his petitions are directed to this end and so are necessarily granted. Comp. John xv. 7." (Bishop Westcott.) This is only

another way of saying, "We know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God and do His will, him He heareth." (John ix. 31.) Jesus Christ testifies to the same truth, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John xv. 7.) Believers who are in perfect accord with God's will, will ask only for what is in His will, and this they will infallibly receive. God answers all the real prayer that is offered, and is waiting for more. In explaining the apparent theological difficulty in this verse that good works are the meritorious ground on which favorable answers to prayer are given, Dean Alford says, "Out of Christ there are no good works at all; entrance into Christ is not won nor merited by them. In Christ, every work done of faith is good and pleasing to God. The doing of such works is the working of the life of Christ in us; they are its sign, they are its fruits. Whatever is attributed to them as an efficient cause is attributed not to us, but to Him whose fruits they are."

"Things pleasing." A fragment of the gospel descriptive of Christ's perfect accord with His Father. "Because the things pleasing to Him I always do, is quoted by John as descriptive of the actual life of believers while in this world. It is true that 'always' is not expressed, but it is implied in continuous tense, 'we are doing.'"

23. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment.

24. And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and

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23. "And this is His commandment." Note the singular. This summary of all God's previous commands, supreme love to God, appears in this last restatement of His law in the form of the obligation to believe on the name of His adorable Son, and love to our neighbor as to ourselves is found in these words, "and love one another."

This last statement of God's law made for all the coming ages magnifies faith, the first place in this Epistle in which it is mentioned. Here we have a complete answer to those contradictory and shallow people who insist that if we do what is about right it does not matter what we believe. Rather it is necessary to believe in order to do what is right.

"On the name of His Son." The name stands for the whole personality, His life, miracles, discourses, death, resurrection, ascension and gift of the Paraclete. True faith lays hold of Him as the only Saviour, casting away every other plea. "The full title, 'His Son, Jesus Christ,' is a compressed creed, the whole sum of the manifold revelations gathered up together so as to form one supreme revelation." (Westcott.)

24. In this verse we have a general return to the

he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us.

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keynote of the Epistle, abide in me, just as the former part of the Epistle, ii. 28, concluded. Brotherly love is the most conspicuous example and proof of two inseparable facts, obedience to God and abiding in Him. Abiding in God is not a quiescent and passive state. It is a strenuous and continuous effort first to ascertain God's commands and then to do them. Such a person abides in God. This mutual abiding shows the strength of the Christian's fortress and the wealth of his privilege. The Omnipotent dwells in the believer, and the believer dwells in the Gibraltar of God's strength. Says Bede, "Let God be a house for thee and thou shalt be a house for God; abide in God and let God abide in thee." This mutual indwelling is by the Holy Spirit. The believer is conscious of His incoming as the witness of adoption, and in single experiences or crises in the spiritual life, such as a sudden and perfect release from some old bondage, and most notably in the act of entire sanctification and in that perfect love of which this act is the gateway. This assures the advanced Christian beyond a doubt of God's delightful fellowship. "By the Spirit which He gave us." This is the first mention of the Spirit in the Epistle. It is remarkable that the adjective "Holy" joined to Spirit never is found in John's

Epistles nor in Revelation. The time when the Spirit was given was not limited to pentecost. Every one may by faith claim a personal pentecost, as marked in individual experience as the day of pentecost was in the history of the apostolic church.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE mention of the Spirit, the pentecostal gift, as decisive of the question whether God abides in believers, suggests that a safeguard should be set up against false spirits who would lead them astray. These are not all of them disembodied, and invisible like Satan. Some of them walk the earth as living religious teachers. These must be tested to prove that they are in sympathy with God and are trustworthy expounders of His truth. Other evil spirits are unseen assuming "specious forms of ambition, power, honor, knowledge, as distinguished from earthly and sensual enjoyments. All such spirits are partial revelations of the one spirit of evil which become (so to speak) embodied in men." (Westcott.)

d. **iv. 1-v. 12. The Sources of Sonship: Possession of the Spirit as shown by Confession of the Incarnation.**

1. The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error (iv. 1-6)
2. Love is the Mark of the Children of Him who is Love (iv. 7-21).
3. Faith is the Source of Love, the Victory over the World, and the Possession of Life (v. 1-12).

1. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits,

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1. "Prove the spirits." One element of our probation consists in the exercise of our powers of discernment, in discriminating between the influences which are brought to bear upon us. The devil wears many different masks. He conquers by deceit. It is our duty to cultivate the ability to detect the actor behind the mask. This ability is one element of Christian perfection, according to Heb. v. 14, "But solid food is for the perfect, even those who by reason of use (habit) have their (internal) senses exercised to discern good and evil." (R. V. margin.)

The mental inertia which refuses to form this habit of spiritual insight is next in culpability to total indifference in the presence of moral good and moral evil, holiness and sin, soliciting our choice and determining our character. There is no evading responsibility at this point. The fact that "discerning of spirits" is one of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit excuses no one from the constant exercise of his intellectual discrimination between good and evil.

"Many false prophets." Or preachers of religious errors. The false prophets in the Old Testament come to us modern readers branded as false, but in their day they were not thus branded, but came to the people as true and inspired. It is so in our times. Many dis-

whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

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credit the true prophets and cleave to the false. Paul encountered rival apostles who publicly questioned the genuineness of his apostleship and turned his converts away from the truth and from Christ its incarnation. In no age has this class of teachers been extinct. They are to-day fulfilling Christ's prediction showing "great signs and wonders" (Matt. xxiv. 24), especially in the line of so-called miraculous healing of the sick and making the dead to appear in material form. Bishop Westcott suggests that John had in mind "the great outbreak of the Gentile pseudo-Christianity which is vaguely spoken of as Gnosticism, the endeavor to separate the 'ideas' of the faith from the facts of the historic redemption." This miscalled "philosophy of religion," which is a series of imaginative speculations respecting the origin of the universe, and the independent and eternal principles of existence, holiness existing in spirit and sin inherent in matter and never touching spirit, is the real key to this Epistle.

2. "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." Here both the A. V. and R. V. have failed to give the exact Greek, "confesseth Jesus Christ, come in the flesh." Christ is the object confessed, and not some fact relating to Him.

3. and every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and

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The confession required is a person and not an abstract doctrine. "The gospel centres in a person and not in any truth, even the greatest, about the Person." It is not the confession of the incarnation, but of the Saviour incarnate, the pledge and pattern of man completely redeemed, soul and body bearing the image of the glorified God-man. The believer who thus savingly apprehends and publicly confesses the historic Christ, not as a phantom man, as the Gnostics taught, but a real man, the incarnation of the uncreated Logos who in the beginning was with God and was God, is of God, born from above. "Faith if it is real must declare itself." This text does not teach that an orthodox creed is saving, unless it has produced a truly penitent heart trusting in the divine and human Christ confessed, and relying on Him alone for salvation. Throughout the Epistle the emphasis laid upon "in the flesh," as denoting Christ's real humanity, is manifestly directed against those docetic Gnostics who denied that He was a real man. This they did to avoid the objection to the inherence of sin in all matter; because this would make Jesus Christ sinful, for He had a real body. To meet this objection these philosophers resorted to the denial of His real body.

3. "Confesseth not Jesus." Overwhelming evi-

this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already.

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dence, including the R. V., requires the omission of the words "Christ is come in the flesh," as an obvious interpolation to complete the antithesis. However orthodox one's theological creed may be, he does not really and savingly confess Christ till he enthrones Him in his heart as both Saviour and Lord, his reason bowing to His authority as an infallible teacher, and his will submitting to Him as his supreme sovereign, the God-man. The marginal reading, "annulleth Jesus," supported by some ancient authorities, is regarded by most modern experts to be a mistake arising from some traditional saying of John. The same may be said of another reading, "the Spirit which separates Jesus," *i. e.*, sunders Him into two persons, one divine and the other human. It has little or no support in the Greek manuscripts, and rests chiefly, if not solely, on the Vulgate version, the Roman Catholic standard. "The denial of the Incarnation is in fact the denial of that which is characteristic of the Christian faith, the true union of God and man." (Bishop Westcott.) Since it was love that prompted the Divine Logos to become flesh, the denial of this fact, as Augustine suggests, is a sign of the absence of love in him who denies.

"Is not of God." There are apparently two classes,

those who deny the Incarnation and (iii. 10) those who do not practise righteousness, but they exhibit two negative signs of one class. He who denies the Incarnation, having thrust from himself the strongest motive to holy living, will fail to practise that genuine, evangelical righteousness which Christ exemplifies and requires.

“Spirit of antichrist.” There being no middle class between the just and the unjust, the friends of Christ and his foes, it must follow that all who are not His friends are actuated by the spirit antagonistic to Christ, the spirit of antichrist. See ii. 18, note.

“Whereof ye have heard.” As a part of the Gospel message (Matt. xxiv. 5, 24) and of apostolic prediction. (Acts xx. 30; 1 Tim. iv. 1.) These general warnings respecting false Christs and heretical teachers are by John vividly condensed in a typical adversary, called by Paul “that man of sin.” (2 Thess. ii. 3.) This antagonist represents not merely unbelievers, but also wilful and conscious perverters of the gospel. Those who have extreme abhorrence of popery render the preposition “anti” instead of. Thus they find in antichrist a forewarning of one who will profess to stand in Christ’s place clothed with His authority to forgive sin and to rule the church as “the vicegerent of God.” It is certain that John was divinely inspired to describe the seed out of which the papacy has budded, blossomed and borne its baneful fruit. This is implied

4. Ye are of God, *my* little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

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in the words "even now already is it in the world." In seed form the fulfilment of the prophecy had come before Christians were looking for it.

4. "Ye are of God." "Ye," as contrasted with the world and with professed believers who were not endowed with spiritual discernment because they had not received and retained "the anointing of the Holy One" (ii. 20, 24, 27). There are in John's writings three phrases to express the relation of believers to God: to be begotten of God, to be of God, and to be a child of God. They occur scores of times, implying a new life in the earth.

"Have overcome them." The false prophets who would seduce you from your loyalty to Christ are permanently conquered by John's hearers, as the perfect tense implies. See ii. 14, v. 4; Rev. ii. 7, 11, 17, 26; iii. 5, 12, 21; xii. 11, to all of which John xvi. 33 is the key. "The ground and assurance of the victory of Christians lie in the Power by which they are inspired." (Westcott.) This power is applied by the mutual indwelling of God and the believer (iii. 24, iv. 16; John xv. 4).

"Greater is He that is in you." The Holy Spirit whose indwelling is maintained by an uninterrupted, unwavering trust in the living glorified Christ,

5. They are of the world: therefore speak they *as* of the world, and the world heareth them.

6. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is

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“Than he that is in the world.” The devil, whose children the wicked are (iii. 10; Matt. xiii. 38, xxiii. 15; Acts xiii. 10). In their case there is also a mutual indwelling, for the world lieth in the wicked one (v. 19), and the unbelieving and impenitent are “in the world” as a baneful and dominating power.

5. “They are of the world.” The false prophets, the organs of the devil, are not merely of the earth, as all men are, but they are of the world—a phrase expressing the characteristics of all who are separated from God (ii. 16; John viii. 23, xv. 19, xvii. 14, 16, xviii. 36).

“They speak of the world.” The character of their speech and the character of their hearers are determined by their own character.” (Westcott.) This is according to the adage, “like priest like people.” An unspiritual pulpit will make unspiritual pews.

6. “We are of God.” Having spoken of Christian hearers in verse 4, John now speaks of Christian teachers whose anointed vision discerns the true message which they bring to men from the lips of God. This is received in its true character by him who has the experimental knowledge of God and by all who sincerely desire such knowledge. “The world listens to those

not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

7. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God.

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who express its own thoughts; the Christian listens to those who teach him more of God. The readiness to hear springs from a living, growing knowledge, which welcomes and appropriates the truth." The phrase, "He who is not of God," does not exclude true moral responsibility. He has determined his own character by the perverse attitude of his own will, by which he has shut out "the Spirit of truth," who reveals the truth and enables the seeking soul to see it. In the absence of the Spirit of truth, the evil spirit, the father of lies, fills the empty and darkened soul with various forms of religious error. Hence the culpability of unbelief.

"By this we know." "This power of recognition belongs to all believers. It is not limited to teachers by an emphatic pronoun as before." That the apostles have the "Spirit of truth" is proved by the fact that they who have been born of the Spirit hear and obey them, while the false prophets show that they have the spirit of error because the world hears them with sympathy and satisfaction.

7. "Every one that loveth" with evangelical, pure, unselfish affection "is begotten of God." This excludes sexual love and the merely natural love of kin-

3. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

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dred. Some who have never heard of Christ, such as Socrates and Marcus Aurelius, have exhibited Christian philanthropy, which evinces that they were born of God. They had the spirit of faith, *i. e.*, the disposition to embrace the object of saving faith, Christ, were He presented to them; and they had the purpose of righteousness, the disposition to conform to Christian ethics when revealed to them. "Such are saved through the historic Christ, though they know him not." (Wesley.) They have the essential Christ, *i. e.*, the outlines of His moral character.

8. "Knoweth not God." Literally "knew Him not" when they professed to know Him by receiving baptism or by testimony of the lips.

"God is love." This is more than to say God is amiable. Only if He is love in His essential being, is the statement true, that to have no personal, experimental knowledge of love is to have no real knowledge of God. The Gnostics were doubtless in John's mind, who knew much about God, but they did not by a heart experience know God, for instead of loving those humble brethren who were not their equals in intellectual attainments they treated them with an arrogant and heartless contempt. "They had recognized that 'God is spirit,' and to some extent that 'God is light;' for they

9. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath

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knew Him to be an immaterial Being and the highest Intelligence; but they had wholly failed to appreciate that God is love." (Dr. A. Plummer.) The heathen regard God as terrible, whose fierce anger needs to be averted with offerings. The Jews believed that He was just and jealous, and, possibly, merciful, whose inmost being was to them a mystery beyond what was revealed in His name Jehovah, "I am that I am." To the regenerate alone is He known as Love.

Says Augustine, "If nothing whatever throughout the other pages of the Scriptures were said in praise of love, and this one thing only were all we were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, 'For God is love,' nothing more ought we to require."

9. "Herein was the love of God manifested," and in John iii. 16, "For God so loved the world." Bishop Westcott says, "The revelation of the divine love is referred to an absolute (eternal) moment, both in relation to the Son and also to the world and to men." God's love is made known chiefly through redemption, which is a definite act. The gift of the Son was absolutely free and spontaneous. If it had been of necessity it would not be a proof of love.

"In us." It was love towards us, but the form of this phrase shows that God's love is revealed not only in His

sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

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Son, but also in us as a transparent medium. "The Christian shares the life of Christ and so becomes himself a secondary sign of God's love." (Westcott.) The new creation is a more clear and expressive revelation of love than the first creation: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

"His only begotten Son." Shallow and weak indeed is the Unitarian exegesis—"best beloved son." It is in vain that extreme liberalism teaches that all men are incarnations of God in a lower degree than Jesus. "Only begotten" denotes unique sonship, an existence unshared which is grounded in God's nature, while the existence of all men and of all things is grounded in God's will. This is the difference between the generation of the Son outside of time limits, "before the world was," and the creation of the universe by His own volition. "Christ is the One only Son, the One to whom the title belongs in a sense completely unique and singular, as distinguished from that in which there are many children of God. (John i. 12-14.)

"That we might live." Activity, not safety, is accentuated.

10. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

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“Through Him.” Christ is the efficient cause of spiritual life. He lives in the true believer. (Chap. v. 12, 20; Gal. ii. 20; 2 Cor. iv. 10-12; Col. iii. 4.) He is the substance of the Christian’s life. (Phil. i. 21.) Also the aim of his life. (Rom. vi. 10, 11, xiv. 8; Gal. ii. 19.)

10. “In this is love.” Real love in its origin is not human, but divine. Its source is not a blind impulse, but an intelligent movement of God’s free will pitying a sinful race and approving those who trust in His Son, whom He sent into a fallen world. In this act God’s love reached its climax. Human love at best is only responsive; it is never original and spontaneous. It is never strictly distinterested, as the love of God is. The theology that requires of mankind such love is too high for the holiest men and angels to reach.

The great secret of God’s method with men is that He loves them into loving. There is no other force so mighty as love, and nothing else so contagious. It is the royal law of the Christian life, because it has been the regal force in God’s dealing with His children. Having been won to the Father by the Father’s love, the child is bound by the very nature of the new life to show the same love to others.

“And this is just as practical a law for the conduct of home. The love of a mother for her child is the great example and sanction of the love of the children one for another. Here in the home it is an indisputable fact that we are loved into loving. And business, which is supposed to be the sphere least subject to the sway of altruistic law, is no less subject to the general principle. Every employer can do more by love, which is always just, than he can by the rigorous enforcement of definite rules. Workmen are loved into loving the work they do and into placing the interests of their employers first. In fact, there is no department of our complex life which is not subject to this spiritual and natural law—we love because He first loved us.”

“The propitiation for our sins.” See on chap. ii. 1. The Greek word (*hilasmos*) occurs in the New Testament only in these two passages, and without reference to the person to whom it is offered. The same is true of the corresponding verb found only twice in the New Testament. The Scriptural conception is not that of appeasing one who is personally angry, but rather that of altering the conditions which prevent pardon and raise up an inevitable obstacle to fellowship. These are two: God’s relation as moral governor and protector of His law, and the natural inclination of fallen man to commit sin. God as the executive of law cannot by mere prerogative pardon the sinner, nor is a sinful being

11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

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fit for fellowship with his holy Creator. The propitiation offered by Christ declares God's righteousness while pardoning the ungodly that repent and trust in the Son of God, receiving Him as both Saviour and Lord. Such are at the same time forgiven and regenerated, or made new creatures. Thus both the obstacles to acceptance are removed.

Such phrases as "propitiating God" and "God being reconciled" are foreign to New Testament diction.

11. "If God so loved us." Here "if" does not intimate a doubt. It is nearly equivalent to "since." Compare John xiii. 14, "If I then . . . have washed your feet."

"We also ought." As spiritual children of God we must honor Him by representing His moral attributes and by following His example in loving those whom He loves. See iii. 16, note. The obligation which God's love here lays upon us is not that we should love Him in return, as we would naturally expect, but that we should "love one another." It was when Jesus was "knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He was come from God, and was going to God," that He put on the livery of a servant and washed His disciples' feet. His followers should learn

12. No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us:

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that the spiritual nobility implied by adoption into the family of God imposes corresponding obligation. The higher the rank the more service to humanity is rightly expected.

12. "God hath no man ever yet beheld." In all the history of the saints from Enoch to John the Baptist, however close their fellowship with God, no one had beheld His essential Being. The various theophanies of the Old Testament were not His real Person, but only fringes of His robe. But faith is a good substitute for sight. Says Bede, "Where we are not yet permitted to enjoy the Divine vision what comfort we experience!" For the invisible God is not only near to us, but to the full believer in Christ, "He is in us, the Life of our lives."

"God abideth in us." He is in the genuine believer not as a stranger in an inn lodging for a night, but He is a permanent inhabitant. This fact should banish fear, begird with strength, afford unbroken peace and unfailing joy, and tireless activity in promoting His glory on the earth. We may not always be conscious of the Holy Spirit abiding within, but there will be periods of wonderful spiritual illumination and crises of indescribable joy. Professor Phelps calls it "almost in-

13. hereby know we that we abide in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

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tolerable joy." "His love is perfected in us." It is our love toward God which is here spoken of as perfected. God's love is always perfect. To say that God's love for us is perfected is to imply that His love may be imperfect, and that His love is not perfected until Christians "love one another." This would make a Divine perfection depend on a human volition. We have perfect love when the Spirit sheds abroad the love of God to such a degree as to exclude everything antagonistic thereto. The claim that we have perfect love to God is manifestly erroneous if love toward our fellow Christians is absent. Love is the only particular in which perfection can be predicated of man marred and dwarfed by sin, and that love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. v. 5), the author of that circumcision of heart requisite for loving God with all the heart and all the soul. (Deut. xxx. 6.) In chap. ii. 5 the sign of the perfect love of God in the believer is his estimate of His revelation and his vigilance in obeying its commandments. Here it is love to one another. Evangelical perfection may consist with many intellectual infirmities.

13. "Hereby know we." Love to man is a proof that God abides within us, just as the stream argues the exist-

ence of the fountain. This Epistle of John is as full of tests of character as a complete chemical laboratory is amply furnished with tests of substances. Hence the constant occurrence of the phrases "we know" and "hereby we know." See iii. 24, iv. 13, 15, 16, v. 20, ii. 5; John vi. 56, xiv. 20, xv. 5.

"That we abide in Him and He in us." Says Basil, "The Spirit is the place for the saints; and the saint is a place appropriate to the Spirit." Prof. Austin Phelps declares that next to the mystery of Three Persons in One Nature is the mystery of the Divine Spirit abiding in the human spirit. This mutual abiding, a favorite doctrine with John, is an expression of the most intimate and delightful fellowship. It is a strong incidental proof of the supreme divinity of Christ that he is frequently spoken of as one of the parties to this mutual abiding (John vi. 56, xiv. 20, xv. 5, xvii. 26); for no created personality can enter into and abide in another.

"He hath given us of His Spirit." The gift of the Spirit is the proof that God abides in believers. His testimony is direct and immediate when he cries in the heart, "Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6), or teaches us to utter the same joyful cry. (Rom. viii. 15.) His testimony is indirect and mediate when from the observed fruit of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22, 23) we infer the abiding presence of the Father and the Son. (John xiv. 23.) The direct witness of the Spirit being the ground of the inferential

14. And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God.

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witness must precede it. Christians are sometimes said to receive of the Spirit and sometimes they are said to receive the Spirit. (Gal. iii. 2, 3, 5, iv. 6.) Only the latter is true of Christ. He has a capacity commensurate with the Spirit's infinitude.

14. "We have seen." "We" is emphatic as in i. 1-5 and designates those who had been eyewitnesses of the Incarnate Son of God working miracles, uttering matchless parables, interpreting the law of God with an authority equal to its Divine Giver on Mt. Sinai, and exhibiting a sinless character amid contradictions, insults, and persecutions, thus proving his claim to be the only begotten Son of God. While no man has beheld the Father, some did see in Jesus Christ the revelation of God.

"The Saviour of the world." He is provisionally the Saviour of all men. But he is really the Saviour of only those that accept Him by faith. (John iii. 16.) All who hear His gospel and do not obey it will be punished with an everlasting sentence. (Matt. xxv. 46; 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.) The Jews were not expecting a Saviour of the world, but a Deliverer of their nation only.

15. "Confess that Jesus is the Son of God." See

16. And we know and have believed the love which God hath in

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verse 2 for the key to the meaning. It does not express the declaration of a fact, but the public recognition of the Person of Christ as the Divine Saviour, and submission to Him as Lord, and trust in Him for salvation. He who with the heart thus acknowledges Him, and with tongue confesses Him, is said to have Him and to have eternal life. "He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also."

"Abideth in Him and he in God." This reciprocal indwelling in God (iii. 24, iv. 13, 15, 16), and in Christ (John vi. 56, xiv. 20, xv. 5), implies the most intimate fellowship of the believer with the Father, and with the Son, in whom He is revealed. The conditions of this fellowship are love, confession and obedience. The effects are fruitfulness, assurance and guilelessness. The sign is the possession of the Holy Spirit who sheds abroad love in the heart and inspires the filial feeling, crying Abba, Father.

16. "And we." This pronoun is emphatic and denotes all "who can speak from the fulness of Christian experience as confessors of Christ." (Bishop Westcott.) Young converts who cannot say with confidence "we know," should be encouraged by the promise, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord."

"Know and have believed." Sometimes knowl-

us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him.

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edge is the ground of faith, as the banker's acquaintance with the good character of the borrower is his reason for trusting him; and sometimes faith is the path to knowledge, as when the child believing the teacher comes to know the alphabet. Paul speaks of the unity of faith and knowledge, *i. e.*, faith ends in knowledge. (Eph. iv. 13.) This is the genesis of all spiritual knowledge. A general acquaintance with Christ and self-surrender to him prepares us for that appropriating faith in his promise of the Paraclete whose office it is to glorify the living Christ revealing Him in the heart. As a practical truth in the spiritual realm, believing precedes knowing. Then in turn knowledge lays the foundation for a higher act of faith, as Paul knew whom he had believed, and on this ground he was fully persuaded or had a perfect faith that he could safely trust the deposit of himself in His hands until the day of judgment. Thus, by first believing and then knowing, and on this new basis believing again, the Christian climbs Jacob's ladder from earth to heaven.

"The love that God hath in us." Believers are the sphere in which God's love manifests itself to all who know them. "God is love." In verse 8 these wonderful words are associated with the

17. Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have bold-

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initial knowledge of God in the soul's new birth. Here they are repeated in connection with the believer's activity, growth and Christian perfection. God in Christ is set as the type for human action and the model to which the believer must be conformed, not only in the future world, but in the present life, for "As he is so are we in this world."

"Dwelleth in God and God in him." See verse 15, note. This mutual abiding enables the adult believer to rise to the heavenly order described in Col. iii. 3, "For ye died and your life is hid with Christ in God." Death to sin is requisite to perfect fellowship with God.

17. "Herein has love been made perfect with us." Some exegetes say that it is God's love to us which is here described, but we agree with Alford that "this is forbidden by the whole context." God's love is always perfect, but man's love to God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit (Rom. v. 5), meeting various obstacles, limitations and antagonisms (Gal. v. 17; 1 Cor. iii. 1-3), is at first feeble and imperfect. But when the flesh is crucified, love filling the soul's whole capacity is said by the Spirit of inspiration to be perfected. Again, "the love of God" in this Epistle commonly means our love to Him, and not His to us (ii. 5, iii. 17, v. 3). If it means the love which He has implanted in us, He is the direct

ness in the day of judgment; because as he is, even so are we in this world.

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object of that love and we are the responsible subjects. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." It is best to interpret "herein" as referring to what precedes; to our abiding in God and God in us. "That we may have boldness." Rather in order that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. The Greek thus strongly expresses the purpose for which our love is made perfect by the mutual indwelling.

"Boldness." This strong Saxon word is the best translation of the Greek. In the A. V. it is rendered by the weak word "confidence," as in ii. 28. It is a compound word meaning "say everything," and signifies the utmost intrepidity and freedom in speaking. The R. V. uniformly renders it "boldness" everywhere in this Epistle and in Heb. iv. 16, where it means the fearless trust with which perfect love regards "the judge of the quick and the dead." This boldness attends the present contemplation of the day of judgment by those who love God with all the heart, mind and strength.

"Day of judgment." This future day is demonstrated by the human conscience, and by divine revelation. It is authenticated by the resurrection from the dead of the appointed Judge (Acts xvii. 31) who declared

that he would judge the whole human family, and confirmed this solemn prediction by his greatest miracle, his victory over the grave.

“Because as He is, so are we in this world.” John’s statement is what in logic is called an “enthymeme.” One of the premises not being expressed is carried along in the mind. This premise is the thought that the Judge will not condemn those who are facsimiles of Himself. This is the syllogism:

The final Judge will acquit facsimiles of Himself.

We are in this world facsimiles of the final Judge.

Therefore the final Judge will acquit us.

Says Bishop Westcott, “The ground of boldness is present likeness to Christ.” Says Alford, “In these words, the sense must be gained by keeping strictly to the tenses and grammatical construction, not by changing the tenses, nor by referring the words in this world to Christ, as Christ was in this world we are.” This is true, but it is not the truth declared in this verse. Our essential likeness to Christ is “not in our trials and persecutions; nor by our not being of the world as He is not of the world; nor in that we, as sons by adoption through Him, are beloved of God, nor in that we live in love as He lives in love; but in that we are righteous as He is righteous (chap. ii. 29, iii. 3-6, 10, 22); this love being evinced by our abiding in love.” Alford furthermore asserts that the ground of

18. There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear,

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our boldness is "because we are absolutely like Christ Himself, because He lives in us, for without this there can be no likeness to Him." Westcott concurs with Alford. He says, "The likeness of Christians to Christ is to His character as it is at present and eternally, not to any one attribute, as love or righteousness, but to the whole character of Christ as it is made known; and His high-priestly prayer serves as a commentary on the view which St. John suggests of the position of Christians in this world."

18. "There is no fear in love." The thought of boldness, by a mental law of suggestion, calls up the theme of fear in contrast as naturally existing in sinful men. Fear and love are mutually exclusive according to the intensity of love. "Fear cannot co-exist with perfect love which occupies the whole heart. The fear of which St. John speaks is, of course, not the reverence of a son (Heb. v. 7, 8), but the dread of the criminal or of the slave." (Westcott.) Says Augustine, "It is one thing to fear God lest He may send thee into Gehenna with the devil; and quite a different feeling to fear God lest He depart from thee." With a theological insight and an epigrammatic expression unparalleled, Bengel groups all mankind in four classes:

1st. Those who are without fear and without love;

because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19. We love, because he first loved us.

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2d. Those who are with fear and without love;

3d. Those who are with fear and with love;

4th. Those who are without fear and with love.

This unmatched epigram also gives the history of the individual soul from the blindness and hardness of impenitence through conviction of sin, and the mixed condition of early Christian experience, "the flesh lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit opposing the flesh" in His endeavor to lead the persevering believer into the experience of love not mingled with fear, pure, or perfect, love, the spiritual Canaan

"Where dwells the Lord our Righteousness,  
And keeps his own in perfect peace  
And everlasting rest."

"Fear hath punishment." In anticipation of divinely inflicted suffering. Such punishment is not future only but present. See John iii. 18.

19. "We love." In the critical manuscript there is no expressed object, because Christian love of every kind is meant.

"Because He first loved us." This is more than gratitude. Evangelical love originates in God's love. This enkindles love in us as a fruit of the Spirit. (Rom. v. 5; Gal. v. 22.)

20. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen.

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20. "If a man say." Here appears again the Gnostic objector with whom we became acquainted in chap. i. 6, 8, 10. By his baneful doctrine of dualism, ascribing all evil to matter, and declaring his spirit by its nature free from sin, he vainly imagines that he can combine in his own person love toward God and hatred of his brother in Christ or his fellow-man made in the image of God. Says Dr. Plummer in the Cambridge Bible for Schools, "The case here contemplated is one form of the man that feareth not. His freedom from fear is caused, however, not by the perfection of love but by presumption. He is either morally blind or a conscious hypocrite." Compare ii. 4, 9. He neither fears nor loves. His fearlessness may result from indifference, or ignorance, or inveterate wickedness veneered with a pretentious philosophy.

"He cannot love God." John's argument is that if a man fails in the duty of love to one with whom he is in daily intercourse, he cannot perform the far more difficult duty of loving one whom he has never seen and of whose form he cannot conceive, and whose invisible existence is kept in mind by the strenuous effort of faith.

21. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.

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21. "Commandment . . . from him." Exegetes find it difficult to determine in this verse, as also in several other passages, whether John is speaking of the Son or of the Father. Both are authors of this command. (Lev. xix. 18; John xiii. 34.) But this difficulty is not without doctrinal significance. It argues that the apostle thoroughly believed in the supreme Godhead of the Incarnate Son of God who shared his Father's glory before the world was. If John had believed that the Son of God was a creature he would not have so confused the Personal Son with his Father's personality.

John's reasoning, in a nutshell, is this, no man can do so contradictory an act as to love God and hate his image in his brother man, and, especially, in his Christian brother.

#### CONCLUDING NOTES.

1. In verse 3 an important variant reading is found in the Vulgate and in many Latin fathers. Instead of "confesseth not Jesus" they have "separates Jesus," *i. e.*, separates the divine from the human, or divides the one divine-human person. Some of the Latin manuscripts read "annulleth" for "confesseth not." See R. V. margin. For the following reasons we reject these two variant readings:

(1.) The name Jesus emphasizes the humanity of our Lord and it would not be used by John in a sense so comprehensive. He would have said "the Christ."

(2.) All the earliest Greek manuscripts read "confesseth not," and all the versions except the Latin, although one important Old Latin follows the earliest Greek manuscripts. Nearly all the Greek fathers who quote this text have the words "confesseth not." In view of these facts there can be no question as to the overwhelming weight of evidence in favor of the traditional reading, as found in both the A. V. and R. V.

2. Verse 8. For the most part St. John, like the other writers of the Bible, leaves the reader to form his conception of God from what is recorded of His action; but in three phrases he has laid down once for all the great outlines within which our thoughts on the Divine Nature must be confined, "God is Spirit," "God is light," and "God is love." "The first is metaphysical and describes God in Himself, in His being. The second is moral, and describes God in His character towards all created things. He is light. The third is personal, and describes God in His action towards self-conscious creatures. He is love. In this order they offer a progress of thought." (Westcott.)

3. Augustine declares that the name "Love" belongs very appropriately in the Holy Trinity to the Holy Spirit who communicates to us that common love which binds

the Father and the Son together. Hence this epigrammatic sentence contains the quintessence of orthodox theology: "Ubi caritas, ibi Trinitas," where love is there is the Trinity. Love existing from eternity, before a creature existed, must have had the only begotten Son for its eternal object, while the messenger between them was the Personal Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory because he fathoms or searches the depths of both the Father and the Son. The unity of the Three is one substance, Love. Augustine insists that the divine "substance is not one thing and love another, but that the substance itself is love, and love itself is the substance, whether in the Father or in the Son." "Love," says Westcott, "involves a subject and an object, and that which unites both. We are taught, then, to conceive of God as having in Himself the perfect object of love and the perfect response of love, completely self-sufficing and self-complete. We thus gain, however imperfect language may be, the idea of a tri-personality in an Infinite Being as correlative to a sole-personality in a finite. In the unity of Him who is One we acknowledge the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the interaction of Whom we can see love fulfilled." To have no personal experience of love in its evangelical sense is to have no personal knowledge of God. The Gnostics knew much about God, but they had no real knowledge of God, because, instead of lov-

ing their illiterate brethren, they, in their intellectual pride, looked down upon them with an arrogant contempt.

4. Until the sunrise of the Incarnation no religion had grasped the truth that God in His very essence is love. The name which He set for Himself in the Old Testament was Jehovah, "I am that I am," but the name revealed in the New Testament is Love. In no book in the New Testament does "love," either as a noun or a verb, occur so often as in this Epistle and the gospel written by "the Apostle of Love." The love of God usually in this Epistle means our love to God, but in verse 9 and in iii. 16 it means His love to us.

5. Only begotten Son, verse 9.

"The point which is emphasized by 'only begotten Son' here is evidently the absolute uniqueness of the Being of the Son. He stands to the Father in a relation wholly singular. He is the one only Son, the one to whom the title belongs in a sense completely unique and peculiar. The thought is centred in the Personal existence of the Son, and not in the generation of the Son. The true reading in John i. 18 is in all probability 'only begotten God' (R. V. margin and text of Westcott and Hort). This phrase occurs in some of the confessions of the fourth century." Christ is the only begotten Son in distinction from the many who have become sons by adoption. We must avoid the error

of Dr. Adam Clarke and Prof. Moses Stuart that the Logos was not the Son until he was born of Mary. He was Son from eternity. See Watson's Institutes on "the eternal generation of the Son."

6. Perfect Love, verse 18.

We cannot agree with the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges: "Though as certain as any physical law, the principle, that perfect love excludes all fear, is an ideal that has never been verified in fact. No believer's love has ever been so perfect as entirely to banish fear; but every believer experiences that as his love increases his fear diminishes." Our objection to this denial is, first, that it assumes that the writer has known the state of feeling of every martyr who has joyfully marched to the stake, and of every other Christian in all the past generations, which assumption is but little short of omniscience; and, secondly, it is a covert denial of the possibility of perfect love in the human soul under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. The most that any man is competent to assert is that he has not himself reached that experience of love which banishes all fear that has torment. Our third objection is that it impeaches and discredits the testimonies of eminent saints in all the Christian ages. In the fourth place idealism, when employed to neutralize a divine precept, is a weapon which can be wielded against every commandment of God. He who interprets as ideal and imprac-

licable the mandate, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," opens the way for the negation of all the other precepts in the Sermon on the Mount, a way in which many modern professors of the Christian faith are carelessly walking.

"To put the standard of Christian perfection too high," says Wesley, "is to drive it out of the world." There is no doubt that what "the beloved disciple" says about perfect love and deliverance from all fear he says out of the experience of his own heart as a fact. St. Paul reasoned, but St. John uttered the intuitions of his own consciousness.

## CHAPTER V.

IN this chapter true faith is described as acknowledging the Messiahship of Jesus, as experiencing the new birth, as aflame with love to God and to all the regenerate, as keeping God's commands, as victorious over the world, as having inward self-attestation and eternal life, and as having boldness and success in prayer. The apostle in iv. 12 details the various evidences on which the Christian faith rests, and declares faith and love to be inseparable, that alike worthless is a faith which does not inspire love, and a love not the offspring of faith. The transition from the former chapter lies in the idea of brotherhood, not human, but Christian, arising from a love flowing from a vital apprehension of Christ as both an almighty Saviour and a supreme Lord. On the plane of love inspired by the Holy Spirit, this brotherhood is not an arbitrary command, but a natural outflow from this diffusive principle.

1. "Whosoever believeth." This is more than assent to the facts in the life of Christ and to the truth of His doctrines and His claims; it is such a reliance upon His person for salvation as causes the abandonment of every

1. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of

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other hope and plea, and the enthronement of Him as the supreme Lawgiver. True faith embraces assent, consent and trust. It requires the hearty assent of the intellect and the cordial movement of the sensibilities and the perfect submission of the will.

“Has been begotten of God.” The perfect tense in the Greek implies the continuous efficacy of this divine change.

“Every one that loveth Him that begat.” The divine order is faith in Christ, the giver of the Spirit, the Spirit imparting life, and love attending spiritual life as its chief element. Thus faith and love are inseparable. Says Augustine, “Faith with love is the faith of a Christian; without love it is the faith of a demon.” The same sentiment is expressed by James respecting those who profess to have faith without its fruitage in works of love. “The devils also believe and tremble,” “and are devils still.” (Wesley.)

“Loveth . . . begotten of him.” This is natural. The love of God and the love of the children of God do in fact include each the other. It is equally true if we reverse the order of the subject and predicate and say “he who loves the children of God loves God. Either form of love may be made the ground or the conclusion in the argument.” The children are in the image of

God; and whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

2. Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and do his commandments.

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their father. No one can love his father and hate his photographs, unless they are distortions so monstrous as to dishonor him. True Christians are more or less perfect representations of God's moral character. This verse is called in logic an irregular sorites:

“Every one who believes the Incarnation is a child of God.

Every child of God loves its Father.

Every believer in the Incarnation loves God.

Every one who loves God loves the children of God.

Every believer in the Incarnation loves the children of God.”

This verse demonstrates that the love of the Father is the source of love to His children, and not the reverse.

2. “Do His commandments.” This phrase occurs nowhere else. Love to God's children is here said to follow from our love to God evinced by obedience. The two loves confirm and prove each other. If either is professed in the absence of the other it is spurious. One may know that his love to his brethren is genuine when he is sure that he loves God. “Whenever we love and obey God we have fresh evidence that our philanthropy is genuine.”

3. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

4. For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world:

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3. "His comandments are not grievous"—or burdensome. Love knows no burdens. Christ's yoke is light because he imparts strength to bear it. "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13, R. V.)

4. "Whatsoever." The neuter emphasizes the victorious power rather than the victorious person. Beware of that exegesis of this text which analyzes the Christian into two personalities, the old man in full strength and the new man dwelling together until death separates them, the old man never crucified (Gal. ii. 20, v. 24; Col. ii. 11) and the body of sin never destroyed. The result is a lifelong sinning personality justified by the doctrine that entire sanctification is impossible in the present life, the doctrine which encourages believers to continue in depravity, and which dis-crowns the Gospel of Christ by making death the final conqueror of the propensity to sin.

"Is begotten of God." Here and in verses 1 and 18, "in all three cases we have the perfect, not the aorist, participle. It is not the mere fact of having received the Divine birth that is insisted on, but the permanent results of the birth." (Dr. A. Plummer's Cambridge Bible for Colleges.) The same writer notes the fact

and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, *even* our faith.

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that in the words, "victory that overcometh," the aorist should be rendered "overcame," the tense denoting "a victory won once for all." Westcott thinks that here "the aorist receives its full force. The victory of Christ was gained upon a narrow field, but it was world-wide in its effects." But we understand from the context that John is describing the victory of regenerate souls. To speak of Jesus Christ as exercising faith is to use a diction foreign to the New Testament. Every Christian may reach a point where faith puts forth its highest possibilities and receives, as a definite second experience of the fulness of the Holy Spirit in his office as the Sanctifier, a victory once for all which will make all future victories easy. Westcott elsewhere concedes that the believer may "pass through the decisive history in which the truth is once for all absolutely realized."

"Overcometh the world." Here is an additional reason why the commands are not burdensome; it is because the new birth gives a new point of view. Christian faith gives a power to grasp spiritual realities by imparting a new unworldly nature and a strength which overcomes the world. Faith makes the invisible world so real and brings the future and eternal life so

5. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

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near as to make them more influential in the formation of character than the influences of the present evil world. (See Chalmers's great sermon on "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.")

"The world." All the limited transitory powers opposed to God. It is an empire whose dominion we cannot escape till through faith in Christ the spiritual and eternal become real and infinitely more valuable than things earthly, sensual and evanescent. Faith gives us the true standard for the estimate of things.

"Even our faith." In the Greek the word "faith" in John's Epistles occurs here only. It is not found in his Gospel. It here signifies the system of Gospel truth summed up in the confession that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, both Saviour and Lord, is so trusted in and enthroned as to constitute that saving faith which works by love, purifies the heart and overcomes the world. He who possesses this faith and perseveringly exhibits its effects in his transformed character will share the victory over the world in which Christ exulted. (John xvi. 33.)

5. "Who is he that overcometh?" Here the abstract "whatsoever" is concreted in the single believer whose victory represents what may actually be realized

6. This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.

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in every Christian. "Belief in Christ is at once belief in God and in man. It lays a foundation for love and trust toward our fellow-men. Thus the instinctive distrust and selfishness, which reign supreme in the world, are overcome."

6. "This is he that came." The identity of the man of Nazareth with the eternal Son of God is again emphasized as the central truth of Christian theology, the reception of which is necessary to the attainment of victory over the world and of translation out of darkness into the marvellous light of His kingdom. Then follow the witnesses to this truth which are "the water and the blood." Many are the explanations of these words. The ritualists understand them to signify the sacraments of baptism and of the Lord's Supper. Others see only symbols of purification and redemption. But it seems to the writer that John uses these words as a summary of Christ's earthly life and mission, baptism in the water of Jordan and His sacrificial death by the shedding of His blood for the redemption of the world. The cardinal truths of His gospel are here briefly stated; for at His baptism with water was His baptism with the Holy Spirit attended by the Divine announcement of His Sonship to God in words implying that He

is the Son in a sense unique and peculiar. This was a sufficient opening and explanation of the whole of His ministry. His public and tragic death is at once the close and the explanation of His life of self-sacrifice. "The Gnostic teachers, against whom the apostle is writing, admitted that the Christ came 'through' and 'in' water; it was precisely at the baptism, they said, that the Divine Word united Himself with the man Jesus. But they denied that the Divine Person had any share in what was effected 'through' and 'in' blood; for, according to them, the Word departed from Jesus at Gethsemane. John emphatically assures us that there was no such separation. It was the Son of God who was baptized; it was the Son of God who was crucified; and it is faith in this vital truth that produces brotherly love, that overcomes the world, and is eternal life." (The Cambridge Bible for Colleges.)

"It is the Spirit that beareth witness." Besides the Spirit's testimony to the Divinity of Christ and the absolute truth of His Gospel (John xv. 26) there are six other witnesses cited in John's Gospel: The Old Testament Scriptures (v. 39-47), the Baptist (i. 7), the Disciples (xv. 27, xvi. 30), Christ's works (v. 36, x. 25, 38), His words (viii. 14, 18, xviii. 37), and the Father (v. 37, viii. 18). In this Epistle John adds two more witnesses, the water and the blood, thus making eight witnesses in all. That John is not a favorite with

the so-called liberal religious teachers is not wonderful.

“The Spirit is truth.” Hence his testimony is absolutely infallible in glorifying the Christ (John xvi. 14) identifying him with Jesus.

“Just as Christ is the Truth (John xiv. 6), the Spirit sent in Christ’s name is the Truth.”

The Vulgate reads thus: “The Spirit is he who testifies that Christ is the Truth.” On this unsubstantial version Bede comments in a very vigorous style, denouncing those who deny the reality of our Saviour’s body: “Since therefore the Spirit testifies that Christ is the Truth, and since He surnames Himself the Truth, and the Baptist proclaims Him to be the Truth, and the Son of thunder in his evangel heralds Him as the Truth, let the blasphemers who dogmatically declare that He is a phantom hold their tongues; let their memory perish from the earth who deny either that He is God or that He is a real man.” The whole truth revealed by Christ must be believed, however unpleasant. It is morally impossible to be an eclectic believer, receiving only the pleasant parts of Christianity. This is putting depraved taste above the infallible Teacher, to whom the human intellect as well as the human will must bow when we exercise saving faith. What is here said of Christ is said also of His representative, the Holy Spirit.

7. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth.

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7. ("Three that bear record in heaven.") These words are not in the R. V. In the opinion of all experts this passage is not genuine, not being found in a single Greek manuscript earlier than the fifteenth century; nor was it quoted by any one of the Greek or Latin fathers in the third, fourth and first half of the fifth centuries, when the doctrine of the Trinity was most intensely discussed. This verse is first found near the close of the fifth century in the Latin version, and it occurs in no other language until the fifteenth century. It is supposed to have been at first a marginal comment on a part of the seventh and eighth verses. "For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the three agree in one." Into these genuine words this marginal comment was probably copied innocently by some scribe, who supposed that they belonged to the text. This is called a gloss. The doctrine of the Trinity does not need any questionable proof-texts, being abundantly proved by those accepted Scriptures which ascribe Divine titles, attributes and works to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in whose names every Christian is baptized and every Christian assembly is with benediction dismissed.

8. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one.

9. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son.

10. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in

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8. "Agree in one." The Spirit, the water, and the blood are for the one object of establishing the Godhead of Christ. "The Trinity of witnesses furnish one testimony."

9. "If we receive the witness of men." An echo of Christ's word in John viii. 17, "the witness of two men is true." How credible, therefore, must the two witnesses be when they are the Father and the Son. The next clause should be reversed and connected with the following verse, thus: "The witness of God is this: He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself," after the analogy of chap. i. 5. "To believe on," a phrase occurring nearly forty times in John's Gospel and elsewhere in the New Testament only about ten times, expresses the strongest reliance and trust. We may believe a person's word without trusting to him our property or our lives.

10. "Witness in him." Here we prefer "himself" (Westcott and Hort) instead of "him" (R. V.). The external witness accepted as valid becomes internal certitude when the will bows in accordance with the truth believed. Absolute and irreversible self-surren-

him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son.

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der to Him who is the Truth brings a direct consciousness of His Divine nature and work. The witness of the Spirit, and of the water, and of the blood leads successively to an inner conviction and realization of pardon, newness of life and entire cleansing. Thus John's doctrine of assurance agrees with Paul's in Rom. viii. 16; Gal. iv. 6. This blessed effect does not follow a mere speculative assent to a fact, but it follows trust in the person of Christ and sole reliance on Him. This statement supplements the conditions of the new birth partly stated in the first verse of this chapter. Speculative or historical faith is not decisive of salvation, but it is the first step toward a saving trust.

"He that believeth not God." The fact that this clause is a direct antithesis to "believing on the Son," implies the Godhead or supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ. It also implies that a man cannot be a true believer in God while refusing to rely on His Son for salvation.

"Hath made Him a liar." This declaration John applies to two classes, to those who say that they have no sins (i. 10) which need a Divine Saviour; and, secondly, to those who deny that such a Saviour is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus. The Gnostics belong to

11. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life.

both of these classes whose teachings impeach God's testimony that "all have sinned," and that there is salvation in no other name than that of Jesus Christ. The two errors are twins. To lie is a dreadful sin, but to be a liar is much worse. The one is a bad act, the other is an evil character. Hence the heinousness of failing to believe God, to say nothing about an avowed distrust and disobedience.

"Hath not believed." The perfect tense indicates a permanent state in the past continuing to the present hour.

11. "That he gave." As a historic fact in the mission of His Son "He gave to us" who evangelically appropriate Christ, "eternal life." He who experimentally knows the truth of the Gospel has life eternal, which is present as well as future, or rather "eternal life" exists, and so is above all time. It is eminently a New Testament phrase occurring forty-four times. It is found only once in the Old Testament, Dan. xii. 2. It was manifested unto us (apostles). See i. 2.

"This life is in His Son." Its source and seat, its Prince or Author. See i. 4; Acts iii. 15.

12. "Hath the Son hath the life." If the Son is the fountain of life, then whoever has the Son

has the life, and no man can have the latter without the former. What is it to have the Son? It must not be weakened to mean to hold as an article of faith that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. To have Him we must appropriate Him by receiving Him as both Saviour and Lord in a manner so definite as to become the children of God (John i. 12), so consciously as to have the testimony of the Holy Spirit crying in the heart *Abba, Father*. (Rom. viii. 14-17; Gal. iv. 6.) If any one is in doubt in respect to this momentous question on which eternal destiny hinges, let him by penitent, all-surrendering faith in Christ ask for the witness of the Spirit of adoption. This life Paul calls "the life indeed" (1 Tim. vi. 19, R. V.), and Ignatius styles it "the inseparable life" and "our true life."

"He that hath not the Son of God." The words "of God" added to the last antithetic clause emphasize the greatness of the treasure which persistent unbelief through probation has forever removed, even the unsearchable riches of Christ. They also accentuate the certainty of failure in such a case, for to His Son God has given to have life in Himself and to impart life to evangelical believers, and to such only.

v. 13-21. CONCLUSION.

1. **Intercessory Love the Fruit of Faith** (v. 13-17).
2. **The Sum of the Christian's Knowledge** (v. 18-20).
3. **Final Injunction** (v. 21).

13. These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, *even* unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.

14. And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

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13. "That ye may know." The Gospel of John was written "that ye may have life" (xx. 31), but this Epistle was written "that ye may know that ye have eternal life." The one leads to the obtaining of the boon of life. The other to the joy of knowing that it is not only obtained, but that it is eternal. Thus from the Gospel to the Epistle there is progress. True faith always leads to knowledge. (Eph. iv. 13.)

14. "This is the boldness." Better, "And the boldness that we have towards Him is this, that if," etc. Thrice before this has John spoken of the Christian boldness (ii. 28, iii. 21, 22, iv. 17). Here it is in reference to intercessory prayer, prompted by love of the brethren. The conscious possession of eternal life enables the believer to come directly before God and to speak every thought with perfect freedom. This boldness is more than simple belief, it is a sure inward experience.

"According to his will." This only limit to acceptable prayer is equivalent to "in my name," John xiv. 13. It comprises all spiritual perfection and all temporal things that are contributory to this perfection.

15. and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him.

16. If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and *God* will give him life for them that sin not unto

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15. "And if we know." There may be uncertainty respecting the fact of the presence of the knowledge, but not in the knowledge itself. He who is prompted by the Holy Spirit will ask for those things only which accord with God's will, and he will have them in the assured promise, if not in conscious realization. (Mark xi. 24.) This may be delayed.

"We have the petitions." Their equivalent, if not necessarily the actual things asked for. A saint in need may pray for gold and receive that which is better than gold, the trial of his faith; confidence in God may be tested and strengthened. This finds its most characteristic expression in intercessory prayer, as in the next verse. Fellowship with God implies deep interest in our fellow-men, especially professed disciples of Christ. But there is one great barrier to the success of such prayer, "sin unto death."

16. "Sin not unto death." Death spiritual is separation from Christ "the life." All sin tends to this separation, but not in equal degrees. A hasty or thoughtless sin flowing from human imperfection and infirmity does not carry the same momentum of volition as a deliberate transgression. A course of sin is

death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request.

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more worthy of condemnation than a single act, immediately confessed and repented.

“He will ask.” The true believer will naturally offer prayer for his erring and imperilled brother in Christ. He needs no command. “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath.”

“And he will give to him life.” The pronoun “he” naturally refers to him who prays. “There is nothing unscriptural in the thought that the believer does that which God does through him, as in James v. 20.” The life given is not life restored, but rather life invigorated as the life of a sick man on the way to death is strengthened by a skilful physician.

“There is sin unto death.” This is the R. V. marginal reading. The A. V., “a sin,” is too definite and indicates a single act, or a certain act, which the Greek does not imply.

“I do not say he shall pray for it.” We are not forbidden to pray, but excused. In Jer. vii. 16, and xiv. 11, the prophet was forbidden to pray for the Jewish people in their apostasy, because they had exhausted the forbearance of God and He had determined to “consume them.” But in the New Testament we are not commanded to refrain from prayer for the very worst

people, even those who have committed the irremissible sin, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. We are told that we may innocently refrain from prayer in such a case.

This sin is not limited to a single act, such as a crime worthy of punishment by death, or a manifestly Divine visitation, or a sin punished by the church with excommunication. It is rather a course of wilful sin in defiance of the known law of God persisted in so obstinately against the influences of the Holy Spirit, that repentance becomes a moral impossibility, just as a man may starve himself so long as to lose the power to appropriate, digest and assimilate food. Just as there is an abstinence from food unto death, there is a career of sin and a refusal of the offers of grace until the power to receive grace perishes. Here arises the question, "How can we know when a sinner has reached this fatal point? How can we know when we are excused from intercessory prayer in his behalf?" So far as our powers of perception are concerned the line between God's mercy and His wrath in this world is imperceptible. But since all true prayer is prompted and helped by the Holy Spirit (Rom. viii. 26), the total absence of such prompting and assistance in the case of attempted prayer for an individual, whether a brother in the church or not, affords to the living Christian, who has the spirit of prayer for other sinners, ground

17. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

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for the inference that this person has sinned unto death, having passed the point in his course of sin which marks the soul for eternal despair. Our exegesis is strongly confirmed by the preceding context, which teaches that when we fulfil the conditions of true prayer we receive "whatsoever we ask." John pauses to note one exception to this promise, namely, when praying for another our prayer will be useless if that person has reached the point in his persistent sinning beyond which there is no possible passing out of death into life. Hence I believe that if the "sin unto death" is an act of sin, however heinous, it is the culmination of a state or habit of sin wilfully chosen and persisted in. It is the deliberate and final preference of darkness to light, of falsehood to truth, of sin to holiness, of the world to God, and of spiritual death to eternal life. It is the choice of Milton's Satan, "Evil, be thou my good."

17. "All unrighteousness is sin." "This statement," says the Cambridge Bible, "serves as a farewell declaration against the Gnostic doctrine that to the enlightened Christian declensions from righteousness involve no sin," because, as they assert, sin inheres in matter only, and hence the human spirit is always sinless. John's wider scope given to the definition of

sin includes not only positive transgression of the law, but also all failures to fulfil our duty to God and to one another. These are unrighteousness, although our natural infirmities and birth propensities do not involve us in guilt and entail punishment. John had already declared (i. 9) that there is ample provision in the atonement for both the forgiveness of actual sins and for cleansing from all unrighteousness. Here is a wide field for brotherly intercession.

“There is a sin not unto death.” This is added as a safeguard against despair. Bishop Westcott finds an unsolved paradox in this clause and the declaration in chap. iii. 9, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; and he cannot sin because he is born of God.” But in this verse John asserts that there is a sin which does not destroy the spiritual life. This has been accounted a plain contradiction. The perplexity disappears, or, rather, is greatly alleviated, by a careful reading of the Greek tenses. The perfect tense “has been born of God” implies that the regenerating efficacy of divine grace continues, and his likeness to God, figuratively expressed by the phrase “son of God,” remains undimmed to the present moment. In that case, while love to God rules the conduct, the person cannot be sinning or in a career of rebellion against God, which is spiritual death ending in eternal death. But from chap. ii. 1 it is assumed that there may be a sin-

18. We know that whatsoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but

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gle sin (aorist tense), contrary to the tenor and trend of this regenerate and saintly character, committed under the stress of sudden temptation, and immediately bewailed with true penitence and trust in the great Advocate with the Father. Such a sin finds speedy forgiveness. The spiritual life is not extinguished in eternal death. In this sense there is possible "a sin not unto death." But if instant repentance is not made, and a second and a third sin are committed, the law of habit comes in, and, like the fabled boa constrictor which crushed Laocoon and his sons in his deadly coils, destroys forever the spiritual life. He has ceased to be a child of God, because he has ceased to be like God. The "sin unto death" has been committed.

18. "But he that was begotten of God." Rather "the begotten of God," otherwise called "the Only Begotten Son." The exegetes quite generally agree that the Son of God is expressed by the aorist participle "begotten." If John had in mind a regenerated man he would have used the perfect tense, as in the first clause of this verse, also in iii. 9. The A. V., in accordance with an uncritical manuscript, leaves every newborn Christian to "keep himself," but the best critical manuscripts, as in Westcott and Hort's text, supply him with a keeper and protector—not a guardian angel, but the

he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not.

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only begotten Son of God. Hence he does not depend on his own resources in his warfare against the active and wily "evil one."

"Keepeth him." The (only) begotten (Son) of God keepeth him, not within a prison, but from watchful regard from without; not in custody, but in freedom.

"Toucheth him not." To a soul perfectly trusting in the power of the Son of God, there is no inward point of contact for the evil one to touch. "The ground of safety," says Westcott, "is revealed in John xiv. 30, for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." The perfectly trusting soul becomes the entirely sanctified soul. The principle of evil is not within, but without. The doctrine of final perseverance cannot be grounded on this passage. Faith may lapse and the person may wander from his divine keeper. "We cannot be protected against ourselves in spite of ourselves," while we are free agents in probation. If a man falls at any stage in his spiritual life, it is not the fault of divine grace, nor does it come from the irresistible power of adversaries, but from relaxed hold on the omnipotent guardian to whom he might have clung. "The sense of the divine protection is at any moment sufficient to inspire confidence, but not to

19. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one.

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render effort unnecessary." Says Bengel in his note on John iv. 14, "Shall never thirst." "Truly that water, as far as it depends on itself, has in it an everlasting virtue; and when thirst returns the defect is on the part of the man, not of the water." Says Alford, on John v. 24, "hath eternal life." "Where faith is, the possession of eternal life is, and when the one remits, the other is forfeited." All of God's promises have a condition expressed or implied. Whoever is in Christ is safe so long as he abides in Him, for he "is kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (1 Pet. i. 5.)

19. "We know that we are of God." This is the most satisfactory knowledge, because it is experimental, intuitive and absolutely certain. The Spirit cries within the heart, "Abba, Father." The first "we know" in verse 18 is theoretical announcing a theological truth respecting the regenerate. It is not a testimony, but a tenet. The first clause of verse 19 is a testimony.

"The whole world." All men who are not in Christ. Human society, as alien from God and opposed to Him, is wholly, in all its organizations, principles and practices, in the embrace of the evil one. Christians know

20. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know him that is true, and we are in

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that there is a kingdom of darkness, out of which they have been translated, and in which all unregenerate still abide. "It is clear, therefore, that the severance between the church and the world ought to be, and tends to be, as total as that between God and the evil one."

"Lieth in the evil one." A malignant personality has usurped the dominion of the whole world as just defined. (John xiv. 30, xvi. 11.) Hence a personal deliverer is required, in order to emancipate the captives of a personal oppressor and destroyer.

20. "And we know." "Even in the intellectual sphere, in which the Gnostics (knowing ones) claim to have such advantages, the Christian is, by Christ's bounty, superior." (Cambridge Bible.) In the Greek this reiterated "we know" is in this case introduced by the adversative particle "but," making a startling antithesis with the preceding clause. Bad as the world is under the tyranny of Satan, there is no ground for pessimistic despair. "That which is as yet dark will be made light. There is given to us the power of ever-advancing knowledge and of present divine fellowship. We can wait, even as God waits."

"The Son of God hath come," implying His perma-

him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

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nent presence, inspiring life, hope and strength in every believer.

“And hath given to us an understanding.” The permanency of this gift is elsewhere expressed in the gift of the Paraclete who came to stay, whose office it is to reveal Christ to the eye of faith and to give insight into spiritual truth.

“That we may know,” be knowing, by a never-ending exercise of our ever-expanding powers, more and more of the depths of the Divine love. This is eternal life.

“Him that is true.” The Father revealed in His Son completely the loftiest and purest idea of God possible in the mind of man, in contrast with the imaginary, unreal and imperfect objects of worship which mislead and debase all the pagan nations.

“We are in Him that is true.” Not by a literal incorporation into the body of the glorified Christ, but by fellowship real and blissful. “So far as believers are united with Christ, they are united with God. His assumption of humanity explains how the union is possible.” (Westcott.)

“This is the true God and eternal life.” All the scholars agree that “this” may grammatically refer to the Father, the principal noun in the previous sentence, or

21. *My little children, guard yourselves from idols.*

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to Jesus Christ, the nearest noun. In favor of the first theory are the following arguments: (1.) The Father is the leading subject of discourse. (2.) It is exactly John's style to repeat with some addition what has been already written. (3.) The Father is the primary source of life, the Son is secondary. (John v. 26.) (4.) This view harmonizes with John xvii. 3. (5.) The fact that God is the true God is in reference to the argument against idolatry, a more special point than the Divinity of His Son, as in 1 Thess. i. 9, "And how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God." The following are reasons for referring "this" to the incarnate Son of God: (1.) His is the noun last mentioned. (2.) The Father having been twice called "the true one" in the previous verse, to call Him so the third time would be a painful tautology. (3.) In this Epistle and in John's Gospel, Christ is styled the life. (4.) Athenasius thus interprets this text in his controversy with the Arians. (5.) The main purpose of this Epistle is to establish the reality of Christ's humanity, that the Son of God who has come in the flesh is a Being worthy of worship, and because He is the revelation of the true God, He is the true God.

21. "Little children." This is a term of endearment addressed to all readers, irrespective of age.

“Guard yourself from idols.” Contrast is one of the laws of the suggestion of thought. In this Epistle we have had light and darkness, truth and falsehood, love and hate, Christ and antichrist, life and death, righteousness and sin, the children of God and the children of the devil, the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, the believer protected against sin by the Only Begotten Son, and the world in the coils of the old serpent, the devil; and now we come to a fitting, practical, climactic conclusion, “Worship the true God and eschew idols.” We must bear in mind the environment of idolatry in which Christians in John’s day lived, when every street and every house literally swarmed with idols, and magnificent temples and groves and seductive idolatrous rites constituted the chief attraction of Ephesus, the city of great Diana. Some of the Gnostic teachers were giving occasion for this warning against idols, by their sophistry that idolatry was harmless, or that there was no need to suffer martyrdom in order to avoid it. If it were sinful, it had no power to defile the spirit with the body, but the material envelope only. Says Bishop Westcott, “This comprehensive warning is probably the latest voice of Scripture.”

The eminent appropriateness of this prohibition of idolatry, rendered emphatic by the fact that it is the final charge of the beloved apostle, is seen when we consider the pagan environment of the Christian

church in Ephesus. "If there was one thing for which the metropolis of Asia was more celebrated than another in the apostolic age, it was for the magnificence of its idolatrous worship. The temple of Artemis (Diana), its tutelary deity, which crowned the head of its harbor, was one of the seven wonders of the world. Its one hundred and twenty-seven columns, sixty feet high, were each a gift of a people or a prince. In area it was nearly as large as St. Paul's Cathedral in London; and its magnificence had become a proverb. 'The gods had one house on earth, and that was at Ephesus.' The architectural imagery of St. Paul in 1 Cor. iii. 9-17, which was written at Ephesus, and in the Epistles to the Ephesians (ii. 19-22), and to Timothy (1 Tim. iii. 15, vi. 19; 2 Tim. ii. 19, 20), may well have been suggested by it. The city was proud of the title, 'Temple-keeper of the great Artemis' (Acts xix. 35), and the wealthy vied with one another in lavishing gifts upon the shrine. The temple thus became a vast treasure house of gold and silver vessels and works of art. It was served by a college of priestesses and of priests. 'Besides these there was a vast throng of dependants, who lived by the temple and its services—*theologi*, who may have expounded sacred legends; *hymnodi*, who composed hymns in honor of the deity and others, together with a great crowd of *hierodulæ*, who performed more menial offices. The making of shrines and images of

the goddess occupied many hands. But perhaps the most important of all the privileges possessed by the goddess and her priests was that of *asylum*. Fugitives from justice or vengeance who reached her precincts were perfectly safe from all pursuit and arrest. The boundaries of the space possessing such virtue were from time to time enlarged. Mark Antony imprudently allowed them to take in part of the city, which part thus became free of all law, and a haunt of thieves and villains. Besides being a place of worship, a museum and a sanctuary, the Ephesian temple was a great bank. Nowhere in Asia could money be more safely deposited than here." (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.) Well did Tacitus remark, "No authority was strong enough to keep in check the turbulence of a people which protected the crimes of men in honor and worship of the gods." We have only to read the first chapter of Romans, or Gal. v. 19-21, and Col. iii. 5-8, to know enough of the kind of morality which commonly accompanied Greek and Roman idolatry in the first century of the Christian era, especially in Ephesus, where architecture and art and poetry appealed to the sense of the beautiful, where the mechanical arts devoted to paganism promoted thrift, where the vaults of Diana's temple afforded avarice a safe-deposit, where a host of priestesses ministered to lust, and the right of asylum shielded crime.

Where pagan religion is thus linked with art and business and pleasure, we do not wonder that John, the venerated Christian teacher, utters his final exhortation, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Nor are we surprised to learn that Heraclitus of Ephesus was called "the weeping philosopher," in view of the monstrous idiocy and protected criminality of the people among whom "there was not a man who did not deserve hanging." But the bottom of the depravity of this idol-worshipping city is not reached till we have passed down through the successive strata of magic, astrology, sorcery, incantations, amulets, exorcism, and every form of rascally imposture, all engendered by its heathen mythology.

"Facts such as these," says Dr. A. Plummer, "place in a very vivid light St. John's stern insistence upon the necessity of holding steadfastly the true faith in the Father and the incarnate Son, of keeping one's self pure, of avoiding the world and the things of the world, of being on one's guard against lying spirits, and especially the sharp final admonition, 'Guard yourselves from idols.'"

#### CONCLUDING NOTE.

The last seven scriptural attestations to the atonement are found in this Epistle. It is the opinion of the most scholarly experts that the so-called First Epistle of

John is the final document of Divine Revelation. This fact enhances the value of the seven clear and emphatic testimonies to the atonement, the central doctrine of the Gospel and the keystone of the arch of Christian theology. Three of these are found in the third chapter and one in each of the other four, making seven in all. It has been beautifully said that this Epistle is a prism which gives all the seven colors that make up the one white light of redemptive truth. Each of these testimonies is really distinct from every other, and from all others in the Holy Scriptures. These unique presentations of this fundamental doctrine have a polemic value, since they are of the nature of apologetic protests against erroneous views of the atonement already commencing to disturb the church and certain to appear more distinctly in future centuries. Let us present a conspectus of these testimonies. The first is "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." This is the negative side of the Christian's high privilege, of which the positive is to have fellowship in the light of God. The sin which is cleansed away by the virtue of the Redeemer's blood is not viewed as transgression to be forgiven, but as defilement to be removed, because it disqualifies for the presence of God in his temple. Here we have a definition of the atonement, as that quality in the blood of Jesus the Son of God which annuls or cleanses conditionally the pollu-

tion of sin. Its uniqueness lies in the divine-human value of the sacrifice for sin nowhere else stated, although it is implied in Paul's word, "the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." (Acts xx. 28.) Hitherto the value of Christ's blood has been expressed in such words as "incorruptible" and "precious," but now John's final testimony reaches an absolute climax. It is "the blood of Jesus His Son." This suggests how widely modern philosophers depart from the truth when they deny the theological and practical reality of the blood of our Incarnate Sacrifice, arguing that the sacrificial language of the Levitical altar-service comes into the New Testament only as a figure. Were this true we should find in the progress of doctrine in this volume a gradual transition from the figurative to the real. On the contrary, Levitical language is more distinct and real at the end of the gospels than at the beginning, at the conclusion of the Acts than at the commencement, and in the final epistle of Paul than in the first of the series. John, the last survivor of the apostles, opens and finishes his last writing with a most realistic allusion to the blood of the atonement. He gives no sanction to an interpretation of the Gospel so refined and so "spiritual" as to need no veritable oblation of blood, the medium of physical life. In his day the evangelical system had not been so sublimated as to clear itself of

the wrath of God and its propitiation in "the blood of Jesus His Son." The modern theory is as false as it is fascinating. The second testimony to the atonement is still more emphatic: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." The uniqueness of this declaration is seen first in the word "hilasmos," "propitiation," used in no other book in the New Testament, and, secondly, in the fact that the Son of God himself is the propitiation, and not as in Rom. iii. 25, a propitiatory offering made by Christ. That which gives heavenly virtue to the sacrifice in this testimony goes beyond the preaching, which emphasizes the blood and the life, and announces the astonishing fact that the very self of the offerer is the propitiation, as the Son. His Person interposes between the divine displeasure and the world which "lieth in the wicked one." He is the standing propitiation. Hence the possibility of a Christian's receiving forgiveness if he should commit a single sin, as the aorist tense, "If any man sin," implies. The Advocate makes no special intercession for the professed Christian who, by persisting in a course of sin without repentance, ceases to be a child of God because he has lost his likeness to God. In the Septuagint there is this remarkable sentence, "There is propitiation (hilasmos) with Thee." This is not for the encouragement

of the saint who has yielded to one temptation to sin, but for his warning to turn immediately in penitent faith in Christ. The Spirit of Inspiration adds these words, "that Thou mayest be feared."

The third testimony is in some respects the most striking of all the seven, though it is introduced quite incidentally and with the least formality. In stating the necessity that all who would see the Son of God as He is, when He shall be manifested, should be found like Him, "pure even as He is pure," it was very natural that His first manifestation should be suggested to the mind of John as making provision for all that the second manifestation would require. This requirement is purity of heart, for which the atonement is an ample conditional provision. In addition we have in this Scripture two distinct and peculiar points, the "taking away of sins," and "in Him is no sin." The words "take away" have a very special force in the New Testament statement of the atonement. In the sentence, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world," the meaning is that Jesus is the conditional substitute, not in punishment, but for punishment. But in 1 John iii. 5 the dominant thought is not that of the sacrificial purgation of sin, but of our complete separation from sin through Christ's hostility to sin and His removal of all sin from believers even as He is Himself sinless. This He does by the indwelling

fulness of the Spirit entirely sanctifying spirit, soul and body. (1 Thess. v. 23.) Hence the atonement exhibits its highest efficiency in the entire removal of the hereditary bent to sinning.

The seal of perfection is put upon the atonement when its Author is thus described: "In Him is no sin." He who takes away our sins by forgiveness and our sinfulness by His mission of the Holy Spirit for our entire purification, makes Himself the standard of our perfection and makes us partakers of His own sinlessness. John displays our Pattern negatively as pure, and positively as righteous, not merely to magnify Christ's dignity, but to reveal our privilege and duty to be exactly like Him in purity and righteousness.

Our fourth allusion to the atonement is found in John's sudden transition from sin to Satan's agency in its origin: "The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil." The past tense, "was manifested," renders it certain that John is not speaking of the destruction of sin at and after his second coming, as some erroneously teach. Here in our earthly sphere, and now in our probation, while contending against these three battalions of enemies to holiness, the world, the flesh and the devil, the usurping prince of this world, is the scene of the most glorious victory of the Son of God over His antagonist taking place on the very ground of Satan's first apparent tri-

umph in the fall of Adam, the progenitor of a race bearing his image marred and scarred by sin through his evil agency. The works of the devil in this world are found only in the human heart. His works do not consist in our actual sins. These are the works of men. His work is that bent to sinning which the sin of Adam, at the solicitation of Satan, the father of lies, entailed upon our race. It is the overthrow of this power of Satan enthroned in human souls. The Son of God came for this purpose that He might, not by physical omnipotence, but by the power of His cross, expel the forces of Satan and regain for Himself and His Father His rightful possession. There is nowhere outside of the Apocalypse so full and explicit a statement of the relation of the death of Christ to the dissolution of the empire of the evil one. If the sins are actual and personal they are taken away into the land of forgetfulness through faith in Christ's redemption. If they are the works of Satan, then are they to be cast out by the entrance of a stronger than he. John does not go into the detail. He leaves the matter in its broad generality. He does not use the Pauline phrase, "sanctify wholly," and "our old man is crucified," but he certainly purposes to accentuate the inspiring truth that those who are born of God may be delivered from every trace of the work of Satan within them as a downward propelling force. With this idea in his

mind let any candid person read the whole passage: "He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin." What is this but a positive assurance that those who fully rely on the atonement may, and must, share their Saviour's freedom from sin? What is this but a declaration that all which is "of the devil" may in this life be removed from our regenerate souls, which have now become the temple of the indwelling Christ?

The fifth testimony to the atonement regards it as the example and pattern of self-sacrificing devotion to the good of others: "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

In the presence of a passage like this we must admit that the atonement was a perfect surrender and oblation of the human and divine self to His Father; a perfect example of the opposite of the sin and selfishness of mankind and a sublime reproof of man's separation from God. But the idea of example does not explain the atonement. There is some purpose infinitely deeper than example. On the Godward side there must have been some barrier to the salvation of a sinful race which the atonement removed. Whether the difficulty was in God's essential justice, as some assert, or in His governmental rectitude, as we believe, we cannot here demonstrate. There is a very wide in-

terval between the kenosis, or self-emptying of the Son of God, and the self-devotion of his imitating servants. But this is true that the love which devised the atonement in the wisdom of the Father, and prompted the self-sacrificing of the Son, is that perfect love in purified human hearts which inspires self-abnegation even unto death in the spiritual interest of our fellow-men.

As we advance in this wonderful Epistle we come to the sixth testimony to the atonement, which is the largest and most comprehensive of the seven. "God is love. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." That here, for the first time in the Bible, God is said to be love, must awaken our keen attention. Love has the pre-eminence here as everywhere, and rules the whole passage. It is the fountain out of which the atonement flows. It presides over the mission of the Redeemer, providing for believers a divine life which itself presupposes and requires a propitiation. It is the melody of all God's Revelation, and it strikes its highest note in the gift of His only begotten Son to the manger and the cross, that the believer might not perish, but have eternal life. In no other sense is love the essence of God's nature than in the intercommunication of the Persons of the Trinity. Upon the fact that the Son was the object of the Father's love from eternity is

grounded the manifestation of His love to us in the gift of His Son, that believers "might live through Him." John does not use any of Paul's terms, "reconciliation," "ransom" and "redemption," but their full meaning is contained in the twice used word "hilasmos," "propitiation" required by holiness and provided by love. This great word in chap. iv. 10, stands between the positive purpose of the atonement in verse 9, "that we might live through him," and the negative in verse 14, "to be the Saviour of the world." The latter teaches the universal extent of the atonement as an objective provision, and the former the free, subjective appropriation which limits its ultimate benefits to those who comply with its conditions.

The seventh and last of John's testimonies and the last in all Revelation relates to the virtue of the atonement as the source of life, eternal life, conditionally inspired in a fallen race. This is the supreme benefit of God in the death and resurrection of His Incarnate Son. If there is one sentence worthy of being God's final word respecting this whole subject, it is this: "And this is the record (testimony) that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life;" or, in the emphatic order of the Greek, "the life he hath not." Searching the "record" just written we find the Spirit, the author and giver of

life; the water, the indispensable supporter of life, "the well of water" within the believer "springing up into everlasting life," and the blood flowing from His pierced side. We may not explain the great miracle of living streams, "water and blood," out of a dead Saviour's side. In the sacrifice of our redemption they flow together, the water signifying the new life imparted in the new birth. This with John is the supreme if not the only meaning of water as a symbol, as all purifying by washing is with blood. "He has washed us from our sins in His blood." The two streams signify the unity of spiritual life in the purgation of sin and the removal of death by the impartation of life, the beginning of life everlasting. He who receives the one receives the other. The blood avails for the whole world as a provision placing all men on salvable ground. But it is not so with the water. It must be drunken before life can be experienced. For eternal life is in His Son. "He," and he only, who hath the Son hath life. To have the Son in this vital sense is to be united with Him as the branch is united with the vine.

There is no book of the New Testament which makes the propitiation of Christ so absolutely all-prevailing; it is the beginning and ending and the interval between them. It is something unspeakably solemn in the appeal of the last page of the Bible to the significance of the atonement, as if the Holy Spirit who inspired it

would end His work at the cross and leave ringing in the ears of every reader the words, "we have life in the Son" through His propitiation. Much of the current theology rejecting propitiation seeks in vain for life, not in the blood, but in human philosophy. Our Lord's final testimony is, "I am the Propitiation and the Life."

## THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN.

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THIS Epistle is not catholic or general, because it is not addressed to the church in all lands, but either to an individual or, what is more probable, to a particular church. (See Introduction, John's literary activity, p. xiii).

1. "The elder." Probably on account of his advanced age he indicates more than official position and speaks of himself as "the old man." Says Dr. Farrar, "A credulous spirit of innovation is welcome to believe and to proclaim that any, or all, of St. John's writings were written by 'John the Presbyter.' They were; but 'John the Presbyter' is none other than John the Apostle." The belief that there were two Johns arose from a misunderstanding of a bungling sentence of Papias, a third-rate writer in the generation next after the five Apostolic Fathers.

"Unto the elect lady," "or an elect lady, or the lady Electa, or the elect Kyria, or Electa Kyria," meaning either a person of whom nothing more is recorded, or a company of believers constituting a local church

1. The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all they that know the truth;
  2. for the truth's sake which abideth in us, and it shall be with us for ever:
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addressed as a lady, just as the general church is styled the Bride. The real meaning of this address will probably never be satisfactorily determined.

“And her children.” Either the offspring of the person addressed or the members of some particular Christian society regarded as a mother, as in Gal. iv. 26.

“All they that know.” Literally “that have come to know.” (1 John ii. 3.) Here is a strong indication that a church is addressed, for how could the children of one woman be known and loved by the whole Christian world? Every true believer in Christ belongs to the Holy Catholic Church, which, according to the Apostles' Creed, properly punctuated, is defined as “the communion of saints,” of which “the love of each for every other is the essential condition of existence.” Christian love goes out towards Christian character wherever it exists.

2. “For the truth's sake.” John has given in his writings two personal definitions of the truth: “I am the truth” (John xiv. 6), and “he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth,” who vitalizes the truth by identi-

3. Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

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fying himself with Jesus, its author. In both cases it is said that abiding "in us" of the personified truth "shall be forever." This indicates that the Gospel of John and this Epistle flowed from the same pen.

3. "Grace, mercy and peace shall be with us." A prediction and assurance, rather than a prayer. With this triplet of divine graces, in the same order Paul twice salutes Timothy and once Titus. Jude makes a variation thus: "Mercy, peace and love." Grace is favor to sinners; mercy is compassion for their misery, and peace is the well-being which follows pardon and renewal.

"From God the Father." He is their source. The atonement itself did not originate with the Son to placate a wrathful God, as some falsely teach, but with God, the moral governor of the universe, that He might save all who would accept offered mercy.

God is the Father, in the evangelical sense, of all who have received the Son. (John i. 12.) The New Testament nowhere teaches the soft doctrine that God is the Father of impenitent sinners. He is the Father of the Divine Son and of all on whom the image of His Son is impressed by the Holy Spirit in the new birth. All who are morally like God, hating what He hates, and loving what He loves, are figura-

4. I rejoice greatly that I have found *certain* of thy children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father.

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tively called sons of God, and all who are like the devil in conduct and character are called the children of the devil. (John i. 12; 1 John iii. 9, 10, note.)

“In truth.” Truth occurs five times in this brief Epistle.

“And love.” Love is found four times, either as a verb or as a noun. These qualities are the essentials of the Christian character.

4. “I rejoice greatly.” The epistolary aorist.

“Thy children walking in truth.” Squaring their lives by the rule of Christian truth. The occasion of John’s joy is cognate to that of the angels, as disclosed by our Saviour in Luke xv. 7. The phrase, “of thy children,” would seem delicately to hint that not all the children of that mother, or members of that church, were walking in the highway of holiness.

“Even as we received commandment.” This is another key-word of the Epistle, in which it occurs four times. Love, truth and obedience; these are the three leading ideas, which partly imply and partly supplement one another. “Obedience without love becomes servile; love without obedience becomes unreal; neither of them can flourish outside the realm of truth.” (Dr. A. Plummer.)

5. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote to thee a new commandment, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6. And this is love, that we should walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, even as ye heard from the beginning, that ye should walk in it.

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5. "I pray thee." He entreats to the exercise of the full privilege of Christian fellowship, implying that there are degrees of love. The new birth implants love. The fulness of the Spirit perfects love.

"New commandment." He prays rather than commands to love one another, as Christ taught.

"We had." In this entire Epistle John identifies himself with his readers, Christian with Christians.

"From the beginning." See 1 John ii. 7, note.

6. "And this is love." It is known by obedience, its fruit. "In verse 5 obedience prompts love; here love prompts obedience. This is no vicious logical circle, but a healthy moral connection." Love strives to realize in detail every single command, while love is the essence of them all.

"Even as ye heard." The allusion is to primary instruction in Christian morals.

"Ye should walk in it," *i. e.*, in brotherly love. The second person is here used because in the beginning the persons addressed were the catechumens and the apostles were the catechists. "It" here refers to love,

7. For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, *even* they

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which is a safeguard against erroneous doctrine next named.

7. "Many deceivers." Wrong opinion respecting fundamental truth sooner or later begets wrong action.

"Are gone forth," or went out from the Christian society to do their evil work. The tense hints a definite succession of heretical teachers. This implies the existence of some form of church government in John's day.

"Into the world." Not into a rival religious organization. Their errors sapped their piety and made them worldlings and not saints.

"Who confess not Jesus Christ coming in the flesh." He is the object of their denial, the Incarnate Messiah. These deceivers are here described as denying not merely the fact of the Incarnation, but its possibility. Says Dr. A. Plummer on this text and on 1 John iv. 2, in both of which participle "coming" or "having come" is used, "In both passages the A. V. and R. V. translate as if we had the infinitive mood instead of the participle. The difference is, that with the participle the denial is directed against the *Person*, 'they deny *Jesus*'; with the infinitive it is directed against the *fact*, they deny that He *cometh* or *has come*. Note that Christ is never said to come *into* the flesh. This would leave room for

that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

8. Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which we have wrought; but that ye receive a full reward.

9. Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of

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saying that the Divine Son was united with Jesus after He was born of Mary; which would be no true Incarnation."

"The deceiver and the antichrist." The definite article is quite important. See 1 John ii. 18, note.

"Many antichrists." Many who exhibit the spirit of the antichrist may be spoken of individually or collectively as "the antichrist." There is reason for believing that this character will shortly before the end of the world appear in some remarkable person antagonizing Christ.

8. "Look to yourselves." Watchfulness and self-examination are required in view of the peril just announced. In the R. V. the pronoun "we" is changed to "ye" in the clauses "we lose" and "we receive." This would signify, "Take heed that these deceivers do not undo the work which apostles and evangelists have wrought in you, but that ye receive the full fruit of it." The apostate himself is the greatest loser.

9. "Whosoever goeth onward." The best manuscripts thus put "goeth onward" in place of "transgresseth." All Christians are exhorted to go on unto

Christ, hath not God : he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son.

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perfection in the application of gospel truth to the extinction of depravity and the development of Christ-like characters, but not to advance beyond the limits of revealed truth. "These antichristian Gnostics were *advanced* thinkers," regarding themselves as "the illumined" who had outgrown the Gospel, which was all very well for the ignorant masses, the unwashed mob, but they could appreciate a speculative philosophy far above the trite and narrow truths of Christianity. "There is an advance which involves desertion of first principles; and such an advance is not progress, but apostasy."

"The doctrine of Christ." Truths revealed in His own person, words and works and through the lips of His apostles and the pens of His evangelists and the characters of His saints.

"Hath not God." Hath no saving knowledge of Him whom he claims to know more perfectly.

"Abideth in the doctrine." Regards Jesus Christ as an infallible Teacher and trusts in Him and in Him only for salvation. Hath the Father and the Son. Through the Spirit of adoption He cries, Abba, Father, for the first time, and recognizes Jesus Christ as both Saviour and Lord. "No man knoweth the Son but the

10. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting:

11. for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works.

12. Having many things to write unto you, I would not *write*

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Father, and no man knoweth the Father but the Son and he to whom the Son may reveal Him.”

10. If any one cometh unto you.” As a teacher to point out the way to eternal life in the light of the glow-worm of human philosophy, instead of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.

11. “Partaketh in his evil works.” This implies that the doctrinal errors in question are of such a character as to bear the fruit of sinful conduct. The original word for “partaketh” implies more than sharing in definite acts. “It suggests a fellowship with the character of which they are the outcome.” It is quite evident that John forbids the evangelical believer making his house a home and headquarters of false teaching.

12. “Not with paper and ink.” “Perhaps we may here trace a sign of the failing powers of an old man, to whom writing is serious fatigue.” (Dr. A. Plummer.) The paper is the Egyptian papyrus, which was costly. Hence, possibly, the brevity of John’s Epistles. Parchment was still more expensive. Ink in those time was a mixture of soot and water, or of lamp-black and gall juice.

*them* with paper and ink; but I hope to come unto you, and to speak face to face, that your joy may be fulfilled.

13. The children of thine elect sister salute thee.

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“Face to face.” “Mouth to mouth” is the Greek.

“Joy may be full.” Says Bishop Alexander, “The high associations with which this phrase is connected lead us to suppose that it would scarcely have been applied by St. John to any meeting but one of peculiar solemnity, after a cruel and prolonged separation, which had threatened to be eternal.”

13. “The children . . . salute thee.” The absence of any salutation from the elect sister harmonizes with the theory that “elect lady” is not a person, but a particular church. But it fits the other theory just as well, for Kyria’s sister may be dead or absent, and the nephews of Kyria may be in business in Ephesus and intimate with John.

“Receive him not into your house.” He is on the devil’s errand, do not help him along. “St. John is at once earnestly dogmatic and earnestly philanthropic; for the Incarnation has taught him the preciousness of man and the preciousness of the truth.” (Liddon.) In declining to receive an erroneous religious teacher we must be quite sure that he is overthrowing doctrines essential to salvation, doctrines which weaken the motive to immediate repentance, which lessen the turpitude of

sin, or detract from Christ's divinity and His power to save. We must make it plain to the man concerned and to the public that our coldness toward him is not prompted by personal ill-will, but it is designed as a safeguard against giving a quasi endorsement to a teacher who is subverting the fundamentals of the Gospel and destroying the souls of our own children by the infection of his errors. There is this limit to Christian charity: it must not be shown to one man in such a way as to be morally and spiritually harmful to others, possibly to our own household ; still less must it be shown in such a manner as to do more harm than good to the unwelcomed teacher. The problem is quite difficult. Yet it is obvious that were the pronounced heretic treated as if he were a true believer his opportunity of doing harm by perverting souls would be greatly increased, and the errorist might be confirmed in his fatal departure from saving faith. Says Clement, in an interesting picture of family devotion, "But I think that it is not proper even to pray with such persons, since in prayer which is made in the home after they arise there is a salutation, a token of gladness and peace."

"Short as the Second Epistle is and having more than half its contents in common with the First or the Third Epistle, our loss would have been great had it been refused a place in the Canon, and in consequence been

allowed to perish. It gives us a new aspect of the apostle; it shows him as the shepherd of individual souls. It is for the sake of particular persons about whom he is greatly interested that he sends the letter, which is a less formal and less public utterance than the First Epistle. We see the apostle at home rather than in the church, and hear him speaking as a friend rather than a metropolitan. The apostolic authority is there, but it is in the background. The letter beseeches and warns more than it commands." (Cambridge Bible for Colleges.)

The Second and Third Epistles of John, together with those of James and Jude, 2 Peter, were at first *antilegomena*, spoken against as not worthy of a place in the sacred Canon. These two Epistles of John are not contained in the Peshito Syriac version, nor are they now accepted by the Syrian church. There is, however, very little ante-Nicene evidence against their authenticity. They were included in the Old Latin version. Clement of Alexandria wrote short notes upon them. The doubt about them probably arose from the fact that their authorship was at first ascribed to an unknown man, John the elder, and not to the apostle. This discredited them in the early centuries.

## THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.

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FOR the historical setting of this Epistle see Introduction, p. xxi.

The record of this brief letter in the sacred Canon was probably designed by the spirit of inspiration to afford a portrait of some first century church members. "Brief as it is, it has the true 'note' of inspiration—that indefinable but unmistakable something which is found in all the Bible, and is found nowhere else. It speaks to a person and of persons. The church is the background against which the figures of three individuals stand out in bold relief—Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius," of whom we have no other glimpse in history. As we study them to avoid their faults and imitate their virtues, we will discover that behind these ancient names stand modern characters.

"Gaius." In the momentary light which falls upon him in this Epistle we clearly see a full-orbed and symmetrical Christian. He is not to be identified with either Gaius of Macedonia (Acts xix. 29), Gaius of Derbe (Acts xx. 4), or Gaius of Corinth (Rom. xvi. 23).

1. The elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth.
  2. Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.
  3. For I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth.
- 

Gaius was a name as common among the Romans as Smith is with us.

“Whom I love in truth,” or love truly. The word “wellbeloved” implies that the whole circle of the Christian friends of Gaius cherished the same affection for him.

2. “I pray that in all things.” Here the R. V. corrects a misleading translation of the A. V., which represents John as placing health and prosperity above all things.

“And be in health.” The inference is natural that the bodily health of Gaius was infirm. The wish for his prosperity may imply that his worldly affairs were not in the best condition. His spiritual life was healthy, vigorous and progressive, so that John could form no higher wish for him than that he might prosper in temporal things in the same measure. If he was a millionaire in grace this would make him a millionaire in gold. “The verse is a model for all friendly wishes of good fortune to others.”

3. “When brethren . . . bare witness unto thy truth.” This implies that Gaius had stood as a rock

4. Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

5. Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal;

against the assaults made by the enemies of Christian truth.

“Even as thou walkest in the truth.” He was an example of the truth which he championed. “Defenders of the faith have not always been liverers of the faith.” Butler rightly satirized those who themselves morally loose,

“Prove the doctrine orthodox  
By apostolic blows and knocks.”

A holy life is an unanswerable argument.

4. “I have no greater joy.” Next to the joy of the angels over repenting sinners is the joy of pastors over the steadfast believers. It has been well said that it requires greater pastoral effort to keep a soul converted than to get him converted. John’s words imply this.

“My children.” Christians, especially those under John’s apostolic care while living in Ephesus.

5. “Thou doest a faithful work.” He was not only a sturdy advocate of the truth, but also a strenuous Christian worker. “Here we catch just a glimpse of the evangelizing activity of the early church. Error was busy. Many deceivers had gone forth into the world. But truth was busy also.”

6. who bare witness to thy love before the church: whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God:

7. because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

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“And strangers withal.” The emphasis upon these words may be an answer to a slander uttered against Gaius, that he had neglected those who have a more pressing claim upon the common ties of Christian brotherhood.

6. “Bare witness . . . before the church.” To right this wrong it seems that the church was assembled and a public testimonial to the hospitality of Gaius was made, and John was present and witnessed the cordiality of this expression of confidence and love. “It enhanced the hospitality of Gaius that the Christians whom he entertained were personally unknown to him.”

“Whom thou wilt do well.” A gentle hint to Gaius that there will be future opportunity for such hospitality.

“Worthily of God.” In a manner worthy of God, whose servants both they and you are.

7. “For the sake of the Name.” The word “Jehovah” was to the Hebrews unutterable, because of an erroneous interpretation of Lev. xxiv. 16, “He that blasphemeth the name of Jehovah shall surely be put to death.” The Jews understood this to forbid the utter-

ance of His name, because this verb in one of its forms signifies to utter, and in another form signifies to blaspheme. The Jews have two ways of avoiding the utterance of Jehovah; one is by substituting the word Adonai, Lord; the other is to omit it entirely and say "the Name." When in the New Testament the Name designates Jesus Christ, as in Acts v. 41; James ii. 7, it is a strong argument for His Godhood, Jehovah of the Old Testament being the Jesus of the New. Hence it is the triune Name into which the Christian is baptized. It is "in essence the sum of the Christian-creed." (Bishop Westcott.) The Name brings before the mind that aspect of the Divine Person which is realized by faith in each action of the spiritual life, whether "believing in the name," or "asking," or "having life."

"Taking nothing of the Gentiles." Bringing the Gospel to them prepaid, lest the preachers should be suspected as actuated by a desire to get gain. "Hence the necessity for men like Gaius to help. These missionaries declined 'to spoil the Egyptians' by taking from the heathen, and therefore would be in great difficulties if Christians did not come forward with assistance. We are not to understand that the Gentiles offered help which these brethren refused, but that the brethren never asked them for help. The Gentiles cannot well mean Gentile converts. What possible

8. We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth.

9. I wrote somewhat unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

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objection could there be to receiving help from them?" They should be early trained to support the Gospel.

8. "We therefore." The pronoun is emphatic in the Greek standing over against the pagans. This is a strong argument for generous missionary contributions. John says "we," not "you," not merely to soften the injunction, but to hint that preachers of all grades, up to the apostles themselves, should be missionary givers, in order that

"We may be fellow-workers with the truth." Rather become their fellow-workers for the truth.

9. "I wrote somewhat unto the church." These words imply that John regarded this letter of small importance. The fact that Divine Providence has not rescued it from oblivion confirms the author's estimate. "To escape from the difficulty supposed to be involved in the loss of an apostolic letter several early authorities introduced 'would,' I would have written." (Bishop Westcott.) Thus reads the Vulgate version, the standard of the Roman Catholic Church. It is probable that Diotrephes destroyed the only copy, because of his hatred of its author and of the committee who brought it to his church.

“But Diotrephes.” The presence of a man so unlovely, self-seeking and unscrupulous in the Christian church so early as the first century is indeed surprising. But more astonishing still is his treatment of the beloved John, the last living apostle, the last link between the incarnate Son of God and all subsequent generations. We are not surprised that so pure a man as John should be victim of a calumniating tongue, but we are surprised that such a poisonous tongue should hiss in the mouth of a prominent professed disciple of the meek and lowly Jesus. We do not know what official position in the church he held, whether he was a preacher or a layman. If he was an elder he must have been a ruling elder and not a teaching elder. But we have no proof that he was a presbyter or priest of the particular church in question. We are inclined to think that he was a purse-proud layman, preferring to be a Cæsar in his own country village to being the second man in Rome. We are inclined to think that Gaius was the long suffering pastor of this contentious bellwether which troubled his flock and put the shepherd in constant fear. See remarks on the Third Epistle in the Introduction, p. xiv. The presence of such a headstrong man in any local church, tyrannizing the members and terrifying the pastor, reconciles the writer to a well-guarded episcopacy to afford protection

10. Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth, and casteth *them* out of the church.

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to young and inexperienced pastors as well as counsel and strength to feeble churches.

“Loveth . . . preëminence.” In creed he seems to be orthodox, but in ambition he is Satanic.

“Receiveth us not.” His non-reception of John (“us” here means “me”) is the rejection of his authority. He wishes his church to be independent of all supervision. He must rule alone, “the monarch of all he surveys.”

10. “Prating against us.” Accusing me falsely with malicious words. The literal Greek is “throwing up bubbles,” indulging in charges as hollow and as unsubstantial as soap bubbles. One sin begets others. This man’s vaulting ambition and abnormal self-assertion inspire slander and lying, and finally injustice by the wrongful exclusion of innocent persons from the church.

“Casteth out of the church.” Probably under the forms of ecclesiastical procedure, as Christ was condemned, or they may have been frozen out by unbrotherly and cold treatment. “It is difficult to realize the circumstances of the case. It may perhaps be reasonably conjectured that Diotrephes regarded the re-

11. Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

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ception of the brethren as an invasion of his authority."  
(Bishop Westcott.)

11. "Beloved." This sweet word, after this list of words harsh and bitter, reminds us of the couplet of the American poet:

"And silence like a poultice comes  
To heal the blows of sound."

"Imitate not evil." A much needed prohibition, for men are very prone to imitate a career of successful villany.

"He that doeth good is of God." His right conduct comes from the reception of the grace of God by faith, and from obedience to His will. It was a maxim of the saintly John Fletcher, "All our goodness is of God, all our evil is of ourselves," because we choose to retain it rather than its proffered cure by Christ the great Physician. Bishop Westcott suggests that John is warning against the Gnostics who disparaged holiness as not necessary to those who have a deeper insight into truth, that is, to the intellectually illuminated, such as they proudly professed to be, asserting that they had no need of the atonement made by Jesus Christ. See note on 1 John i. 8.

12. Demetrius hath the witness of all *men*, and of the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true.

13. I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write *them* to thee with ink and pen:

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12. "Demetrius hath good report." In contrast with the abhorred behavior of the ecclesiastical "boss" (pardon the political term), just described, is the commendable example of Demetrius whose conduct is to be imitated. He has a threefold testimonial to his moral uprightness and Christian excellence: (1) The favorable impression he has made upon the public; (2) truth herself commended him as realizing her ideal of Christian character. Possibly this refers the public impression to the agency of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth; and (3) the testimony of St. John and his intimates. We have no further knowledge of Demetrius. That he is the silversmith who led the mob in Ephesus against Paul, but now, like Paul, advocating the faith which he once destroyed, is a mere conjecture. "It is likely from the context that Demetrius was the bearer of this letter." (Bishop Westcott.) "Thou knowest"—the singular instead of the plural is the best authenticated. The change to the plural was probably made in some manuscripts to suit the erroneous idea that this is not a private but a general Epistle.

13. This conclusion closely resembles that of the

14. but I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name.

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Second Epistle. This suggests that they were both written at about the same time.

14. "Peace be with thee." The triune blessing full of gospel meaning.

Internal peace of conscience,

Fraternal peace of friendship,

Supernal peace of glory.

"By name." As Jesus the good Shepherd calleth His own sheep by name.

**THE END.**

## SUPPLEMENTARY STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN.

It is said in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* that the persons addressed in this Epistle are "the instructed," and that the author's aim is "a deepening of the spiritual life and a confirmation of faith." To contribute something to this worthy aim I have deemed it a fitting occupation for the sunset hour of my life to voice to the whole company of believers "the message" of St. John, the aged, respecting the reciprocal indwelling of God in the soul, and of the soul in God as a result of love made perfect. It is also appropriate to the purpose of this book to divest the message of those misinterpretations which make it discordant and self-contradictory, and to set in a clear light the testimony of the last surviving eyewitness of our Lord to the utmost extent of salvation from sin under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Hence should this series of exegetical studies be occasionally polemical, it will not be from choice, but from necessity in vindicating vital truth and banishing deadly error.

As writers, Paul and John widely differ in style, not in sentiment. Paul elaborates logically; John seizes

by intuition. "Paul writes now in a storm of argument, then in a humble strain of self-forgetful, self-abasing expostulation and entreaty; now eloquently on high abstract truths, now in exquisite descriptions, then about the homeliest and simplest duties. St. John moves in a calm sphere of certainty among the very highest, grandest and largest of Christian truths, raising the general outlines of human life into the same atmosphere till they are illuminated and penetrated by the clear rays of light and love. All is simple, broad, clear, calm, sure. He writes at once with the most commanding authority, and the most loving tenderness; the profoundest wisdom, and the most touching simplicity; the most searching knowledge of the human heart and its difficulties and failures, and the most elevating and bracing courage and confidence; the gentlest affection, and the sternest and most pitiless condemnation of wilful departure from truth in practice or opinion." Paul begins his epistles with a statement of his apostolic authority; John begins with the announcement, in the very first sentence, of the truth that he purposes to set forth. In the Revelation it is the things which must shortly come to pass. In his Gospel it is the supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ. "The Logos was God." Hence we have one dogmatic Gospel. In his First Epistle it is the veritable humanity of Christ who dwelt among men in a real, material body

attested by three of the five special senses, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Logos of life." Hence the teaching of John in this Epistle turns upon the person of Christ. The occasion of this controversial Epistle was the denial of this fact which an erroneous philosophy, extant in the apostolic age in spirit, but not yet developed in form, could not harmonize with the sinlessness of the incarnate Son of God. This inchoate philosophy which began to trouble the church, even in Paul's lifetime, as he hints in the epistle to the Ephesians and Colossians, and in the Pastoral Epistles, and was more fully developed before the death of John, is by many asserted to be that doctrine of Gnosticism called dualism, the existence of two original principles, good and evil, the evil being inherent only in uncreated matter from which the Creator of man could not expel it when He fashioned it into an envelope for the human spirit. It contains several negations of Christian theology, among which are these two: First, the denial of Christ's sinlessness as an intelligence acting through a material organism; and secondly, the doctrine that since all evil is in matter, the soul is incapable of the touch of sin, since there is no point of contact between mind and matter in the human constitution. In order to avoid so repugnant a doctrine as sin in the person of Christ, and to harmo-

nize His perfect holiness with their philosophy, its advocates denied the reality of His body, and taught that it was only a sham, a phantom, a seeming body. Of course this would overturn the foundations of the temple of Christian truth, reducing the atonement, the death and the resurrection of the God-man from substantial verities to empty shadows, mocking human hopes. When John, the aged, sits down to write this address to the churches, probably personally delivered (Bengel) — for it has neither the inscription nor the conclusion of an epistle — he looks this incipient false doctrine of dualism that was “in the air” squarely in the face, and with two strokes of his pen he smites it to the dust. The first stroke cites the testimony of three of the five senses to the reality of Christ’s body; and the second stroke declares the self-deception of those who while indulging in sin had no sense of a need of an atonement, because their inner spirits were perfectly pure, all the sin which defiled them existing only in those irresponsible, yet very convenient, pack-horses, human bodies composed of matter primordially, eternally and incurably evil, and hence no concern of theirs. The first chapter is short, but it is long enough to annihilate dualism, although the subject is alluded to in the rest of the Epistle in the emphasis laid upon believing in Christ, “come in the flesh,” and in the insistence that sinners can have no fellowship with a

holy God any more than darkness can be yoked with light.

Docetism, the doctrine that Christ's body was a phantom, shows its "most ancient trace," says Dorner, in 1 John iv. 2, in which "the antichrists do not deny that Christ has come at all, but only that He has come in the flesh." This denial was made in order to remove the Son of God, the author of all good, from all contact with matter which they conceived to be evil and the source of all evil. Since several modern exegetes of good repute see no traces of this philosophic error in John's writings, especially in his First Epistle, and therefore go astray in their explanation of key texts, it may be well to cite such authorities as Jerome, Ignatius, Hagenbach, who quotes 1 John i. 1-3, iv. 2, 3, and 2 John vii. as probable instances of John's references to "the Seemers" or Docetists. Hammond's commentary finds in this philosophy the key to this Epistle, as do Sinclair's (edited by Ellicott), and Whedon's also. With these agree Townsend and other English scholars, and many German exegetes, such as Lücke, Schmidt, Bertholdt and Niemeyer, who insist that the main object of the Epistle is to oppose the errors of this science (gnosis), falsely so called.

Bishop Westcott says, the false teaching with which "John deals is Docetic," and he intimates that "modern Idealism is a new Docetism."

When we come to see how subversive it is of Christian morality, we will be convinced that the beloved disciple did not waste his energies in opposing a harmless theory. Its advocates asserted that "they themselves would be saved, not by *practice*, but because they are *spiritual by nature*" (not by grace), "and that as gold, though mingled with mire, does not lose its beauty, so they themselves, though wallowing in the mire of carnal works, do not lose their own *spiritual* essence. And, therefore, though they eat things offered to idols, and are the first to resort to banquets which the heathen celebrate in honor of their false gods, and abstain from nothing that is foul in the eyes of God or man, they say they cannot contract any defilement from these impure abominations; and they scoff at us who fear God as silly dotards, and hugely exalt themselves, professing to be *perfect*, and the *elect seed*."

This philosophic error, antagonized by John, because of its baneful moral effect, bearing the fruit of the grossest sensuality, produced in some a different effect — not holiness, but asceticism, an attempt at sanctification on the plane of nature, through efforts of the will, and not on the plane of faith in Jesus Christ, the only conqueror of sin. The belief that all evil is centred in matter caused this class of Gnostics to abhor their bodies. They became ascetics, vegetarians, monks and nuns, contemning and vilifying marriage, and self-

scourgers, maintaining that self-flagellation is a means of grace equal to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both parties brought great discredit upon Christianity, the one by violating its pure ethics, and the other by ignoring or corrupting its saving doctrines. Any error that substitutes human works or sufferings for faith in the blood of Jesus Christ as the ground of justification and means of sanctification is deadly indeed. John intuitively saw the practical outcome of this importation of Oriental philosophy into the Christian Church, and he wrote this Epistle or discourse as the antidote. His method of controversy is peculiar. He does not assail error directly and by name, but indirectly, by stating basal truths repugnant to that special heresy, to the practical effect of which he directs the attention of the reader, and not to the theoretical error itself.

Respecting the first and largest class of these Gnostics, says Dr. Whedon: "They taught that a man might be an outrageous violator of law, and yet a pure and holy saint. The Epistle is, therefore, a defence of Christian purity from sin against Gnostic purity in sin." The centre of purity from sin is Divine LOVE linking a perfectly pure God to the blood-washed soul — a union resulting in life eternal in the case of every persevering believer.

The poet Browning has quite truly indicated the occasion of this letter or tractate as the testimony of the

last surviving eyewitness of the glorious reality of the incarnation now beginning to be denied.

“There was left on earth  
 No one alive who knew (consider this),  
 Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands,  
 That which was from the first, the Word of Life;  
 How will it be when none more saith, ‘I saw’?”

The solitariness of this surviving witness gives a momentous importance to this apostolic testimony to the reality of the historical Christ against the destructive philosophy which would reduce Him to a phantom and subvert the very corner stone of the Christian system. For even though Gnosticism was not yet fully developed, its baneful foreshadowings were visible in such men as Simon Magus, the opponent of Peter, and Cerinthus, the antagonist of John. Hence, it may be concluded that what we see in the New Testament is exactly what we might expect — the early buds of Gnostic error appearing in the church and vigorous apostolic methods to destroy them. It is natural that the last surviving eyewitness should be the most emphatic.

But John's most effectual refutation of error is in the bold statement of the truth as verified by experience. We call the especial attention of preachers of the Gospel to this peculiarity of John. Christians, if genuine, not nominal, cannot be reminded too often that their religious life is “a matter of positive, demonstrable, realized facts,” the witness of the Spirit crying in their

hearts, Abba, Father, the transition from death to life consciously realized, which is the beginning of life eternal in the persevering believer who knows that he is in Christ and Christ in him, and "that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son," and is conscious of the indwelling of the Comforter and Sanctifier, making him a "habitation of God through the Spirit."

John's message to the world is "God is light." The basal truth of Revelation next to the unity of God is His holiness, diffusive as sunlight. Men cannot be transformed from sin to holiness while adoring impure deities. For worship assimilates. We invariably become like the object of our worship. Vile, indeed, became the Greeks, because their gods were impersonations of human lusts and passions enthroned on Mount Olympus. Their depravity created their gods, and their gods in turn intensified their depravity. This is the origin and this is the effect of every form of polytheism. But an intellectual people cannot always be contented with many gods. Reason, in striving to understand and explain the world, tends towards monotheism. Dualism cannot be a philosophic finality. Reason unaided by Revelation, recognizing nature as a whole cosmos, cannot but form a conception of it which will be pantheistic, since it acknowledges only the unity of substance, law and evolution, without the unity

of rational plan and ethical purpose and a final cause. The mind cannot recognize the unity of God until it has harmonized the discords of nature. It discovers goodness in the adaptations of the natural world to the happiness of sentient beings, but it also finds a seeming malevolence in those elements which are destructive of such happiness, the earthquake, the tornado, the pestilence, serpents created with deadly fangs and insects with poisonous stings, and animals with teeth adapted to tear and devour other animals and with appetites prompting to destroy life. It finds death as universal as life. How can one God be the author of these warring elements of good and of evil? He must be a double-headed monstrosity, partly good and partly evil, if he is a personality, or he must be impersonal and destitute of a moral nature. In other words he must be pantheistic, a nondescript force—not “making for righteousness”—for this is a plagiarism from Revelation, but indifferent to moral distinctions, acting alike through both the assassin who slays the President and the patriot who pours out his blood for his country.

Hence, the concept of God in the minds of both pagans and philosophers involved sin. John's first message is to give the true concept: “God is light and there is not in Him any darkness at all, no, not even one speck.” (Alford.) In the Old Testament light is used to signify prosperity and happiness; in the New

Testament it indicates clearness, beauty and glory, all expressed by the word "holiness." Darkness is the absence of this quality, and the absence of happiness also. It is sin and misery. John's message is only a repetition of his Master's message to the world. "The only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*." (Westcott and Hort's text.) "Being the effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance." (R. V.) The Son of God in His essential majesty was the sole expression of the Divine Light in His words and whole life on earth and in the testimony of the Spirit sent through His mediation. He who professes "fellowship with Him," or "similarity of character, hating what He hates and loving what He loves" (Joseph Cook), must be Christlike in moral character. If, instead of this, he walks in the darkness of sin, he lies; he is consciously and wilfully false, and not merely self-deceived. So glaring is the contrast between such a man's dark life and the whiteness of God's character, as imported into knowledge by His incarnate Son, that no term softer than liar properly describes him. He actively affirms what he knows to be false when he professes to combine fellowship with God and the choice of darkness or sin as the sphere of his life.

The central doctrine of the message, the fundamental truth on which the practical duties rest, is the Person

of our Lord. There was an environment of error about the church. On the Jewish side was Ebionism which, like modern Unitarianism, regarded Christ as a mere man. On the philosophic side Docetism made him a mere phantom. A third party combined these two opinions in the doctrine of Cerinthus, who taught that the Divinity descended upon Jesus at His baptism and forsook Him before His death. In the presence of these errors John sets forth the truth more in the form of announcement than of argument, that Jesus has come in the flesh and that the denial of this is the denial of the Father, that there is no logical ground to stand on between the veritable incarnation and blank atheism. The history of modern liberalism abundantly justifies John's declaration. Hence the environment of those to whom he delivered this address is strikingly like our own in the closing decade of the nineteenth century. John's words need no accommodation to fit modern orthodoxy in its conflict with Christological errors. While right opinions alone, apart from holy living, are treated as worthless, the historical manifestation of the Son of God "who laid down His life for us" is urged as the sufficient motive to godlike conduct. Simple profession without action is a fatal delusion.

With John love is generally love of the brethren. Human weakness and aspiration are wonderfully helped by reason not only of Christ come in the flesh suffering

our ills, but also of the glorification of this our Elder Brother, the pledge of our future transfiguration into His glorified image to stand at last "a row of glorified brothers with Jesus at the head." There can be no other destiny for those of whose moral character in probation it was said, "As He is so are we in this world."

"In Him is no darkness at all." Here we note that the difference between right and wrong is not merely a question of degree, the one shading off into the other, but fundamental, absolute, immutable and eternal. A clear perception of this truth by all moral agents would greatly fortify ethical foundations, strengthen conscience and prepare the way for the reception of that solemn doctrine which superficial thinkers and soft sentimentalists are prone to reject—everlasting rewards and punishments. On this contrast between wickedness and holiness, suggested by John and sharply exhibited in the life and teachings of Christ, depends the whole doctrine of sin. It is not a mere imperfection, a disguised form of good, like a bittersweet medicine, ending in a cure, the stumbling of an infant just learning to walk, but it is enmity against God. Between right and wrong there can be no midway step, even so small as a demisemi-quaver in music. "Good and evil may be mixed in an individual for a short time while in a transition state;" in themselves they are contrary, and hence forever in-

capable of union. Yet many men, restive under the threatened eternal punishment of the incorrigibly wicked, are endeavoring to bind up sin and holiness into a unity of character and identity of destiny. Some embrace agnosticism for this reason: If God is unknown and unknowable it may be that His moral character is utterly unlike that portrayed in Revelation. It may be that the distinction which conscience makes between evil and good and the feeling of guilt for sin are all illusions, and that the doctrine of Mansell, in his "Limits of Religious Thought," is true, that "the infinite goodness of God is not explained on the supposition that its sole and sufficient type is to be found in the finite goodness of man." This is an implied denial that man at his best estate reflects the image of God.

As well deny that mathematical truth is not the same with God as it is with men, that the multiplication table is different with God, as to deny that ethical distinctions, universal as the human race and immutable as reason itself, are not the same with God as they are in man's conscience. Yet this denial is the secret hope of the agnostic tormented with a consciousness of sin. His very remorse is a credential of two realities, his own immortal personality, and the eternal identity of God's moral sense with his own moral reason. Another fashionable way of uniting sin and holiness in one character and of destroying both is found in Pantheism,

which denies both the personality of God and of man, both being merged in the great soul of the world, a soul composed of blind forces, devoid of freedom and of moral action. There is no place for either sin or holiness in this view, that God and the universe are identical. This is the theology which Boston liberalists are borrowing from the Brahmins of India. It affords an anodyne to guilt, but no incentive to holiness. Its advocates candidly confess that it never has lifted a wretch out of the slums and planted his feet in the upward path, and that it is utterly unable to achieve such a rescue.

There is still another conception of God which affords a soft and broad theology — soft enough to lull sinners asleep, as on a downy couch, and broad enough to save all sinners who die in their sins. It magnifies the love of God to the entire exclusion of His justice. It is forever preaching to sinners that they are children of God, who is too fatherly ever to shut one of His impenitent children out of heaven. It teaches that God is light, the light of love, without the rays of holiness and justice, and that in this light all sin will ultimately evanesce.

The safeguard against these plausible and seductive errors is found in the Scriptural conception of God's moral attributes, held by believers "who are of full age (Greek, perfect), even those who by reason of use (habit) have their (spiritual) senses exercised to discern

(distinguish between) good and evil." The cause of Christian holiness would receive an instantaneous and permanent upward impulse, should the conviction be inwrought in all believers that holiness in man is an obligation arising from the Divine nature, and that only the holy can be eternally happy in the presence of a holy God.

Elective studies are now quite in vogue in our colleges, but perfect holiness is not optional in God's university. Holiness is required in order to graduation. This requirement is not a by-law, easily suspended in an emergency, but constitutional and immutable because it is grounded not only in the Founder's will, but in His very nature — "in Him is no darkness at all." Hence there should be no darkness in us. For the moral character of God, the Creator, is a pattern after which the creature must create his own moral character. God has left this most valuable part of us for ourselves to construct after the model supplied by Himself: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." The Greek reader notes a shade of meaning in the Received Text not translated into English: "Become ye yourselves holy." It impresses upon us, probationers for an eternal existence of happiness or of woe, a special sense of responsibility to realize that we must carry out of this world something which we did not bring into it, and that something we must ourselves create, as a first

cause. God is the first cause of my existence, but I am the first cause of my character and hence of my destiny. Otherwise God is the author of all the sin in the world.

What is it to have sin?

We have examined the historical setting of this Epistle, and have shown it is aimed to refute an error destructive of both the spiritual life and the moral principles of Christians. We have shown from the opening words of the Epistle that John designed the extinction of this Gnostic error. We are now prepared to examine the text most frequently urged against the doctrine of perfect holiness in this life. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (i. 8). What class of people does John have in mind? When he says "we," does he mean all Christians, including himself, as some expositors say, Christians just described as walking in the light, and by the blood of Christ cleansed from all sin? Dean Alford answers this question thus, "St. John is writing to persons whose sins have been forgiven them (ii. 12), and, therefore, necessarily the present tense, 'we have,' refers not to any previous state of sinful life before conversion, but to their now existing state, and the sins to which they are liable in that state." But the answer is not satisfactory. It implies that "we have sins" which we have not committed, sins to which we are only "liable." It accuses every angel in Heaven,

while keeping his first or probationary state, and Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, before their first sinful volition, of having sin, because they were liable to sin. It asserts a palpable contradiction, that persons cleansed from sin still "have sin." It makes the beloved apostle stultify himself by such a self-contradiction and absurdity. Again he perpetrates the same paradox: "This state of needing cleansing from all present sin is veritably that of all of us, and our recognition and confession of it is the very first essential of walking in light." I can get no other meaning out of these words than that sin "is the very first essential" of holy living, for walking in the light is walking in holiness.

But the Alford school of interpreters may perhaps avoid contradiction by using sin in two different senses, actual sin, implying guilt, and what theologians call original sin, or proneness to sin, which is free from guilt, an impurity impregnating our being, for which there is no cure but death. But the very next verse denies any such doctrine as death sanctification, and asserts that the blood of Christ is the "double cure." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, with no hint that the second cure, entire purification, is postponed to the dying hour, while forgiveness is attainable now." It is as plain as the midday sun that both blessings, pardon and purity, are attainable now. If

both are experienced, why should not both be confessed? With the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. Why should the confession of one part of salvation be commended, and the confession of the other part be condemned as the product of self-deception and untruth? These are exceedingly difficult questions for the Alford expositors to answer. But this is not the worst of their case. Bishop Westcott, the great English scholar, whose commentary on this Epistle, on which he spent most of his life, takes rank with the commentaries of Bishop Lightfoot, as most thorough and exhaustive, exceeding even German accuracy, and used by German professors themselves — this exegete proves beyond all contradiction that the phrase, “to have sin,” used only in two other texts in the Bible (John ix. 41, xv. 22, 24), and only in John’s writings, always signifies, not a guiltless evil tendency, but guilt. “Like corresponding phrases, to have faith, to have life, to have grief, to have fellowship, it marks the presence of something which is not isolated, but a continuous source of influence. It is distinguished from ‘to sin,’ as the sinful principle is distinguished from the sinful act itself.” “To have sin” includes the idea of “PERSONAL GUILT.” Bengel says, “not to have sin denies guilt.” With this light thrown upon the text, let us read it again: “If we say that we have no personal guilt at the present moment, although the blood of Jesus Christ has just this

hour cleansed us from all sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." According to this, every testimony to the remission of the guilt of sin is a deception and a falsehood. A large mistake is Paul's joyful declaration: "There is therefore now no condemnation, no guilt, no unremitted punishment to them that are in Christ Jesus." The knowledge of forgiveness which rings as a joyful sound through the Gospels and epistles is a hallucination of self-deceit and untruth. This use of what logicians call the *reductio ad absurdum* we have resorted to to prove that when John says, "If we say we have no sin," he means not Christians walking in the light of purity and perfect love, but any unregenerate man who declares that he has no sin to be forgiven, no guilt to wash away in the blood of Christ's atonement; especially any Gnostic who boasted that his spirit was pure by nature, and that sin could touch only his body, the husk of his soul.

The theory that this pernicious philosophy was damaging Christianity in Ephesus, where John spent his old age, lets the sunlight into his Epistle, explains every apparent contradiction, and illumines every obscurity. Above all, it relieves John of the charge that, by insisting that all Christians have sin, he extenuates that abominable thing which all the other Holy Scriptures brand with the Divine reprobation.

Multitudes of professed disciples of Christ have vainly

justified acts of daily sin by perverting this text, wrenching it from its context and from the scope of this whole Epistle, which, from beginning to end, teaches that perfect love is in this life an attainable grace, and inspires its readers to aspire after perfect purity through faith in Jesus Christ. He who hurls this text against a soul panting to become holy, is possibly saved from blasphemy only by his ignorance, "because as he (Christ in Heaven) is, so are we in this world," if we fill out the highest possibilities of grace and obtain the full heritage of believers.

"Sin not."

Sin is a small word, but it occupies a large place in human history. The trail of this serpent is upon us all. Upon the holiest of the sons of Adam it has left scars. In all others who have not applied the Divine cure it is a running sore, a virus poisoning the whole soul and threatening eternal ruin. Under God's moral government sin can never be happy. It may, for a short time, be delirious, and sing, and laugh, and dance. But delirium is not felicity. Sin grieves the heart of infinite love. This sorrow prompts the attempt to apply the atonement, the only remedy. This must be adapted to man's free agency. It cannot be forced upon him against his consent. He cannot be saved as a thing; he must be saved as a person by a free compliance with conditions, not as a bale of goods from a burning ware-

house, but as a person intelligently and providently securing a life preserver and binding it upon him. Such a life preserver God has provided in the blood of His Son, which John in the first chapter of his First Epistle announces as the perfect remedy, "the double cure," saving from wrath and making pure. Lest the perverse heart of the sinner should abuse this merciful provision and regard the scheme of reconciliation as a license for sinning, the inspired writer sets up a safeguard: "My little children, I write these things unto you, not to encourage you in sinning, but that ye sin not even once." Paul, after having declared that God's plan of salvation is such that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," is constrained to set up a similar safeguard against perverting the greatness of God's mercy into a motive for plunging more deeply into sin. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." John gives the same precautionary warning in the words, "These things I write unto you that ye sin not." He might have spoken in more general terms and said, "The things written in all the Holy Scriptures have this purpose, that ye sin not." The historical parts of the Bible evidently have this design. They portray sin and its wretched consequences; the sin of Adam and Eve, and the cause of exile from Eden, a life of toil and sorrow ending in the grave; the sin of Cain and the brand of God's displeasure set upon him; the sin of the antedilu-

vians and the all-engulfing deluge, God's broom, with which he swept the earth clean from sinners; the sin of Sodom and the shower of fire and brimstone; the sin of Israel and the captivity in Babylon; the sin of Jerusalem and its predicted overthrow by the Roman armies; the sin of Ananias and his wife, and their judicial death beneath the stroke of Divine justice. What are all these events but so many preachers crying out, "Sin not?" Should we study God's character of goodness, holiness, justice and truth, we should have another group of Gospel heralds proclaiming, "Sin not." Then should we gather together all the precepts and prohibitions of God's word in proverb, in psalm, in prophecy and in parable, we should have another multitude of preachers reiterating the same text, amplifying it and applying it in all the languages and dialects of the Babel earth into which this Book of books has been translated. "All the Divine purposes, words and judgments have for their aim to oppose sin, either to prevent its commission or to destroy it." (Bengel.)

We now raise this pertinent question, "Is the God of the Bible aiming at an end which is practicable, or at an ideal impossible to be realized in this world?" If we say that He is aiming at an ideal which He knows cannot be realized, we reflect on His wisdom and the efficacy of His remedy in the blood of His Son and the gift of His Spirit. Both are failures if they are insuffi-

cient either to prevent the commission of sin by a believing soul, or to destroy it, root and branch, as a principle within. The only escape from this is either probation extended beyond death where the blood of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit will have a higher efficacy — for which doctrine we must have another Bible — or a probation after Christ's second advent when the Holy Spirit will be superseded by a more successful agency, the visible presence of our glorified Lord Jesus overwhelming sinners with His awful majesty, and sanctifying believers and keeping them pure by the very resplendence of His glory. But we have yet to find the text in the New Testament in proof that one sinner will be regenerated or one believer will be entirely sanctified after Jesus shall come with all His holy angels to judge the quick and the dead. This theory is as baseless as that of probation beyond the grave, so far as revelation is concerned.

Hence we are shut up to this alternative, either the whole plan of salvation in the Bible is a stupendous failure, or it is possible for the provisions of grace to destroy sin in a believing soul, and to prevent its subsequent commission.

But does not John in the same verse imply that no one will be able to keep from acts of conscious sin when he says, "And if any man sin, we have an advocate"? Is this hypothesis designed for the rule, or for an ex-

ception? The answer is found in iii. 9, "Whosoever has been born of God (implying that he continues thus) is not committing sin (as a habit), and he cannot be sinning." "The possibility of his sinning is not absolutely denied; but this is affirmed that the new birth and sinning *cannot* exist together" any more than theft and honesty. (Bengel.)

It is a moral *cannot*, such as Joseph implies when solicited by the siren in Potiphar's house. "How can I do this great wickedness?" It is the *cannot* of a person, the whole tenor of whose character, all the moral purposes and the fixed bent of his will, under grace, are all set as a flint against sin. Such a person does not spontaneously, deliberately and intelligently give himself up to a course of sin. But while losing sight of Christ, and under a cloud, he may be so sophisticated by the devil as to yield to some sudden, strong impulse, and commit a single act of sin contrary to the fixed purpose of his mind. Now what is he to do? He can throw down the oars in despair, and go down the Niagara of damnation. This is what Satan desires. But the tender and compassionate Holy Spirit, through John, says to the sorrowing penitent, "You have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous." The whole Trinity is interested in your salvation. Try again in the name of Jesus Christ.

## THE ATONEMENT.

THE seven allusions to the atonement in John's First Epistle demand a more extended discussion, in view of the importance of this central doctrine of Christianity so strongly emphasized by St. John.

The word "atonement" appears but once in the New Testament, and is in that text a mistranslation for "reconciliation," as in the R. V. of Rom. v. 11. But the idea of the atonement, hinted at in the Gospels, where it could not be intelligibly explained as a ransom for many (Matt. xx. 28), is after the death and resurrection of Christ fully unfolded under such terms as "redemption through His blood," "gave Himself for our sins," "reconcile . . . by the cross," "hath given Himself a sacrifice to God," "Christ suffered for us in the flesh," "He is the propitiation for our sins," and many similar expressions. It is the central fact of Christianity perpetually emphasized in the Lord's Supper, which ordinance sooner or later is discontinued wherever the idea of redemption through the blood of the Son of God is no longer preached. When Ralph Waldo Emerson was pastor of a Unitarian church in Boston, about seventy years ago, he ceased to administer the Holy Communion, and being asked by his deacons for

the reason for omitting this sacrament, replied that "it was giving undue prominence to one among many good men." From the standpoint of his theology, which made Jesus Christ a mere man, the son of a Jewish sire, his answer was logical, the memorial of the death of Christ was an invidious distinction.

If liberalism has no place for the atonement, orthodoxy has no ground to stand on without it. Hence we must defend it against all assailants. We must demonstrate it as a fundamental fact, and we must so wisely state the philosophy of that fact that its enemies will find it impregnable. We are, however, very thankful that men can be saved by relying on the fact with little or no knowledge of the philosophy, and even with an exceedingly erroneous philosophy, as we shall soon see.

But if a correct philosophy of the atonement is not necessary for the salvation of penitent believers, it is necessary to the salvation of that orthodoxy which produces penitent believers in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. The Gospel is under obligation to answer the inquiries which it has awakened by stimulating the intellect in all the Bible-reading nations. The question must be answered,

#### WHY IS THE ATONEMENT NECESSARY?

Who or what demanded it? We pass by the first answer, that it was necessary to satisfy the claim of

Satan, who had captured the sinful race of men, and was holding them as his prisoners. For more than a thousand years this was the common answer. I do not say the only answer, because here and there one, like Athanasius, and John of Damascus, declared that the satisfaction was paid to God the Father. But under the stimulus of the Gospel quickening the intellect, this theological crudity of a tribute to Satan was outgrown, and the way was opened for a thorough discussion of the necessity of Christ's atoning death, for He *must* be lifted up, He *must* needs have suffered. Out of the various answers we shall have time to speak of only three: first, God's essential justice; secondly, man's obduracy in sin; and thirdly, the requirements of a Divine government, offering conditional pardon to a race of sinners. The first and the last locate the necessity on the Godward side, while the second locates it wholly on the manward side.

I. The first theory for three hundred years widely prevailed in both branches of orthodoxy — Calvinism and Arminianism — although it logically belongs to that branch which teaches an unconditional election and a particular or limited atonement. It is grounded upon the necessity of satisfying that moral attribute of God called exact, or distributive, justice, defined by Webster as that "which gives every man his exact deserts." This principle of essential justice, or eternal

right, demands punishment for violated law. If the sinner is exempted from penalty, it must be inflicted upon some substitute who is personally not worthy of punishment; otherwise, if himself guilty, he could not be a substitute for the guilty. He must suffer for his own sins. Now there are several reasons why I have never been able to preach this theory of the atonement.

1. It is not exact justice to punish the innocent. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," says distributive justice.

2. Guilt is personal and not transferable.

3. It leaves no room for a literal and true pardon of sin, as Dr. Hodge concedes. Pardon, being a gracious remission of deserved penalty, cannot be required after the penalty has been fully endured by the substitute. Sin having been thoroughly expiated, there can be only a nominal, not a real, forgiveness. There is no longer any penalty due to sin, and of course there is none to remit. I cannot indorse a theory which reduces the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith to a mere sham.

4. The punishment of innocence is repugnant to man's moral intuitions, variously called ethical axioms, first truths, necessary beliefs, self-evident truths. No system can endure or can be true which collides with these ultimate truths, defined by Joseph Cook as "the mode of action of Omnipotence." If it is said

that while it is wrong for man knowingly to punish innocence, it may be right in God, this is denied by the fact that man is in the image of God and is a subject of moral government only because there is between him and God a common standard of right to which both may appeal. Moreover, the assertion that moral qualities in man may be entirely different in kind from the moral attributes of God makes Him an unknown and an unknowable being, thus strengthening the foundations of the prevalent agnosticism which is a blight upon modern Christendom. Every agnostic on earth will thank you for saying that justice in God may be a totally different thing from justice in man.

5. Our next objection to the theory that the atonement is a penal satisfaction paid to distributive justice is that, if it is universal in extent, the inevitable, logical outcome is Universalism. For if the sins of all men were punished in Jesus Christ, no man can be justly punished, either in this world or in the world to come, for sins already expiated by suffering their penalty. I lay no foundations for the delusive doctrine of the final salvation of all men.

6. Wherever it is taught that God punished His Son on the cross there have always been some who indulge in the rhetorical statement that "Christ on Calvary was the greatest sinner in the universe"—language which I have heard within thirty years. Within

that time I have heard an English Wesleyan doctor of divinity in public prayer represent the Father as "hurling the hottest thunderbolts of His wrath down upon the head of His devoted Son in punishment for the sins of mankind."

Such statements give occasion to the liberalists to caricature the orthodox doctrine of the atonement, making the Father the embodiment of unsparing distributive justice, a relentless Shylock demanding his pound of flesh; and the Son, the incarnation of mercy and love, appeasing His personal wrath and making Him willing to be compassionate.

II. We come now to our second division, in which the necessity of the atonement is located wholly in the obduracy of the sinful race which needs this wonderful display of love and sacrifice to melt it into contrition and obedient faith. It is commonly called

#### THE MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY,

though moral influence is incidental to all theories. But here it is the principal thing, the sole need and aim of the atonement. Man, not God, is to be propitiated; the work of Christ has no Godward aspect. If men would repent under other moral influences, the atonement were unnecessary. Christ is only *a* Saviour, not *the* Saviour. He is only one, the most prominent, of many moral benefactors, the efficacy of whose self-

sacrifice for others is the same *in kind*. He stands at the head of the noble army of martyrs who by their unselfish labors and contagious example of heroic self-immolation have turned many from sin unto righteousness. If this does not discrown our Divine Lord Jesus it certainly detracts from His honor as the unique Saviour. He cannot be put into a class without dimming His glory. He must stand alone.

This is our first objection. Our second is this, that if Christ saves only by the moral influence of His atoning death, He can save none who have no knowledge of Him — the countless millions who have never heard of Him in pagan lands, half the human race dying in infancy and the myriads of millions who lived and died before Christ came in the flesh. An atonement whose sole efficacy is moral influence can have no retrospective virtue. It must be known in order to be effectual. The sun must shine upon the ice in order to melt it. The only way to adjust this theory of the atonement to the whole race is to extend probation beyond death. This brings us to an inference for which I find no sufficient Scriptural support. With me this is an insuperable objection to the moral influence philosophy of the atonement. It weakens the motive to immediate repentance. But we cannot further dwell on this point.

Our next difficulty with this theory of salvation through moral influence is that it offers no satisfactory

explanation of all those Scriptures which speak of the remission of sins that are past, that is, before Christ's incarnation; those which declare that there is no salvation except through Him; those which represent His death as a substitute, and those which present it as a propitiatory sacrifice. All of these texts teach that the atonement has a Godward efficacy. For these reasons, however popular and pleasing this view may be, I must reject it.

Our last objection is that this theory always tends to a soft theology, a hazy view of sin and a vague and nebulous statement of its consequences in the life to come.

#### THE GOVERNMENTAL THEORY.

III. The Scripture which comes nearest to a statement of the philosophy of the atonement is Rom. iii. 25: "Whom God set forth as a propitiation through faith, by His blood, for the exhibition of His righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins before committed in the forbearance of God." The question is, What is the nature of the righteousness exhibited in the setting forth of Jesus Christ as a propitiation? Is it the justice of the Judge or the justice of the Governor? In probation God is not dealing with us as a Judge, but as a Governor. The righteousness exhibited is not judicial, exact, distributive, giving to

each his exact deserts, but rectoral, governmental, general justice, defined by Webster as that "which carries out all the *ends* of law, though not in every case through the channels of distributive justice, as we often see done by a parent or ruler in his dealings with those who are subject to his control." The atonement was necessary for the same reason, precisely, that the penalty of the violated law was necessary: it takes the place of that penalty, in the case of penitent believers, answering the same end as would be answered by the infliction of the penalty, maintaining divine law. A more exact definition is that of Miley: "The vicarious sufferings and death of Christ are an atonement for sin as a conditional substitute for punishment, fulfilling, on the forgiveness of sin, the obligation of justice in moral government." The advantages of this theory are:

1. It can be preached without mental reservations.
2. It does not conflict with intuitive, self-evident truth, and it avoids the irrational idea that Christ was literally made sin and became a curse.
3. It is founded upon just and consistent views of the divine character. It makes no dualism or collision between the divine Persons, the Father punishing the Son.
4. It satisfies the Protector of the divine law in forbearing to inflict the penalty which was threatened.

Men in expressing this truth in popular figurative language do not utter exact truth when they say that the *law* was satisfied. The figure is that of hypostatizing or personifying law. Only persons can be satisfied.

5. This theory is Biblical, harmonizing with all the statements and including all the facts of Scripture, ascribing a peculiar moral efficacy to the work of Christ, investing the cross with a *peculiar* moral influence over men, while its necessity lies in the Godward direction. This view teaches that the atonement was vicarious, originating in the bosom of the Father, who showed His love by the sufferings which wrung His heart in the gift of His only begotten Son. Fairbairn, in his recent work, thinks it one of the greatest errors of Christian theology to teach that God is impassible, incapable of suffering. He suggests that "The Son, cheered by the prospect of a reward, did not suffer as much in the redemption of the world as did the Father with no hope of reward in the surrender of the Son," with whom He had been in delightful communion face to face from eternity. The sufferings of the parents in sending their sons to fight and die for the Union were different in kind but probably greater than theirs. This view of the atonement presents—instead of an antagonism between the Father, as the impersonation of justice, and the Son, the embodiment of love—the three Persons of the Trinity co-operating to the utmost in

self-sacrifice for the salvation of men, so that at the funeral of every lost soul the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will head the procession as the chief mourners.

6. It affords a basis for the salvation of such pious pagans as live up to their best light. "They are saved through Christ though they know Him not." (J. Wesley.) How about the condition of faith in Him? They have the spirit of faith and the purpose of righteousness; that is, the disposition to trust in the object of faith, the historical Christ, were He revealed to them in the Gospel, and a willingness to walk by the revealed law of God were it made known to them. What is your Scriptural authority? Jesus Christ intimates that the judgment day will proceed by the use of a sliding scale. Where much is given much will be required; where little is given little will be required. St. Paul declares: "There is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without the written law will be judged by the law written on their hearts." Peter looking upon a group of God-fearing heathen at the headquarters of Brigadier General Cornelius, declared: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him." "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Mr. Joseph Cook, who defends

the rectoral theory, advocates the doctrine of salvation by possessing the essential Christ where the historical Christ is unknown. The essential Christ is an obedient attitude of the will toward "the eternal Ideal required by self-evident truths, which has in Christ, and in Him only, become the historically Real." In the last day the Judge will say, "Come, ye blessed," not only to those who have enthroned the historical Christ in their hearts, but also to those who have exhibited towards His brethren, any forlorn man, the spirit of love, the essential element in the character of Christ—"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye did it unto Me." The standard is so low as to be applicable to all who know the distinction between right and wrong. The rectoral theory of the atonement needs no probation after death. What effect does this have on the missionary motive? None. That word stands in full force — "Go ye and teach all nations." While the pagan can be saved without a knowledge of Christ, the Christian cannot be saved while selfishly withholding that knowledge. I believe it is easier for God to save a pagan without the Bible in Bombay than it is to save a professed Christian in Boston without a disposition to send him a Bible ; in other words, without a missionary spirit. I repudiate the doctrine of geographical election and reprobation expressed in the saying, "To exchange cradles would be to exchange destinies."

7. It can be preached as objectively universal in extent as a provision, but subjectively limited as a realization by a failure of free agents to fulfil its conditions. Hence it lays no foundations for Universalism.

Dr. Edward Dorr Griffin was settled over the Park Street Church in 1811, when orthodoxy was a by-word and a reproach and hardly dared to show its head in any pulpit in Boston. The crisis required just such a master spirit, and this city felt the power of God working through this pulpit dynamo. From the day of his coming orthodoxy began to revive. He preached fundamental truths so plainly that the irreverent called this church "brimstone corner." But the great work which he did was to restate New England theology, especially to rescue the fundamental doctrine of a substitutional atonement from the just reproach of Dr. Channing that it conflicted with the moral intuitions. This he grandly did in developing and popularizing the governmental theory. Let me rehearse some of the themes on which he lectured on Sunday evenings during his four years' pastorate there before he went to Williams College to save it from dying by promoting sweeping revivals of religion. These are his propositions: "Christ did not suffer the literal penalty of the law for us;" "He did not satisfy the law of God for us;" "Christ did not satisfy the distributive justice of God for us;" "The law and dis-

tributive justice eternally demand the punishment of every one who has sinned ;” “ The atonement consisted not in the obedience, but in the sufferings, of Christ, such sufferings as fulfilled the design of punishment and render the sins of believers pardonable ;” “ The atonement was designed equally and indiscriminately for all men viewed as moral agents. It implies that all men as moral agents have natural power to comply with the conditions of life, and to repent without the special influences of the Spirit ;” “ The general atonement implies that all probationers have a fair chance to obtain eternal life.” It was the elaboration of such propositions that arrested orthodoxy from further decline and sent it forth on a career of enlargement and reconquest of its lost ground in New England. Substituting “ gracious ability ” for “ natural power,” and adding that the Holy Spirit so reproves the world as to enable every man to repent, I can personally, and as a representative of Arminian theology, say Amen to that philosophy of the atonement first suggested by the great Grotius.

## FEAR AND LOVE.

THESE are the chief elements of all the religions in the world. The principal ingredient in all pagan systems is dread of the gods. The only religion on earth, the essence of which is love, came down from heaven in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John, speaking from experience under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out all fear that hath punishment," or foreboding of future ill in consequence of wrongdoing. Until conscience is seared there is always distress in view of the broken law of God. It is in the Scriptures described as servile, the slave's dread of his stern master, as distinguished from filial fear, the reverence of an obedient son for his affectionate father. This respect for dignity and rightful authority always attends Christian love. But young converts and all partially developed disciples of Christ are not completely emancipated from fear, because the love of God inspired in their hearts is mingled with remaining evil propensities, which while not dominant, resist the new principle of love divine. It is quite evident that John's perfect love is love so eloquently portrayed by Paul, especially in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians,

that magnificent eulogy of love, styled by Henry Drummond, "The Greatest Thing in the World," the title of a volume with which he enriched English literature and blessed mankind. Love even in a regenerate soul may be imperfect and weak. There was a time when John loved Jesus enough to forsake his fishing nets and to follow Him, but not enough to save himself from an unworthy ambition to steal a march on his brethren to seize the highest seat in the Messiah's kingdom next to the King. He did not then have the "love which seeketh not her own." From this mixed state of love John was saved on the day of Pentecost, when the hearts of the disciples were purified by faith. (Acts xv. 8, 9.)

There are four quite distinct possible combinations and permutations of love and fear, forming four different characters: First, some people have neither. We do not refer to pagans, but men in a certain sense worse than ordinary heathen — Gospel hardened unbelievers. They do not love God, and they have become so callous through resistance to the alarming truths of His word that they have lost all susceptibility to fear. This is the most hopeless character this side of perdition. The thunderings of Sinai have lost their power to alarm, while Calvary has no power to draw and to melt into penitent love. This is a growing class. It is made up of multitudes who walk in chosen dark-

ness or wallow in sensual vices. They have trampled on God's law till they have no respect for its Author, and no fear of its penalties. They have grown hard in our Sunday-schools and Sabbath assemblies under the story of the Father's great love in the gift of His Son. To this permanence of religious irresolution and indifference all rejection of light steadily tends. All efforts to save men are attended by the possibility of their becoming worse and worse, the more the truth is focalized on the conscience.

The second class is made up of those who fear without love. They have been awakened to an apprehension of the Divine justice, and have not yet by faith cast themselves upon the Divine mercy, as impersonated in the Son of God dying for sinners. They have been brought under conviction for sin by the preaching of the law, the neglect of which is one of the great practical errors of the modern pulpit. The whole gospel should be preached, its threatenings addressing the fears of sinners, and its promises inspiring hope in the penitent. John Wesley said that there were so called gospel services held in his day, but that all his meetings were law and gospel services. This may be one of the secrets of the rapid spread and converting power of early Methodism. The very first step toward benefiting this class is to bring them to see that their fear is the effect of conviction for sin, and to induce in them

a loathing of sin. One great practical error of modern preaching is found in the slight emphasis upon sin and its dreadful penalty as revealed in the Word of God. I believe in a tearful and tender, but faithful, announcement of the terrors of the Lord as a preparation for proclaiming salvation through faith in Christ. The law is still the child-leader or tutor (Gal. iii. 24, R. V.) to bring us unto Christ. In patrician families in Rome the boy was intrusted to the care of a servant called a *paidagogos* who took him by the hand and led him, willing or unwilling, to school, guarding him against loitering and truancy by the way. Only those sin-sick souls who have learned by experience with the law that they cannot commend themselves to God by their works eagerly welcome the offer of pardon through faith in the atonement made by the Son of God. Hence we have always admired the brief yet comprehensive homiletics of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. "The best general method of preaching is, 1. To convince; 2. To offer Christ; 3. To invite; 4. To build up. And to do this in some measure in every sermon. The most effectual way of preaching Christ is, to preach Him in all His offices and to declare His law, as well as His Gospel, both to believers and unbelievers. Let us strongly insist upon inward and outward holiness in all its branches."

The third class consists of those who have both fear

and love. The impulse to service in their case is largely fear of the law, and not a mighty, resistless love to the Lawgiver moving them as upon angels' wings. They are not "free from the law," or "dead to the law," in the Pauline sense, but they are still "under the law," inasmuch as they derive from it, and not solely from love to Christ, the motive power to service. While all moral intelligences are under the law as the rule of life, all truly regenerate souls are free from the law as the ground of justification, and all the entirely sanctified are free from the law as the impulse to obedience and the instrument of holiness. In the one case the new basis of pardon is faith in Jesus Christ, and in the other the instrument of complete cleansing and the impellent to service is the love of God fully shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. (Rom. v. 5.) We do not work ourselves up into love. But it comes down from heaven, when with an all-surrendering faith we magnify the promise of our risen and glorified Christ to send the abiding Comforter in the fulness of His offices as the purifier and the inward revealer of Christ.

If the census of the whole Christian Church were taken by an enumerator endowed with omniscience, it is probable that a majority of even evangelical Protestants would be found in the mixed condition of fear and love. They are more or less legal. Their motive

to serve God is largely fear, and not the spontaneous energy of love bearing them onward as upon the wings of the seraphim.

The Oberlin theology denies the existence of any such complexity of spiritual impulse as love and fear, and insists on the unity and simplicity of every moral act, deriving, as it is alleged, its character solely from the attitude of the will. Not only philosophy, but universal human experience, strongly testifies against this doctrine which admits of no degrees in holiness and in wickedness, and makes every person, at any given moment, either a perfect saint or a perfect Satan. Since moral character lies not wholly in the will, but in the trend of the sensibilities and affections back of the will, the experience of the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a frequent phenomenon in the natural man, as that in Gal. v. 17, is in the regenerate man, before he has reached the point of the crucifixion of the flesh with the passions and lusts (verse 24). If there may be persons partly spiritual and partly carnal (1 Cor. iii. 1-4), there may exist both fear and love in the same person, servile fear and Christian love. While this state is much better than no love, it is vastly inferior to "perfect love." When St. John uses this phrase, he is describing not an ideal above the reach of mortals, but a reality in Christian experience this side of the grave. The test of its possession is boldness, not only

in the day of judgment, but boldness here and now in view of that day. (Alford.)

The fourth class comprises believers who are so far advanced as to have love without fear. I do not think that John was contemplating imaginary beings, or angels, or the spirits of good men escaped from their earthly prison, when he said, "There is no fear in love." He was describing the highest possibilities of grace in men dwelling in houses of clay, men of like passions with himself, oppressed with life's ills, and harassed by the devil's fiery darts. Such as these may be so filled with unmixed love as to have boldness in view of the day of judgment long before the Judge shall descend. The secret of this boldness is told in the same sentence, "Because as He is, so are we in this world." (1 John iv. 17.)

"The sense of our text must be gained," says Dean Alford, the great English scholar, "by strictly keeping to the tenses of the text," especially the passage which I have just read: "Because as He is so are we in this world." Some people alter the text and make it read thus: "Because as He *was* so are we in this world." It is a great truth that we are as Jesus was in this world. He was abused, misunderstood, persecuted, vilified, maligned, and at last hung up between two thieves. He says Himself, "As they have persecuted me, they will persecute you." It is a great truth that

we are in this world very much as Jesus Christ was when He was here, misunderstood and persecuted as He was.

But that is not the utterance of John here. John uses the present tense and not the past. Suppose we alter another verb here in the text, we shall have a great truth, but not a truth that John announces. Because as He is we shall be hereafter. As He is glorified we shall be hereafter; we shall stand a row of glorified brothers with Jesus at the head. Splendid truth! But John does not announce it in this text. And Dean Alford insists that we shall cling to the exact tenses in order to get the meaning. And the tense is this: Because as He *is*, to-day, in heaven, so are we in this world. In what respect is the likeness? I will give you Dean Alford's note on this subject. He was not considered a holiness fanatic. He was considered a very level headed man, a very proper and conservative Church of England man. So I give you his note upon it that you may see that I am not straining the passage at all. This is his note. He asks the question: Wherein is the likeness? As Jesus is to-day enthroned on the throne of the Father, so are we in this world. He says the likeness is not in the fact of trials and persecutions through which we are passing. It is not in the fact that we are the adopted sons of God, or beloved of God as He, the only begotten Son, is loved

of God. In the third place, it is not by our being not of the world, as Christ is not of the world. In the fourth place, it is not in the fact that we live in love as He lives in love; but in the fact that we are righteous as He is righteous. This is the note of Dean Alford upon that subject—that we are righteous in this world as He is righteous. And he confirms that position by quoting several passages in this very Epistle to show that that is a favorite thought with John. He refers to the 2d chapter and 29th verse. “If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him.” And in the 3d chapter and 3d verse you will find: “And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” Dean Alford goes on to say that John refers to the fundamental truth on which our love rests, namely, likeness to Christ, “because we are absolutely like Christ, because we are in Christ Himself, because He lives in us—without this there can be no likeness to Him.” Hence we must now in this life have the moral image of Christ, righteousness and true holiness, not imputed, but imparted and inwrought, making us facsimiles of the Son of God.

We here note the exact language of John. He does not say that perfect love diminishes or represses fear, but casts out, separates it from the soul. The Vulgate says, “casts it out of doors.” Let us thank God for

the possibility of living on the earth in this blessed condition, divested of all painful dread of God, or His law, all fear of death and of eternity.

Is there any certain token by which a Christian may know that he has been perfected in love? As there are several proofs of sunrise obviating the need of a tallow candle, so there are many proofs of perfect love. Apply this test: Were the roof above you to be suddenly removed, and were you to see Jesus descending on the great white throne to judge the quick and the dead, what emotion would this awaken in your bosom? Do you shrink away at the very thought, or would you hail the Judge with joy, and if possible, meet Him halfway? When a magnet is passed over the floor of a blacksmith shop every particle of iron will spring up and cleave to it, while not a particle of dirt will be attracted. The one has an affinity for magnetism and the other has not. Such an affinity has perfect love for Christ that when He, the central magnet of all loyal hearts, angelic and human, shall personally descend at His second coming, He will draw even the bodies of the saints out of their graves to meet Him in the air. It is not possible to love with all the heart, and to dread the same person with a tormenting fear. Such fear may consist with an imperfect or mixed love. Hence the sudden cessation of fear in a regenerate soul, aspiring after the fulness of love, is a proof of its experience.

The fourth class we have already described — those who love without fear.

As a writer, St. John was not so much a reasoner, demonstrating propositions, as he was an intuitionist, announcing truths which he sees with the mind's eye. When he attempts to reason, his intellect so rapidly darts through the process, that he omits one of the premises and comes to his conclusion, leaving us to find the missing link in the syllogism. Let us try to find the omitted premise in 1 John iv. 17: "Herein is our love made (proved to be) perfect, in the fact that we have boldness as to the day of judgment, because even as He is, so are we in this world."

*The Judge will not condemn those who are like Himself;  
We, while in this world, are facsimiles of Jesus Christ;  
Therefore, we have no fear that He will condemn us.*

We have found and restored the major premise, which is the first proposition.

"The sense of this text must be gained," says Alford, "by strictly keeping to the tenses. And when we have done so, wherein is the likeness to Christ found? Clearly not in our trials and persecutions; nor by our being not of the world as He is not of the world, nor in that we, as sons of adoption through Him, are beloved of God, even as He is beloved; nor in that we live in love, as He lives in love; but in that *we are righteous as He is righteous*, ch. ii. 29, iii. 3 ff., 10, 22."

That Alford is not speaking of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us is evident from his assertion, that "there can be no likeness to Christ unless He lives in us." Then, and then only, are we in Him.

John's meaning is plainly this: As Jesus is in holy character to-day, enthroned with the Father, so are we on the earth, if we have entered into the full heritage of believers, the indwelling of the Divine Comforter and Sanctifier. The beloved apostle was not idealizing when he penned these words, "As He is so are we in this world." He was not portraying imaginary beings. He was speaking out of the depths of his own consciousness, illumined by the Spirit of Truth. He was enjoying love without fear; love filling the vessel to the brim, and overflowing in streams of gladness; love the sole impulse to service and sacrifice. As fear is the first-born of sin (Gen. iii. 10), it logically follows that when the child is banished from the inward paradise restored, her hateful mother must accompany the out-cast child. Hence perfect love and entire sanctification are interchangeable phrases.

Note the absence of any condemnation of those who have not passed out of the third class into the fourth, those in whom love is mingled with tormenting fear. St. John does neither depreciate nor castigate them. In this respect he is a model for all who preach or write on this glorious theme. He points the fearful saint to

the serene heights of love made perfect, up which the lion's whelp never climbed. What John implies is that it is better further on and higher up. He does not throw stones down upon the heads of Christians on lower levels, where the tormentor rages and roars. By describing the beauty and blessedness of that holy summit, the mount of beatitudes, he lovingly invites them to ascend and permanently to abide in pure love, surrounded by the various temptations of human probation, but "kept by the power of God through faith."

Perfect love is to be preached, "not by driving, but by drawing," says Wesley. There are no threatenings in the Word of God against the children of God. "If children, then heirs."

## SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE ON THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN.

BY REV. JOHN FLETCHER.

REV. JOHN FLETCHER, a presbyter in the Church of England, was the great doctrinal defender of John Wesley's Arminianism and especially of his evangel of Christian perfection. Dr. Dölinger says, "The writings of John Fletcher are the most important theological productions which issued from Protestantism in the latter part of the 18th century." It is not an auspicious omen of the future doctrinal stamina of Methodism that both her laymen and her preachers of the present time are becoming more and more ignorant of the writings of this saintly and almost seraphic champion of their creed, who, of all believers since the days of the apostles, is justly deemed the nearest reproduction of the beloved disciple who reclined on the bosom of his Master and Lord. There are two reasons for the neglect into which Fletcher's writings have fallen: (1) Because of the general disrelish of theological controversy in the era through which the church is now passing; and (2) the decline and decay of Calvinism in America, especially in New England, its

former citadel, against which iron system of unconditional predestination Fletcher's "Checks to Antinomianism" arrayed its irresistible polemic. The system of John Calvin is a dead issue, so far as its five points are concerned, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, bound will, and the final perseverance of the saints. But there is a tenet not embraced in these five doctrines, but stated in the Westminster Catechism, which is still alive and vigorous, namely, the necessary continuance of sin till it is destroyed by physical death. Fletcher taught the possibility and obligation of holiness in this life. His doctrine was assailed by Sir Richard Hill (brother to the eccentric and celebrated Rev. Rowland Hill), who alleged that entire sanctification as taught by Fletcher is contrary to the ninth and fifteenth articles by the Anglican Church, to which both the contestants had subscribed. One of these articles teaches that "original or birth sin," as an "infection of nature, doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated;" and the other article has this heading, "Of Christ alone without Sin." Fletcher's following reply, which extends to the end of this note, so far as it relates to John's First Epistle, is so appropriate to the theme of this volume that the author cannot forbear its quotation:

I proceed to vindicate the holiness of St. John, who is the last apostle that Mr. Hill calls to the help of

indwelling sin, Christian imperfection, and a death purgatory.

Before I show how the loving apostle is pressed into a service which is so contrary to his experience, and to his doctrine of perfect love, I shall make a preliminary remark. To take a passage of Scripture out from the context, and to make it speak a language contrary to the obvious design of the sacred writer, is the way to butcher the body of Scriptural divinity. This conduct injures truth, as much as the Galatians would have injured themselves, if they had literally "pulled their eyes out, and given them to St. Paul;" an edifying passage, thus displaced, may become as loathsome to a moral mind as a good eye, torn out of its bleeding orb in a good face, is odious to a tender heart.

Among the passages which have been thus treated, none has suffered more violence than this: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," 1 John i. 8. "That's enough for me," says a hasty imperfectionist: "St. John clearly pleads for the *indwelling of sin* in us during the term of life; and he is so set against those who profess deliverance from sin, and Christian perfection in this life, that he does not scruple to represent them as *liars* and *self-deceivers*."

Our opponents suppose that this argument is unanswerable. But to convince them that they are mistaken, we need only prove that the sense which they so

confidently give to the words of St. John is contrary, (1.) To his design. (2.) To the context. And, (3.) To the pure and strict doctrine which he enforces in the rest of the Epistle.

I. With respect to St. John's *design*, it evidently was to confirm believers who were in danger of being deceived by Antinomian and antichristian seducers. When he wrote this Epistle, the church began to be corrupted by men, who, under pretence of knowing the mysteries of the Gospel better than the apostles, imposed upon the simple Jewish fables, heathenish dreams, or vain, philosophic speculations; insinuating that their doctrinal peculiarities were the very marrow of the Gospel. Many such arose at the time of the reformation, who introduced stoical dreams into Protestantism, and whom Bishop Latimer and others steadily opposed under the name of "Gospellers."

The doctrines of all these Gospellers centred in making Christ, indirectly at least, the minister of sin; and in representing the preachers of *practical, self-denying* Christianity, as persons unacquainted with Christian liberty. It does not indeed appear that the Gnostics, or *knowing ones* (for so the ancient Gospellers were called), carried matters so far as openly to say that believers might be God's dear children in the very commission of adultery and murder, or while they worshipped Milcom and Ashtaroth; but it is certain

that they could already reconcile the verbal denial of Christ, fornication and idolatrous feasting, with true faith; directly or indirectly "teaching and seducing *Christ's* servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols," Rev. ii. 20. At these Antinomians, St. Peter, St. James, and St. Jude levelled their epistles. St. Paul strongly cautioned Timothy, Titus and the Ephesians against them: see Eph. iv. 14, v. 6. And St. John wrote his First Epistle to warn the believers who had not yet been seduced into their error: a dreadful, though pleasing error this, which, by degrees, led some to deny Christ's law, and then His very name; hence the triumph of the spirit of antichrist. Now, as these men insinuated that believers might *be righteous* without *doing righteousness*; and as they supposed that *Christ's righteousness*, or our own *knowledge and faith*, would supply the want of internal sanctification and external obedience; St. John maintains against them the necessity of that practical godliness which consists in not "committing sin," and in "walking as Christ walked:" nay, he asserts that Christ's blood, through the faith which is our victory, purifies "from all sin, and cleanses from all unrighteousness." To make him, therefore, plead for the necessary continuance of indwelling sin, till we go into a death purgatory, is evidently to make him defeat his own design.

II. To be more convinced of it, we need only read

the controverted text in connection with the CONTEXT ; illustrating both by some notes in brackets. St. John opens his commission thus, First Epistle i. 5, 6, 7 :—  
“ This is the message which we have received of him [Christ] and declare unto you, that God is light, [bright, transcendent purity,] and in him is no darkness [no impurity] at all. If we [believers] say that we have fellowship with him, [that we are united to him by an actually living faith,] and walk in darkness, [in impurity or sin,] we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, [if we live up to our Christian light and do righteousness,] we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. For let no man deceive you : he that does righteousness is righteous, even as he, *Christ*, is righteous ; and in him is no sin,” 1 John iii. 5, 7. So far we see no plea, either for sin, or for the Calvinian purgatory.

Should Mr. Hill reply, that “ when St. John says, ‘ The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin,’ the apostle does not mean *all indwelling sin* ; because this is a sin from which death alone can cleanse us : ” we demand a proof, and in the mean time we answer, that St. John, in the above-quoted passages, says, that “ he who does righteousness,” in the full sense of the word, “ is righteous, as Christ is righteous ; ” observing that “ in him [Christ] is no sin.” So certain, then, as there is

no indwelling sin in Christ, there is no indwelling sin in a believer *who does righteousness* in the full sense of the word; for he is made "perfect in love," and is "cleansed from all sin." Nor was St. John himself ashamed to profess this glorious liberty; for he said, "Our love is made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he [Christ] is [perfect in love, and of consequence without sin,] so are we in this world," 1 John iv. 17. And the whole context shows that the beloved apostle spake these great words of a likeness to Christ with respect to the perfect love which "fulfils the law, abolishes tormenting fear, and enables the believer to stand with boldness in the day of judgment," as being forgiven, and "conformed to the image of God's Son."

If Mr. Hill urge that "the blood of Christ, powerfully applied by the Spirit, cleanses us indeed from the *guilt*, but not from the *filthiness* of sin; blood having a reference to justification and *pardon*, but not to sanctification and *holiness*:" we reply, that this argument is not only contrary to the preceding answer, but to the text, the context, and other plain scriptures. (1.) To *the text*, where our being cleansed from all sin is evidently suspended on our humble and faithful walk: "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, the blood of Christ cleanses us," etc. Now every novice in Gospel grace knows that true Protestants do not suspend

a sinner's justification on his "walking in the light as God is in the light." (2.) It is contrary to *the context*; for in the next verse but one, where St. John evidently distinguishes *forgiveness* and *holiness*, he peculiarly applies the word *cleansing* to the latter of these blessings: "He is faithful to forgive us our sin," by taking away our guilt; "and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," by taking away all the filth of indwelling sin. And, (3.) It is contrary to *other places of Scripture*, where Christ's blood is represented as having a reference to purification, as well as to forgiveness. God himself says, "Wash ye; make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil; learn to do well." The washing and cleansing here spoken of have undoubtedly a reference to the removal of the *filth*, as well as the *guilt* of sin. Accordingly we read that all those who "stand before the throne, have *both washed their robes, and made them white* in the blood of the Lamb;" that is, they are *justified by, and sanctified with his blood.*\* Hence our Church prays "that we may so eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed [*i. e.*, made clean also] through his most precious blood." To rob Christ's blood of its sanctifying power, and to confine its efficacy to the atonement, is therefore an Antinomian mistake, by which our

\* Hengstenberg's Exegesis.

opponents greatly injure the Saviour, whom they pretend to exalt.

Should Mr. Hill assert, that "when St. John says, *If we walk in the light, etc., the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin*, the loving apostle's meaning is not that the blood of Christ *radically* cleanses us, but only that it *begets and carries on* a cleansing from all sin, which cleansing will be completed in a death purgatory:" we answer: (1.) This assertion leaves Mr. Hill's doctrine open to all the above-mentioned difficulties. (2.) It overthrows the doctrine of the Protestants, who have always maintained that nothing is absolutely necessary to eternal salvation, and, of consequence, to our perfect cleansing, but an obedient, steadfast faith, apprehending the full virtue of Christ's purifying blood, according to Acts xv. 9, "God giving them the Holy Ghost, put no difference between them and us, purifying their hearts by faith,"—not by death. (3.) It is contrary to matter of fact: Enoch and Elijah having been translated to heaven, and therefore having been perfectly purified even in body, without going into the Calvinian purgatory. But, (4.) What displeases us most in the evasive argument which I answer, is, that it puts the greatest contempt on Christ's blood, and puts the greatest cheat on weak believers, who sincerely wait to be now "made perfect in love," that they may now worthily magnify God's holy name.

An illustration will prove it. I suppose that Christ is now in England, doing as many wonderful cures as he formerly did in Judea. My benevolent opponent runs to the Salop infirmary, and tells all the patients there that the great Physician, the Son of God, has once more visited the earth; and he again "heals all manner of sickness and diseases among the people, and cleanses" from the most inveterate leprosy by a touch or a word. All the patients believe Mr. Hill; some hop to this wonderful Saviour, and others are carried to his footstool. They touch and retouch him; he strokes them round again and again: but not one of them is cured. The wounds of some, indeed, are skinned over for a time; but it soon appears that they still fester at the bottom, and that a painful core remains unextracted in every sore. The poor creatures complain to Mr. Hill, "Did you not, sir, assure us upon your honor, as a Christian gentleman, that Christ heals all manner of diseases, and cleanses from all kinds of leprosies?" "True," says Mr. Hill; "but you must know that these words do not mean that he *radically cures* any disease, or *cleanses* from any leprosy: they only signify that he *begins* to cure every disease, and *continues* to cleanse from *all* leprosies; but notwithstanding all his cures, *begun* and *continued*, nobody is cured before death. So, my friends, you must bear your festering sores as well as you can, till death comes

radically to cleanse and cure you from them all." Instead of crying, "Sweet grace! Rich grace!" and of clapping Mr. Hill for his evangelical message, the disappointed patients desire him to take them back to the infirmary, saying, "We have there a chance for a cure before death; but your great Physician pronounces us incurable, unless death comes to the help of his art: and we think that any surgeon could do as much, if he did not do more."

If God hath appointed death to make an end of heart pollution, and to be our complete savior from sin, our opponents might screen their doctrine of a death purgatory behind God's appointment; it being certain that God, who can command iron to swim, and fire to cool, could also command the filthy hands of death to cleanse the thoughts of our hearts. But we do not read in our Bible either that God ever gave to indwelling sin a lease of any believer's heart for life; or that he ever appointed the king of terrors to deliver us from the deadly seeds of iniquity. And although the Old Testament contains an account of many carnal ordinances adapted to the carnal disposition of the Jews, we do not remember to have read there, "DEATH shall circumcise thy heart, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. Death shall sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness death will cleanse you. Death will put my

Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and (when you are dead) ye shall keep my judgments and do them." And if death was never so far honored under the Mosaic dispensation, we ask where he has been invested with higher privileges under the Gospel of Christ? Is it where St. Paul says that "Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel?" It appears to us that it is a high degree of rashness in the Calvinists, and in the Romanists, to appoint the pangs of death, and the sorrows of hell, to do the most difficult, and, of consequence, the most glorious work of Christ's Spirit, which is powerfully to "redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, [not full of all inbred unrighteousness, but 'dead to sin, free from sin, pure in heart,' and] zealous of good works." And we shall think ourselves far more guilty of impertinence, if we nominate either death or hell to do the office of the final purifier of our hearts, than if we ordered a sexton to do the office of the prime minister, or an executioner to act as the king's physician. With respect to salvation from the root, as well as from the branches of sin, we will therefore "know nothing," as absolutely necessary, "but Jesus Christ and him crucified," risen again, ascended on high, that he might send the Holy Ghost to perfect us in love, through "a faith that purifies the heart, and through a hope which,

if any man hath, he will purify himself, even as God is pure."

If Mr. Hill say that I beat the air, and that the text which he quotes in his "Creed for Perfectionists," to show that it is impossible to be cleansed from all sin before death, is not 1 John i. 7, but the next verse; I reply, that if St. John assert in the seventh verse that "Christ's blood," powerfully applied by the Spirit of faith, "cleanses us from all sin," that inspired writer cannot be so exceedingly inconsistent as to contradict himself in the very next verse.

Should the reader ask, "What then can be St. John's meaning in that verse, where he declares that 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us?' How can these words possibly agree with the doctrine of a perfect cleansing from all sin?"

We answer, that St. John having given his first stroke to the Antinomian believers of his day, strikes, by the by, a blow at Pharisaic professors. There were in St. John's time, as there are in our own, numbers of men who had never been properly convinced of sin, and who boasted, as Paul once did, that touching the righteousness of the law, they were blameless; they served God; they did their duty; they gave alms; they never did anybody any harm; they thanked God that they were not as other men; but especially that they were

not like those mourners in Sion, who were no doubt very wicked, since they made so much ado about God's mercy, and a powerful application of the Redeemer's all-cleansing blood. How proper then was it for St. John to inform his readers that these *whole-hearted* Christians, these *perfect* Pharisees, were no better than *liars* and *self-deceivers*; and that true Christian righteousness is always attended by a genuine conviction of our *native* depravity, and by an humble acknowledgment of our *actual* transgressions.

This being premised, it appears that the text so dear to us, and so mistaken by our opponents, has this fair, Scriptural meaning:—"If we [followers of Him who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance] say, We have no sin [no *native* depravity from our first parents, and no *actual* sin, at least no such sin as deserves God's wrath; fancying we need not secure a particular application of Christ's atoning and purifying blood] we deceive ourselves, and the truth [of repentance and faith] is not in us."

That the words are levelled at the monstrous error of self-conceited, and self-perfected Pharisees, and not at "the glorious liberty of the children of God," appears to us undubitable from the following reasons: (1.) The immediately preceding verse strongly asserts this liberty. (2.) The verse immediately following secures it also, and cuts down the doctrine of our opponents; the

apostle's meaning being evidently this:—" Though I write to you, that 'if we say' we are originally free from sin, and never did any harm, 'we deceive ourselves;' yet, mistake me not: I do not mean to continue under the guilt, or in the moral infection of any sin, original or actual. For if we penitently and believingly confess both, 'he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,' whether it be native or self-contracted, internal or external. Therefore, if we have attained the glorious liberty of God's children, we need not, through voluntary humility, say that we do nothing but sin. It will be sufficient, when we are 'cleansed from all unrighteousness,' still to be deeply humbled for our present infirmities, and for our past sins; confessing both with godly sorrow and filial shame. For if we should say, 'We have not sinned, [note: St. John does not write, *If we should say, WE DO NOT SIN,*] we make him a liar, and the truth is not in us;' common sense dictating that if 'we have not sinned,' we speak an untruth when we profess that Christ has *forgiven our sins.*" This appears to us the true meaning of 1 John i. 8, when it is fairly considered in the light of the context.

III. We humbly hope that Mr. Hill himself will be of our sentiment if he compare the verse in debate with the pure and strict doctrine which St. John

enforces throughout his Epistle. In the second chapter he says, "We know that we know him, if we keep his commandments, etc. Whoso **KEEPETH HIS WORD**, in him verily is the love of God **PERFECTED**. He that abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked, etc. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light [where the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin] and there is none occasion of stumbling in him."

The same doctrine runs also through the next chapter: "Every one that hath this hope in him, **PURIFIETH HIMSELF AS HE (Christ) IS PURE**. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, etc., and ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, [*i. e.*, to destroy them root and branch ;] and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth, does not [properly] see him, neither know him; he that does righteousness is righteous, even as he [Christ] is righteous. He that committeth sin, [*i. e.*, as appears by the context, he that transgresseth the law,] is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning: for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God [whosoever is made partaker of God's holiness, according to the perfection of the Christian dispensation] doth not commit sin, [*i. e.*, does not transgress the law ;] for his seed," the ingrafted word, made quick and powerful by the indwelling

Spirit, "remaineth in him, and [morally speaking] he cannot sin because he is [thus] born of God. For if ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doth righteousness is born of him;" and that he that doth not righteousness, — he "that committeth sin," or transgresseth the law, — is, so far, of the devil, for "the devil" transgresseth the law, *i. e.*, "sinneth from the beginning. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.\* Whosoever does not righteousness, [*i. e.*, whosoever sinneth, taking the word in its evangelical meaning,] is not of God," 1 John iii. 3–11; ii. 29.

If Mr. Hill cry out, "Shocking! Who are those men that do not sin?" I reply, All those whom St. John speaks of, a few verses below: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us; [and it will condemn us if we sin—but God much more, for] God is greater than our hearts, etc. Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, we have confidence toward God, etc., because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight," 1 John iii. 20, etc. Now, we apprehend, all the sophistry in the world will never prove that, evangelically speaking, "keeping God's command,

\*This doctrine of St. John is perfectly agreeable to that of our Lord, who said that "Judas had a devil," because he gave place to the love of money; and who called Peter himself "Satan," when he "savored the things of men," in opposition to "the things of God."

ments," and "doing what pleases him," is *sinning*. Therefore, when St. John professed to keep God's commandments, and to do what is pleasing in his sight, he professed what our opponents call sinless perfection, and what we call Christian perfection.

Mr. Hill is so very unhappy in his choice of St. John, to close the number of his apostolic witnesses for Christian imperfection, that, were it not for a few clauses of his First Epistle, the anti-Solifidian severity of that apostle might drive all imperfect Christians to despair. And what is most remarkable, those few encouraging clauses are all conditional: "If any man sin," for there is no necessity that he should; or rather, (according to the most literal sense of the word *ἁμαρτη*, which being in the aorist has generally the force of a past tense,) "If any man HAVE SINNED: if he have not sinned unto death: if we confess our sins: if that which ye have heard shall remain in you: if ye walk in the light:" then do we evangelically enjoy the benefit of our Advocate's intercession. Add to this, that the first of those clauses is prefaced by these words, "My little children, these things I write unto you, THAT YE SIN NOT;" and all together are guarded by these dreadful declarations:—"He that says, *I know him*, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. If any man say, I love God, and loveth not

his brother, [note : he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law,] he is a liar. There is a sin unto death, I do not say that he shall pray for it. Let no man deceive you ; he that does righteousness is righteous. He that committeth sin [or transgresseth the law] is of the devil." To represent St. John, therefore, as an enemy to the doctrine of Christian perfection, does not appear to us less absurd than to represent Satan as a friend to complete holiness.









