

# **THE TESTS OF LIFE**

A STUDY OF  
THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN

Being the Kerr Lectures for 1909

BY THE  
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## THE KERR LECTURESHIP

THE "KERR LECTURESHIP" was founded by the TRUSTEES of the late Miss JOAN KERR of Sanquhar, under her Deed of Settlement, and formally adopted by the United Presbyterian Synod in May 1886. In the following year, May 1887, the provisions and conditions of the Lectureship, as finally adjusted, were adopted by the Synod, and embodied in a Memorandum, printed in the Appendix to the Synod Minutes, p. 489.

On the union of the United Presbyterian Church with the Free Church of Scotland in October 1900, the necessary changes were made in the designation of the object of the Lectureship and the persons eligible for appointment to it, so as to suit the altered circumstances. And at the General Assembly of 1901 it was agreed that the Lectureship should in future be connected with the Glasgow College of the United Free Church. From the Memorandum, as thus amended, the following excerpts are here given:--

II. The amount to be invested shall be £3000.

III. The object of the Lectureship is the promotion of the study of Scientific Theology in the United Free Church of Scotland.

The Lectures shall be upon some such subjects as the following, viz. :

A. Historic Theology

(1) Biblical Theology, (2) History of Doctrine, (3) Patristics, with special reference to the significance and authority of the first three centuries.

B. Systematic Theology

(1) Christian Doctrine—(a) Philosophy of Religion, (b) Comparative Theology, (c) Anthropology, (d) Christology, (e) Soteriology, (f) Eschatology.

(2) Christian Ethics—(a) Doctrine of Sin, (b) Individual and Social Ethics, (c) The Sacraments, (d) The Place of Art in Religious Life and Worship.

Further, the Committee of Selection shall from time to time, as they think fit, appoint as the subject of the Lectures any important Phases of Modern Religious Thought or Scientific Theories in their bearing upon Evangelical Theology. The Committee may also appoint a subject connected with the practical work of the Ministry as subject of Lecture, but in no case shall this be admissible more than once in every five appointments.

IV. The appointments to this Lectureship shall be made in the first instance from among the Licentiates or Ministers of the United Free Church of Scotland,

of whom no one shall be eligible who, when the appointment falls to be made, shall have been licensed for more than twenty-five years, and who is not a graduate of a British University, preferential regard being had to those who have for some time been connected with a Continental University.

V. Appointments to this Lectureship not subject to the conditions in Section IV. may also from time to time, at the discretion of the Committee, be made from among eminent members of the Ministry of any of the Nonconformist Churches of Great Britain and Ireland, America, and the Colonies, or of the Protestant Evangelical Churches of the Continent.

VI. The Lecturer shall hold the appointment for three years.

VII. The number of Lectures to be delivered shall be left to the discretion of the Lecturer, except thus far, that in no case shall there be more than twelve or less than eight.

VIII. The Lectures shall be published at the Lecturer's own expense within one year after their delivery.

IX. The Lectures shall be delivered to the students of the Glasgow College of the United Free Church of Scotland.

XII. The Public shall be admitted to the Lectures.

## PREFACE

As only a portion of the contents of this volume could be orally delivered, I have not thought it necessary to adhere to either the form or the title of "Lecture," but (with the consent of the Trustees) have assigned a separate "Chapter" to each principal topic dealt with. The method adopted in this exposition of the Epistle—that, namely, of grouping together the passages bearing upon a common theme—will be found, I trust, to have advantages which compensate in some measure for its disadvantages. That it has disadvantages, as compared with a continuous exposition, I am well aware. These, however, I have endeavoured to minimise, by supplying in the first chapter a specially full analysis of the Epistle, by careful indexing, and by making liberal use of cross-references. For the convenience of the reader, I have set down in the footnotes such exegetical details as seemed most necessary to explain or to establish the interpretation adopted; but where these involved lengthy or intricate discussion, they, along with all minuter points of exegesis, have been relegated to the Notes at the end of the volume. In these Notes the text of the Epistle is continuously followed.

The points of textual difference between the various critical editions of the Epistle are comparatively unimportant,

and I have seldom found it necessary to refer to them. The text used is that of Tischendorf's Eighth Edition; but in one passage (5<sup>18</sup>) I have preferred the reading indicated in our Authorised Version and in the Revisers' margin.

Among the commentators to whom I have, of course, been indebted, I mention Westcott first of all. Owing, perhaps, to natural pugnacity, one more readily quotes a writer to express dissent than to indicate agreement; but, though I find that the majority of my references to "Westcott" are in the nature of criticism, I would not be thought guilty of depreciating that great commentary. With all its often provoking characteristics, it is still, as a magazine of materials for the student of the Epistle, without a rival. Huther's and Plummer's commentaries I have found specially serviceable; but the most original, beautiful, and profound is Rothe's, of which, it is somewhat surprising to find, no full translation has yet appeared. I desire, besides, to acknowledge obligation to J. M. Gibbon's *Eternal Life*, a remarkably fine popular exposition of the Epistle; and to Professor E. F. Scott's *Fourth Gospel*, for the clear light which that able work throws upon not a few important points as well as for much provocative stimulus. But there is no book (except Bruder's *Concordance*) to which I have been more indebted than to Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, the next volume of which is impatiently awaited.

Professor H. R. Mackintosh, D.D., of New College, and the Rev. Thomas S. Dickson, M.A., Edinburgh, have placed me under deep obligation by exceptionally generous and valuable help in proof-reading. Mr. David Duff, B.D., not only has rendered equal service in this respect, but has

subjected the book, even in its preparatory stages, to a rigorous but always helpful criticism—a labour of friendship for which I find it difficult to express in adequate terms the gratitude that I owe and feel. Finally, I am grateful, by anticipation, to every reader who will make generous allowance for the fact, that the preparation of this volume has been carried through amid the incessant demands of a busy city pastorate, and who will attribute to this cause some of the defects which he will, no doubt, discover in it.

EDINBURGH, January 1909.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The following works are referred to as follows, other titles being cited in full:

- ABBOTT *Johannine Vocabulary* (A. & C. Black, 1905), and *Johannine Grammar* (A. & C. Black, 1906).
- BEYSCHLAG *Neutestamentliche Theologie*. Zweite Auflage. Halle, 1896.
- CANDLISH *The First Epistle of St. John*. A. & C. Black, 1897.
- DB *A Dictionary of the Bible*. Ed. by Dr. Hastings. T. & T. Clark, 1898-1904.
- EBRARD *Biblical Commentary on the Epistles of St. John*. T. & T. Clark, 1860.
- GIBBON *Eternal Life*. By the Rev. J. M. Gibbon. Dickinson, 1890.
- GRILL *Untersuchungen uber die Entstehung des vierten Evangeliums*. J. C. B. Mohr, 1902.
- HAUPT *The First Epistle of St. John*. Clark's Foreign Theological Library, 1879.
- HOLTZMANN *Hand-Commentr. zum Neuen Testament*. Vierter Band. Freiburg i. B. 1891.
- HARING *Theologische Abhandlungen zum Carl von Weizsacker gewidmet*. Freiburg i. B. 1892.
- HUTHER *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James and John*. T. & T. Clark, 1882.
- JPT *Jahrbucher fur protestantische Theologie*.
- LUCKE *Commentary on the Epistles of St. John*. 1837.
- MAURICE *The Epistles of St. John*. Macmillan & Co., 1857.
- MOULTON *Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Vol. i. T. & T. Clark, 1906.
- PFLEIDERER *Das Urhristentnm*. Zweite Auflage. Berlin, 1902.
- PLUMMER *The Epistles of S. John*. In the Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges.
- ROTHE *Der erste Brief Johannes*. Wittenberg, 1875.
- SCOTT *The Fourth Gospel, its Purpose and Theology*. T. & T. Clark., 1906.
- STEVENS *The Johannine Theology*. Scribner's Sons, 1904.
- WEISS *Die drei Briefe des Apostel Johannis*. Von Dr. Bernhard Weiss. Gottingen, 1900.
- WEIZSACKER *The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*. Second edition, Williams & Norgate, 1897.
- WESTCOTT *The Epistles of St. John*. Third edition. Macmillan & Co., 1892.

# THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN

## CHAPTER I.

### STYLE AND STRUCTURE.

ON a first perusal of the Epistle, the effect of which one can at least try to imagine, the appreciative reader could not fail to receive a deep impression of the strength and directness of the writer's spiritual intuition, and to be charmed by the clear-cut gnomic terseness of many of his sayings; but not less, perhaps, would he be impressed by what might seem to him the marks of mental limitation and literary resourcelessness,—the paucity of ideas, the poverty of vocabulary, the reiteration, excessive for so brief a composition, of the same thoughts in nearly the same language, the absence of logical concatenation or of order in the progress of thought. The impression might be, indeed, that there is no such progress, but that the thought, after sundry gyrations, returns ever to the same point. As one reads the Epistle to the Romans, it seems as if to change the position of a single paragraph would be as impossible as to lift a stone out of a piece of solid masonry and build it in elsewhere; here it seems as if, while the things said are of supreme importance, the order in which they are said matters nothing. This estimate of the Epistle has been

endorsed by those who are presumed to speak with authority. Its method has been deemed purely aphoristic; as if the aged apostle, pen in hand, had merely rambled on along an undefined path, bestrewing it at every step with priceless gems, the crystallizations of a whole lifetime of deep and loving meditation. The "infirmity of old age" (S. G. Lange) is detected in it; a certain "indefiniteness," a lack of "logical force," a "tone of childlike feebleness" (Baur); an "absolute indifference to a strictly logical and harmoniously ascending development of ideas" (Julicher). It is perhaps venturesome, therefore, to express the opinion that the more closely one studies the Epistle the more one discovers it to be, in its own unique way, one of the most closely articulated pieces of writing in the New Testament; and that the style, simple and unpremeditated as it is, is singularly artistic.

The almost unvarying simplicity<sup>1</sup> of syntactical structure, the absence of connecting, notably of illative, particles,<sup>2</sup> and, in short, the generally Hebraic type of composition have been frequently remarked upon; yet I am not sure that the closeness with which the style has been moulded upon the Hebraic model, especially upon the parallelistic forms of the Wisdom Literature, has been sufficiently recognised. One has only to read the Epistle with an attentive ear to perceive that, though using another language, the writer had in his own ear, all the time, the swing and the cadences of Old Testament verse. With the exception of the Prologue and a few other periodic passages, the majority of sentences divide naturally into two or three or four **stixoi**.

Two-membered sentences are common, both synthetic and antithetic, which are strongly reminiscent of the

<sup>1</sup> The writer's efforts in more complex constructions are not felicitous. Cf. e.g. 2<sup>27</sup> 5<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> **de** occurs with only one-third of its usual frequency; **men**, **te**, **ou#**, do not occur at all; **gar**, only thrice.

Hebrew distich. Examples of the synthetic variety are:

"He that loveth his brother abideth in the light,  
And there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (2<sup>10</sup>);

or,

"Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us:  
And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3<sup>16</sup>).

Of the antithetic, one may quote:

"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof:  
But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (2<sup>17</sup>);

or

"Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not:  
Whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him" (3<sup>6</sup>).

Commoner still are sentences of three members, which,  
in the same way, may be called tristichs; as:

"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" (1<sup>3</sup>);

or,

"Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you,  
But an old commandment which ye had from the beginning:  
The old commandment is the word which ye heard" (2<sup>7</sup>).

Resemblances to the tetrastich also are found:

"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world:  
And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.  
Who is he that overcometh the world,  
But he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God" (5<sup>4-5</sup>);

or

"Little children, it is the last hour:  
And as ye heard that Antichrist cometh,  
Even now have arisen many Antichrists ;  
Whereby we know that it is the last hour" (2<sup>18</sup>).<sup>1</sup>

The Epistle presents examples, also, of more elaborate  
combinations: as in 1<sup>6</sup>-2<sup>2</sup> where the alternating verses

<sup>1</sup> An instance of "introverted" parallelism, in which the first and fourth lines, and the second and third, answer to each other.

6. 8. 10 and 7. 9 2<sup>1</sup> are exquisitely balanced both in thought and expression<sup>1</sup>; and in 2<sup>12-14</sup>, where we have a double parallel tristich:

"I write . . . I write ... I write:  
I have written ... I have written . . . I have written."

The author's literary art achieves its finest effects in such passages as 2<sup>7-11</sup> and 2<sup>15-17</sup> (where one could fancy that he has unconsciously dropped into a strophic arrangement of lines), and in the closing verses of the Epistle (5<sup>18-21</sup>) consisting of alternating tristichs and distichs:

"We know that every one that is begotten of God sinneth not;  
But he that was begotten of God keepeth himself,  
And the Wicked One toucheth him not.

We know that we are of God,  
And the whole world lieth in the Wicked One.

We know that the Son of God is come,  
And hath given us an understanding to know the True One,  
And we are in the True One, in His Son Jesus Christ.

This is the True God, and Life Eternal;  
Little children, guard yourselves from idols."<sup>2</sup>

It is not suggested that there is in the Epistle a conscious imitation of Hebraic forms; but it is evident, I think, that no one could have written as our author does whose whole style of thought and expression had not been unconsciously formed upon Old Testament models.

<sup>1</sup> The structure is broken by the interjected address, "My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not." This being removed, the continuation of the parallelism is clear.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Expository Times* (June November 1897) there is an interesting series of articles by Professor Briggs on the presence of Hebrew poetical forms in the N.T. He does not touch on the Johannine writings; but his method, if applied to the Epistle, would yield results beyond what I have ventured to suggest.

But we pass to the more important topic, the structure of the Epistle. As has been already said, the impression left upon some, who cannot be supposed to have been cursory readers, is that the Epistle has no logical structure, exhibits no ordered progression of thought. And this estimate has a measure of support in the fact that there is no portion of Scripture regarding the plan of which there has been greater diversity of opinion. It is nevertheless erroneous.

The word that, to my mind, might best describe St. John's mode of thinking and writing in this Epistle is "spiral." The course of thought does not move from point to point in a straight line. It is like a winding staircase--always revolving around the same centre, always recurring to the same topics, but at a higher level. Or, to borrow a term from music, one might describe the method as contrapuntal. The Epistle works with a comparatively small number<sup>1</sup> of themes, which are introduced many times, and are brought into every possible relation to one another. As some master-builder of music takes two or three melodious phrases and, introducing them in due order, repeating them, inverting them, skilfully interlacing them in diverse modes and keys, rears up from them an edifice of stately harmonies; so the Apostle weaves together a few leading ideas into a majestic fugue in which unity of material and variety of tone and effect are wonderfully blended. And the clue to the structure of the Epistle will be found by tracing the introduction and reappearances of these leading themes.

These<sup>1</sup> are Righteousness, Love, and Belief. For here let me say at once that, in my view, the key to the interpretation of the Epistle is the fact that it is an

<sup>1</sup> The following list includes most, if not all, of the leading ideas found in the Epistle—God, True One, idols—rather, begotten of God, children of God,—Son of God, Word of Life, Christ come in the flesh, Jesus—Spirit, spirits—Anointing, teaching, witnessing—word, message, announcing--truth, lie, error—beholding,

apparatus of *tests*; that its definite object is to furnish its readers with an adequate set of criteria by which they may satisfy themselves of their being "begotten of God." "These things write I unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (5<sup>13</sup>) And throughout the Epistle these tests are definitely, inevitably, and inseparably—doing righteousness; loving one another; and believing that Jesus is the Christ, come in the flesh, sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. These are the connecting themes that bind together the whole structure of the Epistle. After the prologue, in fact, it consists of a threefold repetition and application of these three fundamental tests of the Christian life. In proof of this statement let us, in the first instance, examine those sections of the Epistle in which the sequence of thought is most clearly exhibited. The first of these is 2<sup>3-28</sup>, which divides itself naturally into three paragraphs, (A) 2<sup>3-6</sup>(B) 2<sup>7-17</sup> (C) 2<sup>18-28</sup>.

Here A (2<sup>3-6</sup>) obviously consists of a threefold statement, with significant variations, of the single idea, that righteousness ("keeping His commandments," "keeping His word," "walking, even as He walked") is the indispensable test of "knowing God" and "abiding in Him." In B (2<sup>7-17</sup>) the current of thought is interrupted by the parenthetical passage, 2<sup>12-14</sup>; but, this being omitted, it is apparent that here, also, we have a paragraph formed upon one principal idea--Love the test of the Christian Life, the test being applied positively in 2<sup>7-11</sup> (the "new commandment"), and negatively in 2<sup>15-17</sup> ("Love not the world"). In C (2<sup>13-25</sup>), again, the unity is obvious.

believing, knowing, confessing, denying—brotherhood, fellowship—righteousness, commandment, word of God, will of God, things that are pleasing in His sight--sin, lawlessness, unrighteousness—world, flesh, Antichrist, Devil—blood, water, propitiation, Paraclete, forgiveness, cleansing—abiding, passing away—Beginning, last hour—parousia, Day of Judgment, manifestation, hope—boldness, fear—asking, receiving—overcoming.

The theme of the paragraph is—the Christian life tested by Belief of the truth, of which the Anointing Spirit is the supreme Witness and Teacher, that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God.

If, next, we examine the part of the Epistle that extends from 2<sup>29</sup>—4<sup>6</sup>, we find precisely the same topics recurring *in precisely the same order*. We have again three paragraphs (A) 2<sup>29</sup>-3<sup>10a</sup>, (B) 3<sup>10b-24a</sup> and (C) 3<sup>24b</sup>-4<sup>6</sup>. And, again, it is evident that in A we have the test of Righteousness, in B the test of Love, and in C the test of Belief.

In the third great section of the Epistle (4<sup>7</sup>-5<sup>21</sup>) though the sequence of thought is somewhat different, the thought-material is identical; and for the present it is sufficient to point out that the leading themes, the tests of Love (4<sup>7-12</sup> and 4<sup>16b-21</sup>), Belief (4<sup>13-16a</sup> and 5<sup>5-12</sup>), and Righteousness (5<sup>18, 19</sup>) are all present, and that they alone are present.

We seem, then, to have found a natural division of the Epistle into three main sections, or, as they might be most descriptively called, "cycles," in each of which the same fundamental thoughts appear, in each of which the reader is summoned to bring his Christian life to the test of Righteousness, of Love, and of Belief. With this as a working hypothesis, I shall now endeavour to give an analysis of the contents of the Epistle.

Passing by the Prologue (1<sup>1-4</sup>), we have the

### FIRST CYCLE, 1<sup>5</sup>-2<sup>28</sup>

Walking in the Light tested by Righteousness, Love,  
and Belief

It begins with the announcement, which is the basis of the whole section, that "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1<sup>5</sup>). And, since what God is determines



the condition of fellowship with Him, this is set forth: first, negatively (1<sup>6</sup>)—"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness"; then positively (1<sup>7</sup>)—"If we walk in the Light as He is in the Light." What, then, is it to walk in the Light, and what to walk in darkness? The answer to these questions is given in all that follows, down to 2<sup>28</sup>.

PARAGRAPH A, <sup>(1)</sup> 1<sup>8</sup>-2<sup>6</sup>

*Walking in the Light tested by Righteousness:* first, in confession of sin (1<sup>3</sup>—2<sup>2</sup>); secondly, in actual obedience (2<sup>3-6</sup>).

The first fact upon which the Light of God impinges in human life is Sin; and the first test of walking in the Light is sincere recognition of the true nature, the guiltiness, of Sin (1<sup>8,9</sup>). Again, this test is applied negatively—"If we say that we have no sin," and positively—"If we confess our sins."

But, in the Light of God, not only is Sin, wherever present, recognised in its true character as guilt; it is revealed as universally present. Whence arises a second test of walking in the Light—"If we say that we, have not sinned, we make Him a liar," etc.

What follows is very significant. Obviously the writer had intended to continue—"If we confess that we have sinned, we have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous" (thus carrying forward the parallel series of antitheses: 1<sup>6,8,10</sup> = walking in darkness, 1<sup>7,9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid complexities in our preliminary survey, 2<sup>3</sup> was taken as the starting-point, the structure being more clearly marked from that point onward. But this first Cycle really includes the whole from 1<sup>5</sup>. The verses (1<sup>8-22</sup>) which deal with the confession and removal of sin and those (2<sup>3-6</sup>) which deal with conduct, are both included in the ethical guarantee of the Christian Life. That recognition of sin in the Light of God and that renunciation of it which are involved in its sincere confession are inseparable in experience from the "keeping of God's commandments" and "walking as Christ walked,"—are the back and the front, so to say, of the same moral attitude toward life.

and what would have been 1<sup>11</sup> = walking in the light). But before he writes this, his pen is arrested by the sudden fear that some might be so infatuated as to wrest these broad evangelical statements into a pretext for moral laxity. He therefore interposes the earnest caveat, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not"; then carries forward the train of thought in slightly different forms, "And if any man sin," etc. (2<sup>1, 2</sup>).

But if confession of sin is the test of walking in the Light, confession itself is to be tested by its fruits in new obedience. If impenitence, the "lie" of the conscience (1<sup>8</sup>), renders fellowship with God impossible, no less does disobedience, the "lie" of the life (2<sup>4</sup>). This is the purport of the verses that follow (2<sup>3-6</sup>). Christian profession is to be submitted to the test of Christian conduct; of which a threefold description is given—"keeping God's commandments" (2<sup>3</sup>); "keeping His word" (2<sup>5</sup>); and "walking even as He (Christ) walked" (2<sup>6</sup>). With this the first application of the test of Righteousness is completed.

PARAGRAPH B, 2<sup>7-17</sup>.

*Walking in the Light tested by Love.*

(A) Positively—the old-new commandment (2<sup>7-11</sup>).

This is linked on to the immediately preceding verses by the word "commandment." Love is the commandment which is "old," familiar to the Apostle's readers from their first acquaintance with the rudiments of Christianity (2<sup>7</sup>); but also "new," a commandment which is ever fresh and living to those who have fellowship with Christ in the True Light, which is now shining forth (2<sup>8</sup>). But from this follows necessarily, that "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness." The antithesis of 2<sup>8,9</sup> is then repeated, with variation and enrichment of thought,

in 2<sup>10,11</sup> (Then follow the parenthetical verses <sup>12-14</sup>, the motive for the insertion of which will be discussed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> These being treated as a parenthesis, the unity of the paragraph at once becomes apparent.)

(B) Negatively. The commandment to love is completed by the great "Love not" (2<sup>15-17</sup>) If walking in the light has its guarantee in loving one's "brother," it is tested no less by not loving the "world." One cannot at the same time participate in the life of God and in a moral life which is dominated by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of the world.

#### PARAGRAPH C, 2<sup>18-28</sup>

##### *Walking in the Light tested by Belief.*

The Light of God not only reveals Sin and Righteousness, the children of God (our "brother") and the "world" in their true character, so that, walking in that Light, men must confess Sin and follow after Righteousness, love their "brother" and not love the "world"; it also reveals Jesus in His true character as the Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. And all that calls itself Christianity is to be tested by its reception or its rejection of that truth. In this paragraph, it is true, the Light and the Darkness are not expressly referred to. But the continuity of thought with the preceding paragraphs is unmistakable. Throughout the whole of this first division of the Epistle the point of view is that of Fellowship with God, through receiving and walking in the Light which His self-revelation sheds upon all things in the spiritual realm. Unreal Christianity in every form is comprehensively a "lie." It may be the Antinomian lie of him who says "he has no sin" (1<sup>8</sup>), and, on the other hand, is indifferent to keeping God's commandments (2<sup>4</sup>); the lie of lovelessness (2<sup>9</sup>); or the lie of the Antichrist who,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XV.

claiming spiritual enlightenment, denies that Jesus is the Christ (2<sup>22</sup>). Every one who does this asserts what is untrue and impossible, if he say or suppose that, while thus walking in darkness, he has fellowship with God, who is Light. Minuter analysis of this paragraph is, for our present purpose, unnecessary.

SECOND CYCLE, 2<sup>29</sup>-4<sup>6</sup>.

*Divine Sonship tested by Righteousness, Love, and Belief.*

The first main division of the Epistle began with the assertion of what God is relatively to us--Light; and from this it deduced the condition of our fellowship with Him. The light of God's self-revelation in Christ becomes to us the light in which we behold ourselves, our sin, our duty, our brother, the world, the reality of the Incarnation; and only in acknowledging the "truth" thus revealed and loyally acting it out can we have fellowship with God. The point of view is ethical and psychological. This second division, on the other hand, begins with the assertion of what the Divine nature is in itself, and thence deduces the essential characteristics of those who are "begotten of God." Righteousness, Love, Confession of Christ are the proofs, because the results, of participation in the Divine nature; Sin, Hate, Denial of Christ, the proofs of non-participation. The point of view is, predominantly, biological. The key-word is "begotten of God."

PARAGRAPH A, 2<sup>29</sup>-3<sup>10a</sup>

*Divine Sonship tested by Righteousness.*

Here (2<sup>29</sup>) the idea of the Divine Begetting is introduced for the first time. And, as the first test applied to Fellowship in the Light was the attitude toward Sin and

Righteousness, so, likewise, it is the first applied to the life of Divine sonship. As the Light convicts of sin and at the same time reveals both the content and the absolute imperative of Righteousness, so the Divine Life begotten in man has a twofold action.<sup>1</sup> The identity of the human will with the Divine, which is the necessary result of the community of nature, reveals itself both in "doing righteousness" and in entire antagonism to sin. "If ye know that He is righteous, know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him." But here the writer is immediately arrested by the wonder and thanksgiving that fill and overflow his soul at the thought that sinful men should be brought into such a relation as this to God. "Behold what manner of love!" (3<sup>1a</sup>). This leads him further to contemplate, first, the present concealment of the glory of the children of God (3<sup>1b</sup>); then, the splendour of its future manifestation (3<sup>2</sup>); and, finally, the thought that the fulfilment of this hope is necessarily conditioned by present endeavour after moral likeness to Christ leads back to the main theme of the paragraph, that the life of Divine sonship is, by necessity of nature, one of absolute Righteousness, of truceless opposition to sin (3<sup>4-10a</sup>). This is now exhibited in a fourfold light: (1) in the light of what sin is, lawlessness (3<sup>4</sup>); (2) in the light of Christ—the purpose of all that is revealed in Christ is the removal and abolition of sin (3<sup>5-7</sup>); (3) in the light of the Divine origin of the Christian life—only that which is sinless can derive from God (3<sup>9-10a</sup>); (4) intertwined with these cardinal arguments there is a fourth, that all that is of the nature of sin comes from a source which is the antithesis of the Divine, and which is in active hostility to the work of Christ—the Devil (3<sup>8-10a</sup>). The last clause of the paragraph reverts to and logically completes the proposition with which it began. To the positive, "Every one that

<sup>1</sup> The parallelism is strikingly close. Cf. 3<sup>3</sup> with 2<sup>6</sup>, 3<sup>6a</sup> with 2<sup>5b</sup>, 3<sup>6b</sup> with 2<sup>4</sup>.

doeth righteousness is begotten of God " (2<sup>20</sup>), is added the negative," Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God" (3<sup>10b</sup>). The circle is completely drawn. The "begotten of God" include all who "do righteousness"; all who do not are excluded.

PARAGRAPH B, 3<sup>10b-24a</sup>

*Divine Sonship tested by Love.*

In structure, this paragraph is less regular; its contents are not so closely knit to the leading thought. But what this leading thought is, is clearly fixed at the beginning: "He that loveth not his brother is not begotten of God" (3<sup>10b</sup>). That brotherly love is the test of Divine sonship is the truth that dominates the whole. Instead, however, of developing this thought dialectically, the Apostle does so, in the first instance, pictorially; setting before us two figures, Cain and Christ, as the prototypes of Hate and Love. The contemplation of Cain and of the disposition out of which the first murder sprang (3<sup>12</sup>), suggests parenthetically an explanation of the World's hatred of the children of God (3<sup>13</sup>); but, chiefly, the truth that in loving our brethren we have a reliable guarantee that we have passed from death unto life (3<sup>14</sup>); while, on the other hand, whosoever hateth his brother is potentially a murderer and assuredly cannot have the Life of God abiding in him (3<sup>15</sup>). Next, in glorious contrast to the sinister figure of Cain, who sacrificed his brother's life to his morbid self-love, the Apostle sets before us the figure of Christ who sacrificed His own life in love to us, His brethren (3<sup>16a</sup>); and draws the inevitable inference that our life, if one with His, must obey the same spiritual law (3<sup>16b</sup>). In 3<sup>17</sup> this test is brought within the scope of everyday opportunity; and is followed (3<sup>18</sup>) by a fervent exhortation to love "not in

word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth." This introduces a restatement of the purport of the whole paragraph—that such Love is the test of all Divine sonship, and affords a valid and accessible ground of assurance before God, even should our own hearts condemn us (3<sup>19.20</sup>). In the remainder of the paragraph the subject of assurance and its relation to prayer is further dwelt upon (3<sup>21.22</sup>). And, finally, in setting forth the grounds upon which such assurance rests, the Apostle combines all the three cardinal tests—Righteousness ("keeping His commandments," 3<sup>22</sup>), Belief ("in the name of His Son Jesus Christ," 3<sup>23a</sup>), and Love (3<sup>23b</sup>). All these are, in fact, "commandments," and he that keepeth them abideth in God, and God in him (3<sup>21a</sup>).

PARAGRAPH C, 3<sup>24b</sup>-4<sup>6</sup>

*Divine Sonship tested by Belief.*

Here, again, the test to be applied is broadly and clearly indicated at the outset. "Hereby know we that He abideth in us, by the Spirit<sup>1</sup> which He hath given us." As in the corresponding paragraph 2<sup>13-28</sup>, so here also the argument is conducted in view of the concrete historical situation, upon the consideration of which we do not now enter. The essence of the paragraph lies in 4<sup>2.3b</sup> and 6<sup>b</sup>: "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of

<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to say here, although a fuller discussion will be given later, that, in the Epistle, the Spirit is regarded solely as the Spirit of Truth, whose function is to testify of Christ, to reveal the Divine glory of His Person, to inspire belief in Him, and to prompt confession of Him as the Incarnate Son of God. The "knowing" by "the Spirit which God hath given us" is not immediate but inferential. It does not proceed from any direct subjective testimony that "God abideth in us," but is an inference from the fact that God hath given us that Spirit without whom no man calleth Jesus Lord.

God." "By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

To recur to the general structure of the Epistle, it may be noted that we have found the first and second "cycles" corresponding exactly in subject-matter and in order of development. In 1<sup>5-26</sup> and in 2<sup>29</sup>-3<sup>10a</sup> the Christian life has been tested by its attitude to Sin and Righteousness, in 2<sup>7-17</sup> and in 3<sup>10b-24a</sup> by Love, and in 2<sup>18-28</sup> and 3<sup>24b-4<sup>6</sup></sup> by Belief.

### THIRD CYCLE, 4<sup>7</sup>-5<sup>21</sup>

#### *Inter-relations of Love, Belief, and Righteousness.*

In this closing section the Epistle rises to its loftiest heights; but the logical analysis of it is the hardest part of our task. The subject-matter is identical with that which has been already twice used, not a single new idea being introduced except that of the "sin unto death." But the order and proportion of treatment are different; the test of Righteousness takes here a subordinate place (5<sup>2.3</sup> 5<sup>18</sup>); and the whole "Cycle" may be broadly divided into two sections, the first, 4<sup>7</sup>-5<sup>3a</sup>, in which the dominant theme is Love (with, however, the Christological passage 4<sup>13-15</sup> embedded in it); the second, 5<sup>3b-21</sup>, in which it is Belief. The same practical purpose is still steadfastly adhered to as in the preceding "Cycles"—the application of the three great tests to everything that calls itself Christian. But here an additional aim is, I think, partly discernible, namely, to bring out the necessary connections and inter-relations of Righteousness, Love, and Belief. Hitherto the writer has been content to exhibit these simply as collateral elements in the Christian life, each and all indispensable to its genuineness. He has made no serious effort to show why these three elements must coalesce in the unity of life,—why the Life of which one



manifestation is Belief in the Incarnation must also manifest itself in keeping God's commandments and loving one another. Here, however, as he traverses the same ground for the third time, he does seem to be feeling after a closer articulation. Thus in 4<sup>9-16</sup> the inner connection between Belief and Love is strongly suggested; in 5<sup>2.3a</sup> we find the synthesis of Love and Righteousness; and in 5<sup>3b-5</sup>, the synthesis of Righteousness and Belief. Without asserting that the writer's conscious purpose in this third handling of his material was to exhibit these interdependencies, it may be said that in this consists its distinctive feature.

### SECTION I. 4<sup>7</sup>-5<sup>3a</sup>.

#### LOVE.

#### PARAGRAPH A, 4<sup>7-13</sup>

##### *The genesis of Love.*

Christian Love is deduced from its Divine source. Regarding Love, the same declaration, precisely and verbally, is now made as was formerly made regarding Righteousness (2<sup>29</sup>). "God is Love"; and every one that loveth is begotten of God (4<sup>7</sup> and, negatively, 4<sup>8</sup>). But here, feeling his way to a correlation of Love and Belief, St. John advances to the further statement, that the mission of Christ alone is the perfect revelation of the fact that the nature of God is Love (4<sup>9</sup>); nay, that it furnishes the one absolute revelation of the nature of Love itself (4<sup>10</sup>). From this follows the inevitable consequence, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (4<sup>11</sup>); and the assurance that, if we love one another, the invisible God abideth in us; His nature is incorporate with ours; His Love is fulfilled in us (4<sup>12</sup>).

PARAGRAPH B, 4<sup>10-16</sup>*The synthesis of Love and Belief.*

As in 2<sup>20-28</sup> and 3<sup>24b-4<sup>6</sup></sup>, the gift of the Spirit, by whom confession is made of Jesus as the Son of God, is cited as proof that God abideth in us and we in Him (4<sup>13-15</sup>), and seems to be merely collateral with the proof already adduced from "loving one another" (4<sup>12</sup>). But it becomes evident, on closer examination, that the two paragraphs (4<sup>7-12</sup> and 4<sup>13-16</sup>) stand in some more intimate relation than this. We observe the parallel statements, "If we love one another, God abideth in us" (4<sup>12</sup>); then, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him and he in God" (4<sup>15</sup>); then a second time, "He that abideth in love abideth in God, and God in him" (4<sup>16</sup>). We observe, further, that the confession of Jesus as the Son of God (4<sup>16</sup>) is paralleled by the statement that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (4<sup>14</sup>), which points back to that revelation of God as Love (4<sup>9, 10</sup>) in which the moral obligation and spiritual necessity of loving one another have been already disclosed (4<sup>11</sup>). And we observe, finally, that the confession of Jesus as the Son of God, sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world (4<sup>14, 15</sup>), is personally appropriated in this, "We know and have believed the Love which God hath toward us," followed by the reiterated "God is Love; and he that abideth in Love abideth in God, and God in him" (4<sup>16</sup>). Thus closely observing the structure of the passage, we cannot doubt that the writer is labouring to express the truth that Christian Belief and Christian Love are not merely concomitant, but vitally one. Yet, what the interrelation of the two is in the Apostle's mind; which, if either, is anterior and instrumental to the other; whether we are begotten through the medium of spiritual perception into love, or through the medium of

love into spiritual perception, it would be hazardous to say.

PARAGRAPH C, 4<sup>17</sup>-5<sup>3a</sup>

*The effects, motives, and manifestations of Love.*

1. The effect of Love is assurance toward God (4<sup>17. 18</sup>). It is a notable example of the symmetry with which the Epistle is constructed that the sequence of thought here is minutely the same as in 3<sup>19. 20</sup>. Here, as there, Love has, as its immediate result, confidence toward God; and with precisely the same condition, that Love be in "deed and in truth" (cf. 3<sup>18. 19</sup> with 4<sup>20</sup>)

2. The motives to brotherly Love: These are God's love to us (4<sup>19</sup>), the only possible response to which is to love one's brother (4<sup>20</sup>); the express commandment of Christ (4<sup>21</sup>); and the instincts of spiritual kinship (5<sup>1</sup>).<sup>1</sup>

3. The synthesis of Love and Righteousness.

This is exhibited in a two-fold light. True love to man is righteous, and is possible only to those who love God and keep His commandments (5<sup>2</sup>). True love to God consists in keeping His commandments (5<sup>3a</sup>).

SECTION II. 5<sup>3b-21</sup>

BELIEF.

PARAGRAPH A, 5<sup>3b-12</sup>

*The power, contents, basis, and issue of Christian Belief*

It may seem sufficiently arbitrary to make the clause "And His commandments are not grievous" the point of

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this portion of the Epistle, each thought is so closely interlocked, as well with what precedes as with what follows, that it is impossible to divide it at any point which shall not seem more or less arbitrary. I have made 5<sup>2</sup> the beginning of a subsection; but obviously it is also the requisite complement to 5<sup>1</sup>. There, loving "him that is begotten" is the sign and test of loving "Him that begat"; here, conversely, loving God and "keeping His commandments" is the sign and test of "loving the children of God."

departure for a new paragraph. But so closely is the texture of thought woven in these verses, that the same objection would apply equally to any other line of division. There is, however, an obvious transition in 5<sup>3-5</sup> from the topic of Love to that of Belief; and it seems most suitable to regard the transition as effected at this point, "This is the Love of God, that we keep His commandments," is St. John's last word concerning Love. All that is now to be said has as its subject, more or less directly, Belief. And, while the clause "and His commandments are not grievous" is intimately linked on to the first half of the verse by the common topic "commandments," it introduces an entirely new train of thought.

1. The synthesis of Belief and Righteousness (5<sup>3b. 4</sup>)  
 God's commandments are not burdensome to the believer. That which would make them burdensome, the power of the world, is overcome by the victorious divine power given to every one who is "begotten of God"; and the medium through which the victorious power is imparted is our Christian Belief,

2. The substance of Christian Belief is that "Jesus is the Son of God, even He that came by water and by blood" (5<sup>5. 6</sup>)

3. Next, the basis on which it rests is: the witness of the Spirit (5<sup>7</sup>); the coincident witness of the Spirit, the water and the blood (5<sup>8</sup>); which is the witness of God Himself (5<sup>9</sup>); and which, when received, becomes an inward and immediate assurance, a self-evidencing certitude (5<sup>10a</sup>). On the other hand, to reject this witness is to make God a liar (5<sup>10b</sup>)

4. The issue of Christian Belief. The witness of God to His Son Jesus Christ is fundamentally this, that He is the source of paternal Life to men (5<sup>17</sup>). This Life is the present possession of all who spiritually possess Him and to be without Him is to be destitute of it (5<sup>12</sup>).

The end of the paragraph thus answers sublimely to its beginning. That which has eternal life in it (5<sup>12</sup>) must conquer, and alone can conquer, the world, whose life is bound up with transitory aims and objects. Because it makes the truth that "he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" a living power, faith wins its everlasting victory over the world which "passeth away with the lust thereof."

PARAGRAPH B, 5<sup>13-21</sup>

*The conscious certainties of Christian Belief.*

1. Its certainty of Eternal Life. To promote this in all who believe in the name of the Son of God is the Apostle's purpose in writing this Epistle (5<sup>13</sup>).

2. Its certainty regarding Prayer (5<sup>14-17</sup>) If we ask anything according to God's Will, He heareth us" (5<sup>14</sup>); and, consequently, we have these things for which we have made petition (5<sup>15</sup>). An example of the things which we may ask with assurance is "life" for a brother who sins "a sin not unto death" (5<sup>16a</sup>); and an example of the things regarding which we may not pray with such confidence is the restoration of a brother who has committed sin unto death (5<sup>16b</sup>). To this is appended a statement regarding the nature and effect of sin (5<sup>17</sup>).

3. The certainty regarding the regenerate Life, that Righteousness is its indefeasible characteristic, that it is a life of uncompromising antagonism to all sin (5<sup>18</sup>).

4. The certainty as to the profound moral contrast between the Christian life and the life of the world (5<sup>19</sup>)

5. The certainty of Christian Belief as to the facts upon which it rests, and the supernatural power which has quickened it to perception of those facts (5<sup>20a</sup>)

Then with a final reiteration of the whole purport of the Epistle, "This is the true God and Eternal Life" (5<sup>20b</sup>), and an abrupt and sternly affectionate call to all believers

to beware of yielding the homage of their trust and dependence to the vain shadows which are ever apt to usurp the place of the True God, the Epistle ends, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (5<sup>21</sup>).

### SYNOPSIS.

THE PROLOGUE, 1<sup>1-4</sup>.

FIRST CYCLE, 1<sup>5</sup>-2<sup>28</sup>

THE CHRISTLAN LIFE, AS FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, CONDITIONED  
AND TESTED BY WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

1<sup>5</sup>. The fundamental announcement. "God is Light."

PARAGRAPH A, 1<sup>6</sup>-2<sup>6</sup>

1<sup>6-7</sup>. General statement of the condition of fellowship with God, Who is Light.

1<sup>8</sup>-2<sup>6</sup>. Walking- in the Light tested by the altitude to Sin and Righteousness.

*To walk in the Darkness.*

**a.** To deny sin as guilt, 1<sup>8</sup>.

**b.** To deny sin as fact, 1<sup>10</sup>.

**g.** To say that we know God and not keep His commandments, 2<sup>4</sup>.

**d.** Not to walk as Christ walked, 2<sup>6</sup>.

*To walk in the Light.*

**a.** To confess sin as guilt, 1<sup>9</sup>.

**b.** To confess sin as fact, 2<sup>1,2</sup>.

**g.** To keep His commandments, 2<sup>3</sup>.

**d.** To keep His word, 2<sup>5</sup>.

**e.** To walk as Christ walked. 2<sup>6</sup>.

PARAGRAPH B, 2<sup>7-17</sup>.

*Walking in the Light tested by Love.*

(a) By love of one's brother (vv. 7-11)

[Parenthetic address to the readers (vv. 12-14).]

(b) By not loving the World

PARAGRAPH C, 218-28

*Walking in the Light tested by Belief*

2<sup>18</sup>. Rise of the antichrists.

2<sup>19</sup>. Their relation to the Church.

2<sup>20,21</sup>. The source and guarantee of the true Belief.

2<sup>22,23</sup>. The crucial test of Truth and Error.

2<sup>24, 25</sup>. Exhortation to steadfastness.

2<sup>23-27</sup>. Reiterated statement of the source and guarantee of the true Belief.

2<sup>28</sup>. Repeated exhortation to steadfastness.

SECOND CYCLE, 2<sup>29</sup>-4<sup>6</sup>  
 THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, AS THAT OF DIVINE SONSHIP, APPROVED  
 BY THE SAME TESTS.

PARAGRAPH A, 2<sup>29</sup>-3<sup>10</sup>.  
*Divine Sonship tested by Righteousness.*

- 2<sup>29</sup>. This test inevitable.  
 3<sup>1-3</sup>. The present status and the future manifestation of the children of God: the possession of this hope conditioned by assimilation to the purity of Christ.  
 3<sup>4-10a</sup>. The absolute contrariety of the life of Divine Sonship to all sin.  
**a.** In the light of the moral authority of God (v.<sup>4</sup>).  
**b.** In the light of Christ's character and of the purpose of His mission (vv.<sup>5-7</sup>).  
**g.** In the light of the origin of Sin (v.<sup>8</sup>).  
**d.** In the light of its own Divine source (v.<sup>9</sup>).  
**e.** In the light of fundamental moral contrasts (v.<sup>10a</sup>)

PARAGRAPH B, 3<sup>10b-24a</sup>  
*Divine Sonship tested by Love.*

- 3<sup>10. 11</sup> This test inevitable.  
 3<sup>12</sup>. Cain the prototype of Hate.  
 3<sup>13</sup>. Cain's spirit reproduced in the World.  
 3<sup>14a</sup>. Love, the sign of having passed from Death unto Life.  
 3<sup>14b.15</sup> The absence of it, the sign of abiding in Death.  
 3<sup>16</sup> Christ the prototype of Love; the obligation thus laid upon us.  
 3<sup>17.18</sup> Genuine Love consists not in words but in deeds.  
 3<sup>19-22</sup>. The confidence toward God resulting from such Love, especially in Prayer.  
 3<sup>23.24b</sup> Recapitulatory; combining, under the category of His "commandment," Love and also belief on His Son Jesus Christ. Thus a transition is effected to Paragraph C.

PARAGRAPH C, 3<sup>24b</sup>-4<sup>6</sup>.  
*Divine Sonship tested by Belief.*

- 3<sup>24b</sup>. This test inevitable.  
 4<sup>1</sup>. Exhortation in view of the actual situation.  
 4<sup>2</sup>. The true Confession of Faith.  
 4<sup>4-6</sup>. The relation thereto of the Church and the World.

THIRD CYCLE, 4<sup>7</sup>-5<sup>21</sup>  
 CLOSER CORRELATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, LOVE AND BELIEF

SECTION I. 4<sup>7</sup>-5<sup>3a</sup>

LOVE.

PARAGRAPH A, 4<sup>7-12</sup>.

*The genesis of Love.*

- 4<sup>7.8</sup>. Love indispensable, because God is Love.
- 4<sup>9</sup>. The mission of Christ the proof that God is Love.
- 4<sup>10</sup>. The mission of Christ the absolute revelation of what Love is.
- 4<sup>11</sup>. The obligation thus imposed upon us.
- 4<sup>12</sup>. The assurance given in its fulfilment.

PARAGRAPH 4<sup>13-16</sup>

*The synthesis of Belief and Love.*

- 4<sup>13</sup>. The True Belief indispensable as a guarantee of Christian Life, because the Spirit of God is its author.
- 4<sup>14.15</sup>. The content of the true Belief, " Jesus is the Son of God."
- 4<sup>16</sup>. In this is found the vital ground of Christian Love.

PARAGRAPH C, 4<sup>15</sup>-5<sup>3a</sup>

*The effect, motives, and manifestations of love.*

- 4<sup>17.18</sup>. The effect, confidence toward God.
  - 4<sup>19</sup>-5<sup>1</sup>. The motives to Love: (1) God's love to us; (2) the only possible response to which if to love our brother; (3) Christ's commandment; (4) the instincts of spiritual kinship.
- 52-3a. The synthesis of Love and Righteousness.

SECTION II. 53b-21.

BELIEF.

PARAGRAPH A, 5<sup>3b-12</sup>.

*The power, contents, basis, and issue of Christian Belief.*

- 5<sup>3b.4</sup>. The synthesis of Belief and Righteousness. In Belief lies the power of obedience.
- 5<sup>5.6</sup>. The contents of Christian Belief.
- 5<sup>7-10</sup>. The evidence upon which it rests.
- 5<sup>11.12</sup>. Its issue, the possession of Eternal Life.



PARAGRAPH B, 5<sup>13-21</sup>  
*The certainties of Christian Belief*

- 5<sup>13</sup>. Its certainty of Eternal Life.
- 5<sup>14.15</sup>. Of prevailing in Prayer.
- 5<sup>16</sup>. Instance in which such certainty fails.
- 5<sup>17</sup>. Appended statement regarding Sin.
- 5<sup>18</sup>. Of Righteousness, as the essential characteristic of the Christian Life.
- 5<sup>19</sup>. Of the moral gulf between the Christian Life and the life of the World.
- 5<sup>20</sup>. Of itself, the facts on which it rests, and the supernatural power which has given perception of these facts.
- 5<sup>21</sup>. Final exhortation.

Note.—After this chapter was completely written, there came into my hands an article by Theodor Haring in the *Theologische Abhandlungen Carl von Weizsäcker gewidmet* (Freiburg, 1892). I am gratified to find that in this article, which is of great value, the analysis of the Epistle is on precisely the same lines as that which I have submitted. The only difference worth noting is that Haring, by combining Righteousness and Love, finds in each "cycle" only two leading tests, which he calls the "ethical" and the "Christological." This gives a more logical division; but I am still of opinion that my own is more faithful to the thought of the Epistle, in which the comprehension of Righteousness and Love under any such general conception as "ethical" is not achieved.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE POLEMICAL AIM OF THE EPISTLE.

ALTHOUGH explicit controversial allusions in the Epistle are few, — are limited, indeed, to two passages (2<sup>18. 19</sup> 4<sup>1-6</sup>) in which certain false teachers, designated as "anti-christs," are unsparingly denounced,—there is no New Testament writing which is more vigorously polemical in its whole tone and aim. The truth, which in the same writer's Gospel shines as the dayspring from on high, becomes here a searchlight, flashed into a background of darkness.

But, though the polemical intention of the Epistle has been universally recognised, there has been wide diversity of opinion as to its actual object. By the older commentators generally, it was found in the perilous state of the Church, or Churches, addressed. They had left their "first love"; they had lapsed into Laodicean lukewarmness and worldliness, so that for them the sense of the absolute distinction between the Christian and the unchristian in life and belief had become blurred and feeble. And it was to arouse them from this lethargy—to sharpen the dulness of their spiritual perceptions — that the Epistle was written. But not only does the Epistle nowhere give any sign of such an intention; it contains many passages which are inconsistent with it (2<sup>13. 14. 20. 21. 27</sup> 4<sup>4</sup> 5<sup>18-20</sup>)

Unmistakably its polemic is directed not against such evils as may at any time, and more or less always do,

beset the life of the Church from within, but against a definite danger threatening it from without. There is a "spirit of error" (4<sup>6</sup>) abroad in the world. From the Church itself (2<sup>19</sup>) many false prophets (4<sup>1</sup>) have gone forth, corrupters of the gospel, "antichrists" who would deceive the very elect. And, not to spend time in statement and refutation of other views, it may be asserted as beyond question that the peril against which the Epistle was intended to arm the Church was the spreading influence of Gnosticism, and, specifically, of a form of Gnosticism that was Docetic in doctrine and Antinomian in practice. A very brief sketch of the essential features of Gnosticism will suffice to show not only that these are clearly reflected in the more explicitly controversial utterances of the Epistle, but that the influence of an anti-Gnostic polemic is traceable in almost every sentence.

Of the forces with which Christianity had to do battle for its career as the universal religion—Jewish legalism, pagan superstition, Greek speculation, Roman imperialism—none, perhaps, placed it in sharper hazard than Gnosticism, that strange, obscure movement, partly intellectual, partly fanatical, which, in the second century, spread with the swiftness of an epidemic over the Church from Syria to Gaul. The rise and spread of Gnosticism forms one of the dimmest chapters in Church history; and no attempt need be or can be made here to elucidate its obscurities or unravel its intricacies. But one fact is clear, Gnosticism was not, in the proper sense, a "heresy." Although it became a corrupting influence within the Church, it was an alien by birth. While the Church yet sojourned within the pale of Judaism, it enjoyed immunity from this plague; but, soon as it broke through these narrow bounds, it found itself in a world where the decaying religions and philosophies of the West were in acute fermentation under the influence of a new and powerful leaven from the East; while

the infusion of Christianity itself into this fermenting mass only added to the bewildering multiplicity of Gnostic sects and systems it brought forth.

That this was the true genesis of Gnosticism,—that it was the result of an irruption of Oriental religious beliefs into the Graeco-Roman world,—and that, consequently, it sought to unite in itself two diverse strains, Western intellectualism and Eastern mysticism, is generally admitted. Different views are held, however, as to which of these is to be regarded as the stock upon which the other was grafted. It has been the fashion with Church historians of the liberal school to glorify Gnosticism by giving chief prominence to its philosophical aspect. Oriental elements it admittedly contained, but these, in its most influential representatives at least, had been thoroughly permeated with the Hellenic spirit. In its historical result it was the "acute Hellenising" of Christianity. The great Gnostics were the first Christian philosophers; and Gnosticism is to be regarded as, upon the whole, a progressive force. More recent investigations and a more concrete study<sup>1</sup> of the subject have tended to discredit this estimate. Naturally, Gnosticism had to make some kind of terms with Hellenic culture, as Christianity itself had to do, in order to win a footing on which it could appeal to those who sought after "wisdom"; but by much the prepotent strain in this singular hybrid was Oriental Dualism. Many of the Gnostic sects were characterised chiefly by a wild, fanatical, and sometimes obscene cultus; and even in those which, like the Valentinian, made the most ambitious attempts to evolve a philosophy of the universe, Dualism was still the fundamental and formative principle. It is far truer to call Gnosticism a reactionary than a progressive force, and its most eminent leaders the last upholders of a lost cause, rather than the advance-

<sup>1</sup> v. Bousset's *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, pp. 1-9.

guard of intellectual progress.<sup>1</sup> But Dualism no less than Monotheism or Pantheism has its philosophy, its reading of the riddle of existence; and it is clear that it was by reason of its speculative pretensions that Gnosticism acquired its influence in the Church. The name by which the system came to be designated, the Gnosis, indicates a claim to a higher esoteric knowledge<sup>2</sup> of Divine things, and a tendency to reckon this the summit of spritual attainment; a claim and tendency which St. Paul, as early as his First Epistle to the Corinthians, finds occasion to meet with stern resistance (I Cor. I<sup>19</sup>-2<sup>5</sup> 8<sup>1</sup> 13<sup>2</sup>), as engendering arrogance and unbrotherly contempt for the less enlightened (8<sup>1</sup>. 7-11) This Epistle, it is true, exhibits no trace of anything that can be distinctively called Gnosticism; but it does reveal into how congenial a soil the seeds of Gnosticism were about to fall. In the Epistle to the Colossians we find that the sower has been at work; in the Pastoral and other later Epistles, that the crop is already ripening. The innate pride and selfishness of the system became more and more apparent as it took more definite form (I Tim. 6<sup>3-5</sup>, 2 Tim. 3<sup>2-5</sup>). Those who possessed the higher knowledge were distinguished from those who were incapable of its possession, as a superior order, almost a higher species, of believers. The latter were the unspiritual men, **yuxikoi; pneuma mh-entej.**<sup>3</sup> The highest Christian attainment was that of intellectual or mystic contemplation. To "know the depths"<sup>4</sup> was esteemed not only above the commonplace facts and moralities of the gospel, but above love, virtue, and practical holiness. When this, the general and most pronounced

<sup>1</sup> Bousset, *ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> It is maintained, however, by Bousset (p. 277) that the name Gnosis primarily signified, not so much a higher intellectual knowledge, as initiation into the secret and sacramental mysteries of the Gnostic sects.

<sup>3</sup> Jude 19, where the epithet is retorted upon those who used it.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. 2<sup>24</sup>. Cf. Hippolytus, *Ref. Haer.* v. vi. i.

feature of Gnosticism, is borne in mind, a vivid light is at once shed upon many passages in the Epistle. In those, especially, in which we find the formula "he that saith" (**o|| egwn**); or an equivalent (**eh̄n eīwmen, eh̄n tij eīp̄**), it becomes apparent that it is no abstract contingency the writer has in view, but a definitely recognised case. Thus in 2<sup>4-6.9</sup> we have what may be supposed to be almost verbal quotations of current forms of Gnostic profession (he that saith), "I know Him,"<sup>1</sup> "I abide in Him," "I am in the light";<sup>2</sup> and in each case the claim, unsupported by its requisite moral guarantee, is underlined with the writer's "roughest and blackest pencil-mark" as the statement of a liar. When we observe, moreover, the prominence which the Epistle gives throughout to the idea of knowledge, and the special significance of several of the passages in which it occurs, the conviction grows that one of the purposes chiefly aimed at is not only to refute the arrogant claims of Gnosticism, but to exhibit Apostolic Christianity, believed and lived, as the true Gnosis,—the Divine reality of which Gnosticism was but the fantastic caricature—the truth of experience to which it was the corresponding "lie" (2<sup>4.22</sup> 4<sup>20</sup>). The confidence he has concerning those to whom he is writing is that they "know Him who is from the beginning," and that they "know the Father" (2<sup>13</sup>). The final note of exulting assurance upon which the Epistle closes, is that "we know the True One, and we are in the True One" (5<sup>20</sup>). This, the knowledge of the ultimate Reality, the Being who is the Eternal Life, is, for Christian and Gnostic alike, the goal of aspiration. But, against the Gnostic conception of this as to be attained exclusively by flights of intellectual speculation or mystic contemplation, the Apostle labours, with the whole force of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Clementine Recognitions*, "Qui Deum se nosse profitentur." Holtzmann, *J. P. T.*, 1882, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> To be of the "seed of the light" appears to have been a popular form of Gnostic pretension. Holtzmann, *ibid.* p. 323.

his spirit, to maintain that it is to be reached only by the lowlier path of obedience and brotherly love; and that by these, conversely, its reality must ever be attested. To speak of having the knowledge of God without keeping His commandments (2<sup>4</sup>) is self-contradiction. If God is righteous, then nothing more certain than that "Every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him" (2<sup>20</sup>), and that "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God" (3<sup>10</sup>). "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him" (3<sup>6</sup>).

Still more strenuously, if that were possible, does the Apostle insist upon brotherly love as at once the condition and the test of the true knowledge of God. In Gnosticism knowledge was the sum of attainment, the crown of life, the supreme end in itself. The system was loveless to the core. St. Paul saw this with a prophet's eye (1 Cor. 8<sup>1</sup> 13<sup>2</sup>), and the contemporary witnesses bear testimony that it bore abundantly its natural fruit. "Lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, untruthful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers" (2 Tim. 3<sup>2,3</sup>), are the typical representatives of the Gnostic character as it is portrayed in the later writings of the New Testament. "They give no heed to love," says Ignatius,<sup>1</sup> "caring not for the widow, the orphan, or the afflicted, neither for those who are in bonds nor for those who are released from bonds, neither for the hungry nor the thirsty."

That a religion which destroyed and banished love should call itself Christian, or claim affinity with Christianity, excites the Apostle's hottest indignation. To him it is the real atheism. Against it he lifts up his supreme truth, God is Love, with its immediate consequence, that

<sup>1</sup> **peri>agaphj ou>mel ei au>toj, ou>peri>xhraj, ou>peri>of anou, ou>peri>ql ibomenou, ou>peri>dedemenou h>| el umenou, ou>peri>peinwntoj h>|diywntoj.** *Ad Smyrn.* 6. 2.

to be without love is the fatal incapacity for knowing God. "Every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God" (4<sup>7</sup>); but, "He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is Love" (4<sup>8</sup>). Spiritual illumination, apart from the practice of love, is the vaunt of a self-deceiver (2<sup>9</sup>). The assumption of a lofty, mystical piety, apart from dutiful conduct in the ordinary relations of life, is ruthlessly dealt with. "If any man say, I love God" (we can almost hear the voice of the self-complacent "spiritual") "and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" All these and numerous other passages (2<sup>7</sup>. 8. 10. 11 3<sup>10b</sup>. 11. 14. 17-19. 23b 4<sup>11</sup>. 12. 17. 18. 19. 21 5<sup>1b</sup>) receive fresh point when read in view of the unbrotherly aloofness inherent in Gnosticism. And, in general, it may be said that the uniquely reiterated emphasis which the Epistle lays upon brotherly love, the almost fierce tone in which the New Commandment is promulgated, is not adequately accounted for by any idiosyncrasy of the writer, on the supposition that he is writing in the abstract, but becomes vividly intelligible as the expression of a truly godlike wrath against actual tendencies that were powerfully assailing the life and fellowship of the Church.

But if Gnosticism was distinguished by this unethical intellectualism, its deeper characteristic lay in its dualistic conception of existence. Epiphanius tells us that Basilides began with the inquiry, **poqen to kakon** (*Haer.* 24. 6); Clement, that he ended by "deifying the devil" (**qei azwn nen ton diabolon**, *Strom.* iv. 12, 87). This may be taken as a compendious account of Dualism. It traces back into the eternal the schism of which we are conscious in the world of experience, and posits two independent and antagonistic principles of existence, from which, severally, come all the good and all the evil that exist.



It is true that in those Gnostic systems which were most strongly touched by Hellenic influence, the fundamental dualism was disguised by complicated successions of emanations and hierarchies of moons and archons, bridging the gulf between absolute transcendent Deity and the material creation. These cosmogonies were broadly analogous to the materialistic theory of evolution; except that, while modern evolution is from matter upward to "whatever gods there be," Gnostic evolution was from divinity downwards. Invariably, however, the source and the seat of evil were found in matter, in the body, with its senses and appetites, and in its sensuous earthly environment; and invariably it was held inconceivable that the Divine Nature should have immediate contact with, or influence upon, the material side of existence.

To such a view of the universe Christianity could be adjusted only by a Docetic interpretation of the Person of Christ. A veritable incarnation was unthinkable. The Divine Being could enter into no real union with a corporeal organism. The Human Nature of Christ and the incidents of His earthly career were, more or less, an illusion. It is with this Docetic subversion of the truth of the Incarnation that the "antichrists" are specially identified in the Epistle (2<sup>22.23</sup> 4<sup>3</sup>); and it is against it that St. John directs, with whole-souled force and fervour, his central thesis—the complete personal identification of the historical Jesus with the Divine Being who is the "Word of Life," the "Son of God," the "Christ."<sup>1</sup>

A further consequence of the dualistic interpretation of existence is that Sin, in the Christian meaning of Sin, disappears. In its essence, it is no longer a moral opposition, in the human personality, to good; it is a physical principle inherent in all non-spiritual being. Not

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters VI, and VIII.

the soul, but the flesh is its organ; and Redemption consists not in the renewal of the moral nature, but in its emancipation from the flesh. And, again, it becomes apparent that no abstract possibility, but a very definite historical phenomenon, is contemplated in the repeated warning, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1<sup>8.10</sup>).

With the nobler and more earnest spirits, the practical consequence of this irreconcilable dualism in human nature was the ascetic life. Only by the mortification of the bodily members and the suppression of natural appetite could the deliverance of the soul from its life-long foe be achieved. A rigid asceticism is ascribed to various Gnostic sects (Encratites, the followers of Saturninus, etc.), and has left distinct traces in the Epistle to the Colossians (2<sup>21</sup>) and in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 4<sup>3</sup>). But the same principle readily suggested an opposite method of achieving the soul's deliverance from the yoke of the material. Let the dualism of nature be boldly reduced to practice. Let body and spirit be treated as separate entities; let each obey its own laws and act according to its own nature, without mutual interference.<sup>1</sup> The spiritual nature could not be involved in nor defiled by the deeds of the flesh; and the power of external things was most effectually overcome when they were not allowed to disturb in anywise the tranquility of the inner man. Let the flesh indulge every lust, but let the soul soar on the wings of lofty spiritual thought, no more hindered or harassed by the body and its appetites than is the skimming swallow by the barking dog that chases it. It is evident, from various references in the later New Testament writings (Tit. 1<sup>10.16</sup>, 2 Tim. 3<sup>1-7</sup>, 2 Pet. 2<sup>12-22</sup>, Jude 4.<sup>7-19</sup>, Rev. 2<sup>14.15.20</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> This was **to a diaforwj zhñ**. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* iii. 5. 40.

that Gnosticism, from its earliest contact with Christianity, began to infect the Church with this leaven of all abominableness. And for the interpretation of our Epistle this Antinomian development of Gnosticism is of special importance. While there are no direct allusions to it, as there are in Second Peter and Jude, it is ever present to the writer's mind when he is on the ground of ethics. The moral indifferentism of the Gnostic sheds a vivid light upon such utterances as "sin is lawlessness" (3<sup>4</sup>), and its converse, "every unrighteousness is sin" (5<sup>17</sup>). Especially is it the key, as we shall find, to that difficult passage 2<sup>29</sup>-3<sup>10</sup>, the whole emphasis of which falls upon the "doing" (**poiein**), whether of righteousness or of sin. Every one that "doeth righteousness" is begotten of God (2<sup>29</sup>). He that "doeth sin" "doeth also lawlessness" (3<sup>4</sup>). He that "doeth righteousness" is righteous (3<sup>7</sup>). He that "doeth sin" is of the Devil (3<sup>8</sup>). Every one that is begotten of God "doeth not" sin (3<sup>9</sup>), and every one that "doeth not" righteousness is not of God. Clearly, in all this trenchant reiteration of the same thought, St. John is not actuated merely by the consideration of the perpetual tendency in men to substitute profession, sentiment and vague aspiration for actual doing of the Will of God. The writer expressly indicates, indeed, a more definite object of attack (3<sup>7</sup>); and the whole passage presupposes, as familiar to its readers, a doctrine of moral indifferentism, according to which the status of the "spiritual" man is not to be tested by the commonplace facts of moral conduct.

The detailed examination of this and kindred passages must be deferred to a later stage.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the present chapter has been served if it has furnished a general view of the polemical scope of the Epistle, and if it has been shown that in it all the

<sup>1</sup> Chapter XI.

authentic features of Gnosticism, its false estimate of knowledge, its loveless and unbrotherly spirit, its Docetic Christology, its exaltation of the illuminated above moral obligations, are clearly reflected. It is true that the whole presentation of truth in the Epistle widely overflows the limits of the controversial occasion. On the one hand, the human tendencies that manifested themselves in Gnosticism are not of any one period or place. The Gnostic spirit and temper are never dead. On the other hand, St. John so little meets these with mere denunciation;<sup>1</sup> he so constantly opposes to the pernicious plausibilities of error the simple, sublime, and satisfying facts and principles of the Christian Revelation; he so lifts every question at issue out of the dust of mere polemics into the lucid atmosphere of eternal truth, that his Epistle pursues its course through the ages, ever bringing to the human soul the vision and the inspiration of the divine life. Nevertheless, for its interpretation, the polemical aim that pervades it must be recognised. The great tests of Christianity, the enforcement of which constitutes its chief purpose,—the tests of practical Righteousness and Love, and of Belief in Jesus as God Incarnate,—are those which are of perennial validity and necessity; yet it was just by these that the wolf of Gnosticism could be most unmistakably revealed under its sheep's clothing, and they are presented in such fashion as to certify that this was the object immediately aimed at.

One point more, though of minor importance, remains for consideration, namely, whether the polemic of the Epistle is directed throughout against the same persons, or whether, in its two branches, the Christological and the ethical, it has different objects of attack. The latter view has been widely held. It is admitted that it is Gnostic

<sup>1</sup> An instructive contrast, in this respect, is presented by the Epistle of Jude and its comparatively small influence in later times.

error that is controverted in the Christological passages, but not that it is Gnostic immorality that is aimed at in the ethical passages. On the contrary, it is maintained that the moral laxity against which these are so vigorously directed is within the Church itself. And on behalf of this view it is argued that, in the Epistle, no charge of teaching or practising moral indifferentism is brought against the "antichrists"; that, apart from the Epistle, there is no proof that Docetism in Asia Minor lay open to such a charge; and that the moral tendencies reflected in the Epistle are such as would naturally spring up in communities where Christianity had already passed from a first to a second generation and become, in some degree, traditional.<sup>1</sup>

But, as has been already said, the tone in which the writer of the Epistle addresses his readers lends no support to this supposition. He is tenderly solicitous for their safety amid the perils that beset them; but this solicitude nowhere passes into rebuke. It is plainly suggested, too, that the same spirit of error (4<sup>6</sup>) which is assailing their faith is ready to make a no less deadly assault upon the moral integrity of their Christian life (3<sup>7</sup> "let no man deceive you," not, "let no man deceive himself"). Of necessity, Dualism led, in practice, either to Asceticism or to the Emancipation of the Flesh; and, in the absence of any allusion in the Epistle to the former, it is a fair inference that, with Gnosticism in Asia Minor, the pendulum had swung, at the date of the Epistle, towards the latter. This influence is confirmed by the historical data, scanty as these are. The name associated with the Epistle by unvarying tradition as St. John's chief antagonist is that of Cerinthus. It seems to be beyond doubt that the Apostle and the heresiarch confronted each

<sup>1</sup> Neander, *Planting of Christianity*, i. 407-408 (Bohn). With this view Lucke and Huther agree.

other in Ephesus.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the accounts of Cerinthus and his teaching which have come down to us are fragmentary, confused, and, in some points, conflicting. The residuum of reliable fact is that, according to his teaching, the World and even the Law were created not by the Supreme God, but by a far inferior power; and that he deduced from this a Docetic<sup>2</sup> doctrine of the Incarnation.

We do not know with equal certainty that he deduced from it the other natural consequence of practical Antinomianism. But such testimony as we do possess is to that effect. According to Caius<sup>3</sup> of Rome, a disciple of Irenaeus, Cerinthus developed an elaborate eschatology, the central point of which was a millennium of bliss as sensual as that of the Mohammedan paradise. This account is confirmed by Dionysius of Alexandria (c. 260), who says that, as Cerinthus was a voluptuary and wholly sensual, he conjectured that Christ's kingdom would consist in those things which he so eagerly desired, in the gratification of his sensual appetites, in eating and drinking and marrying.<sup>4</sup> If such was his programme of the future, we can more readily believe, what is stated on good authority, that his position approximated closely to that of Carpocrates, in whom Gnostic Antinomianism reached its unblushing climax. And although the only version of his opinions which we have is that given by his opponents, there seems to be no room for doubt as to their real character. Thus, so far as they go, the historical data harmonise with the internal

<sup>1</sup> The well-known incident of their encounter in the public baths at Ephesus has been discredited on the ground of its incongruity with the Apostle's character, and of the improbability of the alleged visit of the Apostle to the public bath-house. But Irenaeus gives the story on the authority of those who had heard it from Polycarp (*Adv. Haer.* iii. 3, 4; Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* iii. 28, iv. 14); and such evidence is not altogether contemptible.

<sup>2</sup> See, further, Chapters VI. and XIII.

<sup>3</sup> *Ap.* Euseb. iii. z8, vii. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* viii. 25.

evidence of the Epistle itself in giving the impression that the different tendencies it combats are such as were naturally combined in one consistently developed Gnostic system, and that the object of its polemic is, throughout, one and the same.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE WRITER.

NOT only is the "First Epistle of St. John" an anonymous writing; one of its unique features, among the writings of the New Testament, is that it does not contain a single proper name (except our Lord's), nor a single definite allusion, personal, geographical, or historical. Untrammelled, therefore, by any question of authenticity, we are left to gather from tradition and from the internal evidence such facts, if such there are, as may furnish a warrantable conclusion regarding its authorship.

As to the general question of its antiquity, the evidence is peculiarly strong, and may be briefly stated. It is needless to come further down than Eusebius, by whom it is classed among the *homologoumena* (c. 325). It is quoted by Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria (247-265), by Cyprian, Origen, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and the Muratorian Canon. Papias (who is described by Irenaeus as **Iwannou men akousthj, Polukarpou d lefairoj**) is stated by Eusebius (*H. E.* iii. 39) "to have used testimonies from John's former Epistle"; and Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians (c. 115) contains an almost verbal reproduction of 1 John 4<sup>3</sup>. Reminiscences of it are found in Athenagoras (c. 180) (**koinwnia tou patroj proj ton uion**, cf. i. 3), the Epistle to Diognetus (vi. 11), the Epistle of Barnabas (**h qen ej sarki**, cf. 4<sup>2</sup>; **uifj tou qeou ef anerwqh**, cf. 3<sup>8</sup>), more distinctly in Justin (**qeou tekna al hqina kal oumeqa kai esmen**, *Dial.*



123), and in the Didache (cc. x., xi., **tel eiwšai auþna eþ t^? aġap^ sou; parel qetw o[kosmoj oušoj; paġ deþrof hthj dedokimasmenoj**, cf. 4<sup>18</sup> 2<sup>17</sup> 4<sup>1</sup>). They are also alleged in Hermas. It is possible that the earliest of these indicate the currency of Johannine expressions in the Christian circles in which the writer moved rather than acquaintance with the Epistle itself. The evidence, however, is indisputable that this Epistle, though one of the latest, if not the very latest, of the books of the New Testament, won for itself immediately and permanently an unchallenged position as a writing of inspired authority.<sup>1</sup>

The verdict of tradition, moreover, is equally clear and unanimous that the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle are both the legacy of the Apostle John, in his old age, to the Church. All the Fathers already mentioned as quoting the Epistle (excepting Polycarp, but including Irenaeus) quote it as the work of St. John. And until the end of the sixteenth century this view was unquestioned.<sup>2</sup>

Proceeding to consider what light the Epistle itself sheds upon the personality of the writer, we note, in the first place, that, though writer and readers are alike left nameless, and any clue to the identity of either must be merely inferential, the writing before us is one in which a person calling himself "I" addresses certain other persons as "you," and is, in form at least, a letter. That it is more than formally so, has been denied by various critics, who have, in various ways, pronounced it deficient

<sup>1</sup> This statement requires no modification on account of the fact that the Epistle shared with the other Johannine writings the fate of rejection, for dogmatic reasons, by Marcion and the so-called Alogi.

<sup>2</sup> There are possible exceptions to this statement in the case of Theodore (Bishop of Mopsuestia, 393–428), who is said to have "abrogated" all the Catholic Epistles, and of the "certain persons" referred to by Cosmas Indicopleustes, the topographer (sixth century), as having maintained that all the Catholic Epistles were written by presbyters; not by apostles. Both statements are at second-hand; the latter, in addition, is very indefinite.

in genuine epistolary character, describing it as a treatise, a homiletical essay, or a pamphlet. This criticism is unwarranted. Although its topics are so broadly handled, the Epistle is not written in any abstract interest, theological or ethical; nor—though the movement it was designed to combat was one which threatened, on the widest scale, to imperil the very life of Christianity—is it even Catholic, in the sense of being addressed to the Church at large. From beginning to end the writer shows himself in close contact with the special position and the immediate needs of his readers. The absence of explicit reference to either only indicates how intimate was the relation between them. For the writer to declare his identity was superfluous. Thought, language, tone—all were too familiar to be mistaken. The Epistle bore its author's signature in every line.

Though the main characteristics of the Epistle are didactic and controversial, the personal chord is frequently struck, and with much tenderness and depth of feeling, the writer alternating between the "you" of direct address (1<sup>3, 5</sup> 2<sup>1, 7, 8, 12-14, 18</sup> etc., 3<sup>5, 13</sup> etc.) and the "we" in which spontaneous feeling unites him with his readers (1<sup>6, 10</sup> 3<sup>1, 2, 14, 16, 18</sup> etc., 4<sup>7, 10, 11</sup> etc., 5<sup>14, 15, 14-20</sup>). Under special stress of emotion his paternal love, sympathy, and solicitude break out in the affectionate address, "Little children"<sup>1</sup> (**teknia, paidia**), or, yet more endearingly, "My little children" (**teknia ephou?**). Or, again, the prefatory "Beloved"<sup>2</sup> (**agaphtoi**) gives proof how deeply he is stirred by the sublimity of his theme and by the sense of its supreme importance to his readers. He shows

<sup>1</sup> Expressing mingled confidence and anxiety (2<sup>1</sup>), glad thanksgiving (4<sup>4</sup>), fervent exhortation (2<sup>28</sup> 3<sup>18</sup>), urgent warning (3<sup>7</sup> 5<sup>24</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> Conveying in every case an *earnest appeal*, based upon the familiar and fundamental character of the doctrine advanced (2<sup>7</sup>), the loftiness of the Christian calling and privilege (3<sup>2</sup>), the urgent necessity of the case (4<sup>1</sup>), the sense of special obligation (4<sup>7, 11</sup>)

himself intimately acquainted with their religious environment (2<sup>19</sup> 4<sup>1</sup>), dangers (2<sup>26</sup> 3<sup>7</sup> 5<sup>21</sup>), attainments (2<sup>12-14,21</sup>), achievements (4<sup>4</sup>), and needs (3<sup>19</sup> 5<sup>13</sup>) Further, it is implied that the relation between them is definitely that of teacher and taught, evangelist and evangelised (1<sup>2-3</sup>). The Epistle is addressed primarily to the circle of those among whom the author has habitually exercised his ministry in the gospel.<sup>1</sup> He is in the habit of announcing to them the things "concerning the Word of life" (1<sup>1</sup>), that they may have fellowship with him (1<sup>3</sup>); and now<sup>2</sup> that his joy may be full he writes these things unto them (1<sup>4</sup>). He writes as light shines. Love makes the task a necessity and a delight. That joy may have its perfect fruition in aiding their Christian development, in guarding them from the perils to which it is exposed, in guiding them to the trustworthy grounds of personal assurance of eternal life, he sets himself to draw out and place before them the great practical implications of the gospel, and the tests of genuine Christian discipleship which these afford.

Thus the writer is a person who, to his readers, is of so distinctive eminence and recognised authority that he does not find it necessary even to remind them who he is. His whole tone towards them is affectionate, solicitous, responsible. His relation to them is not necessarily that of "spiritual father" in the Pauline sense, but it is, at any rate,

<sup>1</sup> This is worth noting for its bearing on the interpretation of the Epistle. It has always seemed to me that such a passage as that on the "Three Witnesses" contains merely a summary—"heads" of sermons, shall we say?—intended to recall fuller oral expositions of the same topics. Though this yields no help to interpretation, there is a certain relief in the thought that what is so obscure to us need not have been equally so to the original readers.

<sup>2</sup> **ihā h[̄]karašh̄wñ ^#pepl hrwmenh**. The words are almost a verbal reproduction of John 15<sup>24</sup>. On critical grounds, it is not easy to decide between the rival readings **h̄wñ** and **ūwñ** (v. Westcott, critical note, p. 13). The former may be preferred as less obvious, and as yielding the finer and more characteristically apostolic sense. Cf. St. Paul's "Now we live if ye stand fast in the Lord" (1 Thess. 3<sup>8</sup>, also Phil. 2<sup>2</sup>).

that of spiritual guide and guardian, whose province it is to instruct, to warn and exhort with all authority, as with all tenderness. All this agrees perfectly with the traditional account of St. John's relation to the Churches of Asia Minor during the later decades of the first century. More than this cannot be said. Nothing has been, so far, adduced that points conclusively to an apostolic authorship. There is one passage in the Epistle, however, which has a special bearing upon the personality of the writer, namely, the Prologue (1<sup>1-4</sup>); and this we shall now examine so far as it relates to this question.

1<sup>1-4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our own <sup>2</sup> eyes, that which we gazed upon, and our own <sup>2</sup> hands handled, concerning the Word of Life (and the Life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and announce unto you the Life, the Eternal Life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard we announce also unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us. And these things write we unto you, that our joy may be full."

This is, in effect, a statement of the theme of evangelical announcement, an abstract of the report which the Christian apostle is sent to deliver "concerning the Word of Life." And, both for the interpretation of the passage itself and for its bearing on the question of authorship, the first point to be determined is what is signified by the "Word of Life." And here, at once, we enter upon controversial ground; for the phrase may be taken as denoting

<sup>1</sup> For exegetical details, see Notes, *in loc.*; for the doctrinal implications, Chapters VI., VII., and X.

<sup>2</sup> "Own" is not too strong for an adequate rendering of **hḥwñ** in the phrases **toij of qal noij hḥwñ** and **ai[xeiʔej hḥwñ**.

either the personal Logos of John 1<sup>1-14</sup> or the Christian Revelation.

Some of the Greek commentators, followed by Westcott and others, adopt the latter alternative. "The obvious reference is to the whole Gospel, of which Christ is the centre and the sum, and not to Himself personally" (Westcott, p. 7). But the immense difficulty of establishing this view (though it is said to be "obvious") is sufficiently illustrated by the acrobatic feats of interpretation to which its exponent is compelled to resort.<sup>1</sup> With the great majority of commentators, I conclude that the "Word of Life" here signifies the Personal Logos; and for the following reasons. (a) The parallelism between the Prologue to the Epistle and that to the Gospel is too unmistakable to permit of different significations for a word which is so cardinal in both. (b) In answer to the objection that elsewhere<sup>2</sup> **logoj thj zwhj** is applied always to the Gospel, never to the personal Christ, it is to be observed that, while there is no reason why it should not be so applied, the form of expression is here determined by the verse following (**kai>h[zwh>ef anerwqh**), which is

<sup>1</sup> The application of **ofh# ap jatxhj** to the Gospel is justified by the observation "of the grandeur of the claim which St. John here makes for the Christian Revelation, as, in some sense, coeval with creation." But, true as it is that the Gospel has an eternal being and operation in the thought and purpose of God, it is difficult to imagine that a truth so remote from the ordinary plane of thought was made the starting-point of the Epistle. Again, "What we have heard" has to embrace "the whole Divine preparation for the Advent, promised by the teaching of the Lawgiver and Prophets, fulfilled at last by Christ." "What we have seen with our eyes" connotes "the condition of Jew and Gentile, the civil and religious institutions by which St. John was surrounded, the effects which the Gospel has wrought, as revealing to the eye of the world something of the Life." It is acknowledged that **eyhlaf hsan** is a quotation of our Lord's own word **yhlaf hsate-m** (Luke 24<sup>39</sup>); but "While it is probable that the special manifestation indicated is that given by the Lord after the Resurrection, this is, in fact, the Revelation of Himself as He remains with His Church by the Spirit." In that case, the use of language surely is to conceal thought !

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 13<sup>19</sup>, Acts 20<sup>32</sup>, 2 Cor. 5<sup>19</sup>, Phil. 2<sup>16</sup>. It is to be observed that none of these parallels is Johannine. In John 6<sup>68</sup> **rhuata**, not **logoj**, is found.

already in the writer's mind, and which requires **thj zwhj** as a point of dependence. The theme of the whole Epistle, moreover, is Life. Its whole scope is summed up in this: "These things write I unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (5<sup>13</sup>). What then more natural than, at the outset, to place before the mind of the readers their Lord and Saviour as the "Word of Life"? (c) There is not a clause or a word<sup>1</sup> in the Prologue that does not naturally and inevitably point to the personal Logos—Him who in the beginning was with God, and was God, and who "became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1<sup>1.14</sup>).

The subject regarding whom the announcement (**apaggel lomen**, 1<sup>2</sup>) is made being the Lord Jesus Christ, the matter announced is "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our (own) eyes, that which we beheld and our (own) hands handled." From this, two inferences are obvious, if the words "heard," "seen," "beheld," "handled" are taken in their natural sense. The first is that the Prologue does not in any way describe the contents of the Epistle, but must refer to some other occasion or mode of announcement. It is true that the reference to the historic Gospel is here in absolutely the right place. The facts in which the Divine Life has been personally revealed to human perception are the fitting and firm basis for the Epistle with all its theological and ethical developments; and, doubtless, it is the purpose to impress this upon its readers that underlies the Prologue. But, since the Epistle itself contains no announcement whatsoever of such facts, the reference (**apaggel lomen ufiñ**, 1<sup>2</sup>) can be only<sup>2</sup> either

<sup>1</sup> The single apparent exception to this statement is the use of the neuter **o!** instead of the masculine **oj**, in the relative clauses. As to this, see Notes, *in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> Those who understand wept **peri-tou?logou thj zwhj** as referring to the personal Logos and yet regard the Prologue as a syllabus of the contents of the Epistle, are reduced to extremities of exegesis. Rothe, *e.g.*, commenting on "concerning

to the writer's habitual oral teaching, or to the literary record of it—that is to say, the Fourth Gospel.

The second inference is that the writer claims direct, first-hand acquaintance with the facts of the Saviour's life on earth. The terms in which he describes the substance of his announcement are these<sup>1</sup>—"what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes," so that any suggestion of subjective, visionary seeing is set aside, "what we gazed upon" (**eḡeasameqa**, deliberately and of set purpose to satisfy ourselves of its actuality), "what our hands handled" (**eyhl af hsan**, the most incontrovertible evidence of physical fact that human sense can furnish). It is difficult to imagine words more studiously adapted to create the impression that the writer is one of the actual disciples of Jesus. But we are informed<sup>2</sup> that this "superficial impression is corrected" when the language is taken along with such expressions as John 1<sup>14</sup>, 1 John 3<sup>6</sup>, and 4<sup>14</sup>. Turning to these passages for the correction of our "superficial impression," all that we find is proof that **oḡaḡ** (1 John 3<sup>6</sup>) may certainly, and that **qeaṣqai**<sup>3</sup> may possibly, be used of purely spiritual vision. This does not go far to alter the impression that when one speaks of "what he has seen with his eyes," he intends us to

the Word of Life," explains that the apostle is not (in the Epistle) in a position to announce the whole Word. "Only a drop from the ocean, not the ocean itself, will he give." To find this meaning in **peri** is to be, exegetically, capable de tout. Besides, the Epistle does not give even "a drop from the ocean." Haupt, on the other hand, idealises the meaning of **oḡaḡkoamen, k.t.l.**, and reaches the conclusion that "while it is the Logos who certainly is present to the writer's view, it is not the Person in Himself, and as such, that is the matter of his announcement, but only that quality in Him which is Life." Thus a mere abstraction, a quality belonging to the Person, but considered apart from the Person, is "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes," etc.

<sup>1</sup> After **oḡaḡ ap laḡxhḡ**, which, since it probably refers to the eternal pre-existence of the Logos, is not relevant to the point under discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Moffatt, *Historical New Testament*, p. 621.

In John 1<sup>14</sup> a spiritual element is implied in the "beholding" (**qeaṣqai**), but it is the spiritual beholding of a Divine Glory revealed through facts of sense. In 1 John 4<sup>12</sup> the physical element is undeniable. No one would maintain that the meaning is, "No man has had spiritual perception of God at any time."

understand—well, just what he has seen, or supposes that he has seen, with his eyes.

It is asserted (ibid.) that even the "strange metaphor **eyhl af hsan** is not too strong for the faith-mysticism of the early Church and its consciousness of possessing a direct experience of God in Christ." One desiderates some stronger proof for such a statement than a vivid phrase from so highly rhetorical a writer as Tacitus.<sup>1</sup> Assuredly, if one speaks of "what his hands have handled," meaning thereby his consciousness of a spiritual experience, it is one of the most bewildering uses to which human language has ever been put; and the ordinary mind may well despair of tracing, with any certitude, the meaning of a writer so elusive.

Besides these palpable obstacles to the adoption of the "faith-mysticism" interpretation, there are others, less obvious but not less insuperable. How, on that theory, can we explain the sudden change from the perfect tense<sup>2</sup> in **alhkoanen** and **eyrakamen** to the aorist in **ejeasameqa** and **eyhl af hsan**? The change of tense is quite naturally accounted for by referring the aorists to a definite occasion, that, namely, on which the Lord<sup>3</sup> invited His disciples to satisfy themselves of the reality of His Resurrection by the most searching tests of sight and touch (Luke 24<sup>39</sup>, John 20<sup>27</sup>) But can it be supposed that any definable diversities as to time or mode of spiritual perception are intended to be expressed by such variations of phraseology?

It is to be observed, moreover, that the writer assumes

<sup>1</sup> Moffatt quotes "mox nostre duxere Helvidium in carcerem manus," from Tacitus, *Agricola*, 45, where the commentators debate whether he means his own hands or the hands of the senators. But I fail to perceive in this any analogy whatsoever to the faith-mysticism of the early Church.

<sup>2</sup> These perfects signify that the "hearing" and "seeing," though in the past, have been abiding in their results, one of which is the writer's present ability to bear witness to the facts seen and heard.

<sup>3</sup> **eyhl af hsan** is a direct quotation of Our Lord's **yhl af hsate me**; while **ejeasameqa** is the natural response to the repeated **idete** in the same verse (Luke 24<sup>39</sup>).



that, in announcing to his readers his experiences of the Word of Life, he is communicating what they do not fully possess (**apagget lomen kai-upiñ**, 1<sup>3</sup>). But if these were merely spiritual experiences, he could not and would not write thus. On the contrary, his constant assumption is that his readers have full spiritual perception of the truth (2<sup>13. 14. 20. 21. 27</sup> etc.). And, on the broadest exegetical grounds, the "faith-mysticism" theory is inadmissible. It eviscerates the words of precisely that (anti-docetic) force of testimony they are intended to contain--not to the ideal truth of the gospel nor to the consciousness of a spiritual experience, but to the physical reality, certified by the evidence of every faculty given to man as a criterion of such reality, of the human embodiment by means of which, alone the glory of the Only-Begotten of the Father was revealed to the spiritual perceptions of mankind. Upon that testimony, together with the accompanying testimony of the Spirit, the whole anti-docetic polemic of the Epistle is based (2<sup>24</sup> 4<sup>6. 14</sup> 5<sup>6-8</sup>); and it is incredible that the writer intended these words to be understood in a sense in which Cerinthus himself might have appropriated them.

It is alleged,<sup>1</sup> however, that the words are susceptible of an interpretation which, while preserving the natural sense of "heard," "seen," "beheld," "handled," does not necessitate that the writer be held as making a strictly personal claim to these experiences. It is noted that here, in the Prologue, the author writes in the plural number, while elsewhere in the Epistle he speaks of himself, in the singular<sup>2</sup> (2<sup>12-14</sup> 5<sup>13</sup>), and uses the plural "we" only when identifying himself with his readers. And from this it is argued that all he may have intended was to give

<sup>1</sup> Julicher, *Introduction to N. T.* p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> There are exceptions to this statement, namely, 4<sup>6</sup> and 4<sup>14</sup>. It might be said, however, that in these the reference of "we" is involved in the same ambiguity as here.

his Epistle the authority of "the collective disciples of Jesus," the emphasis being not on the persons, but on the actuality of the perception. At furthest, this would be possible, apart from unverity, only if the writer were one who was recognised by the Church as so peculiarly identified with the original witnesses that, without creating a false impression, he could speak of the Apostolic testimony as virtually his own. But, except the presumption that the writer cannot have been one of the original witnesses, there is really nothing to urge in favour of this supposition. The use of the plural here perfectly harmonises with the dignity of the passage; and the same idiom is employed in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (1<sup>14</sup>), where it is not denied that the testimony purports, at least, to be personal. And there are strong arguments to the contrary effect. The very emphatic phraseology—"what we have seen with *our eyes*," "what *our hands* handled"—makes it difficult, if not impossible, to suppose that the writer intends himself to be understood as merely producing the collective testimony of the Apostles, he himself not being of their number. No example of any such *modus loquendi* is found in the New Testament, or is alleged in the patristic literature.<sup>1</sup> And—what seems to be decisive—the author uses in the same passage the same "plural of majesty" of his present writing,<sup>2</sup> as well as

<sup>1</sup> This is scarcely accurate. A parallel is alleged from Irenaeus (v. i. 1); but it is quoted without its context. The passage is—"Non enim aliter nos discere poteramus quae sunt Dei, nisi magister noster, verbum existens, homo factus fuisset . . . Neque rursus nos aliter discere poteramus, *nisi magistrum nostrum videntes, et per auditum nostrum vocem ejus percipientes.*" It is a travesty of the meaning of this passage to say (as Holtzmann does) that Irenaeus reckons himself, in any sense corresponding to our writers, among those "whose ears have heard and whose eyes have seen." What Irenaeus asserts, in both of the sentences quoted, is merely a general and necessary truth. As it was impossible for us to learn the things of God except by the Incarnation of the Word, so also it was impossible for us to receive the revelation of the Incarnate Word except through the medium of human sense. There is as little suggestion of a "collective testimony" as there is of "faith-mysticism."

<sup>2</sup> ~~kai-tauta graf omen~~, 1<sup>4</sup>. Cf. ~~graf w~~, 2<sup>12</sup>; ~~egraya~~, 2<sup>13. 14</sup> 5<sup>13</sup>.

of the testimony on which he claims to found. So far from suggesting that the writer was merely one who could in some peculiar manner represent the original witnesses of the Incarnation, the language employed resists such an interpretation. He who writes these things " (1<sup>4</sup>), is he who announces (1<sup>3</sup>) his personal experiences of the incarnate "Word of Life" (1<sup>1</sup>). Putting aside, as morally intolerable and inconceivable, the hypothesis of deliberate misrepresentation, we really seem to be shut up to the conclusion that the writer is one of the contemporary witnesses of the Saviour's life on earth.

To sum up, then, what has been gathered from the Epistle itself regarding the writer:—he was intimately acquainted with and profoundly concerned in the religious state and environment of his readers, their attainments, achievements, dangers, and needs; his tone and temper are paternally authoritative and tender; the relation between them is that of teacher and taught; and, finally, he claims that his testimony to the historic Gospel is based on first-hand observation of the facts. Thus the internal evidence agrees so completely with the ancient and unbroken tradition which assigns the authorship of the Epistle to the Apostle John that, unless this traditional authorship is disproved by arguments of the most convincing kind, it must be regarded as holding the field. Whether the arguments brought against the Johannine authorship possess this character is a question which involves the criticism of the Fourth Gospel even more than of the Epistle, and which cannot be investigated here. Yet the kernel of the question is contained in small compass. It is whether room can be found within the first century for so advanced a stage of theological development as is reached in the Johannine writings, and whether this development can be conceivably attributed to one of our Lord's original disciples. To neither of these questions, as it

appears to me, is a negative answer warranted. If, within a period comparatively so brief, primitive Christian thought had already passed through the earlier and later Pauline development, and through such a development as we find in the Epistle to the Hebrews, there is no obvious reason why it may not have attained also to the Johannine, within the lifetime of the latest survivor of the Apostles. Nor, when one considers the nature of the intellectual influences, without and within the Church, by which the Apostle John was surrounded—if, as tradition says, he lived on to a green old age in Ephesus—is there any obvious reason why he should not have been the chief instrument of that development.

Only a fragment of the Johannine problem, however,—namely, the relation of the Epistle to the Fourth Gospel,—can be discussed in detail within the limits of this present study; and this discussion it will be well to reserve until we have completed our consideration of the Epistle itself.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AS LIFE AND LIGHT.

THE influence of the immediate polemical purpose of the Epistle is manifest in its doctrine of God manifest not only in its contents, but, first of all, in its exclusions. For, though the conception and delineation of the Divine Nature are the crowning glory of the Epistle, and form its greatest contribution to New Testament thought, it may justly be said that this conception is a narrow one, or, at least, narrowly focussed. The limitations of the writer's field of vision are only less remarkable than the intensity of his perceptions within it. Throughout the Epistle, God is seen exclusively as the Father of spirits, the Light and Life of the universe of souls. His creatorship, His relation to the government of the world and the ordering of human lives, the providential aspects and agencies of His salvation, the working together of nature and grace for the discipline and perfecting of redeemed humanity,--all this is left entirely in the background. From beginning to end, the Epistle contains no direct reference to the terrestrial conditions and changes of human life, or to the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, that arise from them. These do not come within the scope of the present necessity; it is not from this quarter that the faith of the Church is imperilled. The writer's immediate interest is confined to that region in which the Divine and the human directly and vitally meet—to that in God which is communicable to man, to that in man by which he is capable of participation in the Divine Nature.

From this point of view, the conception of God is presented under four great affirmations: God is Light (1<sup>5</sup>); God is Righteous (2<sup>29</sup>); God is Love (4<sup>8</sup>); God is Life (5<sup>20</sup>). And though, characteristically, St. John makes no endeavour to bring these ideas into an organic unity of thought, their inter-relation is sufficiently clear. Righteousness and Love are the primary ethical qualities of the Divine Nature; Life is the essence in which these qualities inhere; and that God is Light signifies that the Divine Nature, as Righteousness and Love, is self-necessitated to reveal itself so as to become the Truth, the object of faith, and the source of spiritual illumination to every being capable of receiving the revelation. Thus, while Gnostic speculation conceived the Divine Nature metaphysically, as the ultimate spiritual essence in eternal separation from all that is material and mutable, and while Gnostic piety aspired to union with the Divine Life solely by the mystic vision of the Light which is its emanation; with St. John, the conception of God is primarily and intensely ethical. A deity of mere abstract Being could never awaken his soul to worship. His homage is not given to Infinitude or Everlastingness. For him, God is in the least atom of moral good, as He is not in

"the fight of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky."

For him, the Eternal Life, the very Life of God, brought into the sphere of humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, is Righteousness and Love; and with his whole soul he labours to stamp on the minds of men the truth that only by Righteousness and Love can they walk in the Light of God, and have fellowship in the Life of the Father and of His Son Jesus Christ.

*God is Life.*<sup>1</sup>

"This is the true God, and Eternal Life" (5<sup>20</sup>). It is everywhere assumed in the Epistle that God is the absolute final source of that life—Eternal Life—the possession of which is the supreme end for which man, and every spiritual nature, exists. This is clearly implied in such a statement as "This is the witness, that God gave us Eternal Life" (5<sup>11</sup>) and in all the passages, too numerous to be quoted, that speak of the existence of this Life in man as the result of a Divine Begetting. That God is also the *immanent* source of Life—that it exists and is maintained only through a continuous vitalising union with Him, as of the branch with the vine—is no less clearly implied in those equally numerous passages that speak of our abiding in God and God's abiding in us.

In all this it is further implied that God is the source of Life to men because He has Life in Himself. *Omne vivum ex vivo*. Eternal life may be spoken of as His gift (5<sup>11</sup>, Rom. 6<sup>23</sup>); but the gift is not extraneous to the Giver. It is nothing else than His self-communication to men, the transmission to us of His own nature. "This is the true God, and Eternal Life" (5<sup>20</sup>).<sup>2</sup>

It must be observed, however, that St. John nowhere merges the idea of God in that of Life. God is the ultimate Eternal Life; Eternal Life is not God. God is personal,

<sup>1</sup> This part of the subject is treated very briefly. For fuller exposition of the Johannine conception of Life, see Chapter X.

<sup>2</sup> **οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ ἀληθινὸς θεὸς καὶ ζωὴ αἰώνιος**. See Notes, *in loc*. Even here, it is true, the thought is primarily soteriological. It is not of what God is in Himself, but of what He is in relation to us—the source of Eternal Life. This is clear from the contrast drawn between Him who is "the true God and Eternal Life," and the idols which cannot give life (cf. Jer. 2<sup>13</sup>), and from which we are exhorted to guard ourselves (5<sup>21</sup>). But, of course, the thought of what God is in relation to us inevitably passes up into the thought of what God is in Himself.

Life is impersonal;<sup>1</sup> and any manner of thinking by which God is reduced to a pantheistic *anima mundi* is as foreign to St. John as it is to every other Biblical writer. It is noticeable, indeed, that St. John nowhere carries his conception of God as the Life to its full cosmical expansion. It would be in full accord with that conception—it is its religious as well as its logical completion—to say that God, as immanent, is the principle of universal life; that life, throughout the whole hierarchy of creation, from the flower in the crannied wall to the archangel, is a pulse of God's own life, a stream not separated but ever flowing from Him as its fountain-head (Ps. 36<sup>5</sup>). For every finite being life is union with God according to its capacity. But the lower potencies of the creative Life do not come within the Apostle's horizon. Man alone, of terrestrial creatures, has capacity for the highest kind of life, which St. John calls Eternal Life; and his concern is exclusively with this.

What elements, then, are present in St. John's conception of the Divine Life? Primarily, as has been said, this conception is ethical. The activities in which the Life is manifested are those of Righteousness (2<sup>29</sup>), and Love (4<sup>8</sup>). The life God lives is a life absolutely righteous and loving. But the conception is also metaphysical. Essentially, the Eternal Life is nothing else than the Divine Nature itself, regarded, not as abstract being, but dynamically, as the ground and source of all its own manifold activities—as the animating principle<sup>2</sup> in virtue of which the Divine Righteousness and the Divine Love are not mere abstractions, but eternally active forces. And, finally, the Life of God is a principle of self-communication and self-reproduction. It is this by intrinsic necessity. Love cannot but seek to beget love (4<sup>7</sup>); and Righteousness to

<sup>1</sup> Even in 1<sup>2</sup>, where **h[zw]h[ai]vnoij** is, not the Logos, but the pre-incarnate life of the Logos. The Eternal Life is the common element in the personality of God, the Word, and those who are "begotten of God."

<sup>2</sup> v. Scott's *Fourth Gospel*, p. 257.



beget righteousness (2<sup>29</sup>). In the Epistle, this generative activity of the Divine Life holds a place of equal importance with its ethical quality. No thought is more closely interwoven with its whole texture than that of the Divine self-communication. Eternally, the Father imparts Himself to His only-begotten Son (4<sup>9</sup>), the Word whose life from the Beginning consisted in His fellowship with the Father (**htij h# proj ton patera**, 1<sup>2</sup>). To men, Eternal Life is communicated as the result of a Divine act, by which, in the terminology of St. John, they are "begotten of God" and become the "children of God" (**tekna tou?geou?**). This actual impartation of the actual Life of God is the core of Johannine soteriology. It is this that makes the Gospel a gospel, and Christ the mediator of a real salvation. "This is the witness, that God gave us Eternal Life, and this Life is in His Son."

*God is Light.*

"And this is the message which we have heard from Him, and announce again unto you, that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth"(1<sup>5,6</sup>).

The words "God is Light," though unrecorded in any of our Gospels, may quite conceivably contain the verbal reminiscence of an actual utterance of our Lord. This, however, is not necessarily implied in St. John's statement. What is asserted is that the whole purport of the Christian Revelation,<sup>1</sup> from a certain point of view, may be said to be this—God is Light. And our endeavour, in the first place, must be to determine the sense in which the symbol is here employed.

Light, the most beautiful and blessed thing in Nature,

<sup>1</sup> **aggel ia** is used with exactly the same import in 3<sup>11</sup>. There the "message" is " that we love one another."

which seems as if created to be the emblem of all purity and splendour, of knowledge, safety, love and joy, and which fits the world to be the abode of the higher forms of life, has been inevitably associated by men of every race and religion with their conception of the Divine. It would lead far from our present purpose, however, to attempt an investigation of the typology of Light in the extra-Biblical religions, or even to examine minutely the symbolic meanings and uses of it that are scattered broadcast over the Scriptures themselves.<sup>1</sup> It will suffice to notice that there are two main lines along which the idea of Light is related, both in the Old Testament and the New, to the being, character and activity of God.

On the one hand, Light is associated physically or symbolically with the Divine Essence, and with the heavenly world. Everywhere in the Old Testament, Light is the actual medium of theophany, the physical accompaniment of Jehovah's presence.<sup>2</sup> In the New Testament also, the same conception of Light as pertaining to the essence of Deity—as the physical element, so to say, of the Divine Life—is abundantly present. God "dwells in light that is inaccessible and full of glory" (1 Tim. 6<sup>16</sup>); and wherever the celestial world is projected into the terrestrial it is in a radiance of supernatural Light.<sup>3</sup> Following this line of analogy, we might infer that here in our Epistle the idea of Light is associated symbolically with the moral Being of God. That God is Light in which there is no darkness, signifies the spotless and radiant perfection of the Divine

<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive discussion, both of the Biblical and extra-Biblical typology of light, is contained in Grill's *Untersuchungen über die Entstehung des vierten Evangeliums*.

<sup>2</sup> In the visions of Ezekiel, e.g. (Ezek. 1<sup>28</sup> 3<sup>23</sup> 10<sup>4</sup> etc.), as the "Glory of the Lord"; which in the Priestly Code is localised, and assumes a definite uniformity as the Shekinah-Glory (Ex. 40<sup>34</sup>, 1 Kings 8<sup>11</sup> etc.).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Matt. 17<sup>2</sup> 28<sup>3</sup>, Acts 9<sup>3</sup> 12<sup>7</sup> etc. In these and other similar passages the conception is of a Light, supramundane, "above the brightness of the sun," but actual and in some sense physical, emanating from the Divine Presence.

Holiness. In another class of passages, on the other hand, the symbol is used to express the correlative facts of God's self-revelation and of the enlightenment it brings to man's spiritual perceptions. Thus, in the Old Testament, it is the symbol of the illuminative action of the Divine Word (Pss. 19<sup>8</sup> 119<sup>105</sup>), of the Divine Spirit (Ps. 36<sup>10</sup>, Prov. 20<sup>27</sup>), and of the witness of the people of God to the surrounding world (Isa. 42<sup>6</sup> 49<sup>6</sup> 60<sup>1-3</sup>). In the New Testament this is the prevailing use. Christ is the **apaugasma** of the Father's glory (Heb. 1<sup>3</sup>); the Word in whom the Divine Life becomes the Light of men (John 1<sup>4</sup>) and of the world (8<sup>12</sup>); and the prophetic word is a "lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1<sup>19</sup>). The subjective illumination which is the counterpart of the external revelation is also Light. By the "Spirit of wisdom and revelation" the "eyes of the heart" are enlightened (Eph. 1<sup>18</sup>); and as, in the first creation, God caused Light to shine out of darkness, so now He shines in the heart "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4<sup>6</sup>).

Now, for the interpretation of the Epistle, it is a question of some importance to determine with which of these ideas, essence or revelation, St. John's conception of the Divine Light comes into line. In my judgment it is with the latter. That God is Light expresses the self-revelation of God; first, as a necessity that belongs to His moral nature; secondly, as the source of all moral illumination. But while maintaining this interpretation I must admit that the exegetical authorities, almost with one voice, declare for the opposite view, namely, that Light here denotes the essential Being of God. "It is the innermost, all-comprehending essence of God, from which all His attributes proceed" (Haupt); "Absolute Holiness and Truth" (Huther); "the Absolute Holiness of God, especially as Love" (Rothe); "the new idea of God as unconditioned

Goodness, holy Love" (Beyschlag, ii. 450); "the Love which constitutes the essence of God " (Grill, p. 312). To this whole class of interpretations there is only one objection—a serious one, however--that they are irrelevant to the context. While this interpretation of the Light as absolute Holiness or Love serves admirably for this single sentence (1<sup>5</sup>), taken by itself, it will be found that it entirely dislocates the continuity of thought that runs through the paragraph (1<sup>5</sup>-2<sup>2</sup>). Examining this paragraph as a whole, we find that the unifying idea is not the Light, but is fellowship with God. St. John does not introduce the thought that God is Light as an independent thesis. He does not develop it, or even recur to it. It is introduced only for the sake of leading up to what follows, "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." In fact, it is the logical starting-point for the whole paragraph--the major premise from which the Apostle proceeds, in the course of the paragraph, to draw a number of conclusions regarding the conditions of fellowship with God. These conditions are, abstractly and summarily, that "we walk in the Light, as He is in the Light" (1<sup>7</sup>). Light is the medium in which fellowship between God and man is realised; the first element which He and we may possess in common. The crucial question, moreover, is as to what this condition of fellowship—walking in the Light—signifies for sinful men; for, as St. John immediately proceeds to insist, to "walk in the Light" is, first and indispensably, to confess our sins (1<sup>8-10</sup>). Obviously, therefore, the Light cannot signify the absolute moral perfection of God. For sinners, fellowship with God cannot, initially, consist in sharing His moral perfection. The Light in which we, being yet sinful, can walk so as to have fellowship with God, is the Light of Truth, the Light which His self-revelation sheds upon all objects in the moral universe, and, first of all, upon ourselves and our sin. The clue to the

whole passage, in short, is the idea of fellowship.<sup>1</sup> As in nature Light is the medium of fellowship,—the social element in which all creatures, whatever their affinities or antagonisms, may meet and be revealed one to another,—so, in the spiritual sphere, the Light, the source of which is the self-revelation of God, is the medium of fellowship between all spiritual beings. And especially is it the element in which we, though yet sinful, can have fellowship with God; because, when by confessing our sins we walk in the Light, "the Blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

The single meeting-place of the Holy God and sinful men is, to begin with, the Truth; the only medium of their fellowship, a common view of spiritual realities. And it is because God is Light that this is possible. As it is said in the most Johannine of the Psalms, "In Thy Light shall we see light."

I. That God is Light signifies, therefore, in the first place, that the Divine Nature is, by inherent moral necessity, self-revealing.<sup>2</sup> As Light, by its nature, cannot be self-contained, but is ever seeking to impart itself, pouring through every window and crevice, shining into every eye, bathing land and sea with its pure radiance; so God, from His very nature of Righteousness and Love, is necessitated to reveal Himself as being what He is. He is Light, and as such is always seeking to shine into the minds He has made in His own Image. "And in Him is no darkness at all."

<sup>1</sup> So Westcott (p. 14). Yet, having grasped the clue, he does not follow it up. Having struck the nail on the head, he proceeds to make a circle of dints all around it.

<sup>2</sup> So Weiss, though somewhat inadequately: "God is Light denotes the fact that He has become visible, namely, in Christ, in whom He is completely revealed." "God is Light means in modern language that it is the nature of God to communicate Himself" (Inge, *Dict. of Christ*, i. 892b). "The transcendent life streaming out on men, the absolute nature of God as Truth, as the Supreme reality for man to believe in" (Moffatt, *ibid.* ii. 34a).

<sup>3</sup> The idea of Light is one which plays a various but always prominent part in the Gnostic theologies and cosmogonies. And it may very well be that the aim of the writer of the Epistle was partly, at least, to emphasise as supreme

In God there is nothing that hides, nothing that is hidden. In the Light of His self-revelation there is no darkness, because in His nature there is no inconsistency, no variability, no secret reserve, God, as revealed in Christ, is knowable as no other Being is. His holiness, justice, and love are beyond knowledge, not because there is in Him anything that is not holiness, justice, and love, but because these, as they exist in Him, are beyond the measure of man's mind. The Divine character is utterly transparent—goodness without a shadow of evil. It is Light in which there is no darkness, to which there is no arresting horizon, that streams through the spiritual universe from Him who is its Sun, the Word of Life.<sup>1</sup>

II. But this thought of God's self-revelation carries with it, as its correlative, the thought of man's illumination thereby. As the light of the sun not only reveals the sun itself, but brings all things in their proper forms and colours to our vision, so the Light of God makes all things in the spiritual realm visible in their true character. As all truth is God's thought, and all finite intelligence is

the moral significance of the Divine Light, as opposed to the merely intellectual, or, on the other hand, semi-physical conceptions of Gnosticism. Westcott thinks that in the emphatic "in Him is no darkness at all" there is a reference to "Zoroastrian speculation on the two opposing spiritual powers." But Zoroastrianism did not teach that there are two opposing powers in *God*. Holtzmann, again, finds a protest against any idea of a **sugxusij aḵikh**, such as was subsequently developed in the Basilidian system. But the doctrine of Basilides (Clem. *Strom.* ii. 2o. 112), that the corruption of the human soul is due to an original confusion and mixture of Light and Darkness (**kata-tina taraxon kai sugxusin aḵikhn**), has no perceptible relevance to St. John's dictum, "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all." The Antinomianism which the Epistle combats must have had as its basis a dualistic conception of the Universe; but there is no indication that it carried this dualism back into the Divine nature itself.

<sup>1</sup> In the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, the concatenation of ideas is exactly parallel to that which I have endeavoured to establish in the Epistle. As here we have successively the ideas of the Word (1<sup>1</sup>), the Life (1<sup>2</sup>), and the Light (1<sup>5</sup>); so there, "In the beginning was the Word" (1<sup>1</sup>); "In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men" (1<sup>4</sup>). In the Gospel it is quite evident that the idea of Light is attached not to the Divine Essence, but to the self-revelation of God in the Word.

participation in the light of the Eternal Reason; so, in the moral sphere, the character that things have in the moral judgments of God and the view of them that is given in the light of His self-revelment constitute what is called, in Johannine phrase, **h[a]hqeia**, the Truth. And it is in their perception of the Truth, their illumination by the Divine Light, that there exists for all moral beings a medium of conscious fellowship with God. For sinful men, especially, this is the only possible medium' of such fellowship. We can come to the Light and walk in the Light, as He is in the Light (1<sup>7</sup>). Light is the translucent atmosphere in which, even while still morally imperfect and impure, we can come to have a common perception of moral facts and a true fellowship of mind with Him who is the absolutely Good. This, indeed, is the basis of spiritual religion; it is this that distinguishes Christianity from irrational superstitions and unethical ritualism. It is no merely emotional, mystical, or sacramentarian fellowship with God that St. John declares to us; but a fellowship in the Truth, in thought and knowledge, and in all that springs from them. God is not Life merely; He is Light also. And the complete Johannine conception may be expressed in this, that Life is the medium of our sub-conscious, Light of all our conscious fellowship with God and with one another (1<sup>7</sup>).

The relation to God in which such fellowship is consciously realised is expressed throughout the Epistle, as in the Gospel, by the characteristic use of the verb "to know" (**ginwskein**).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To "know Him" (2<sup>4</sup>) is equivalent to "being in Him" (2<sup>5b</sup>), and to "abiding in Him" (2<sup>6</sup>). The children of God "know the Father" (2<sup>14</sup>). "Every one that loveth is begotten of God and knoweth God" (4<sup>7</sup>). "We have received an understanding that we should know Him that is true" (5<sup>20</sup>). The antithesis of this relation is expressed as "not knowing" (3<sup>6</sup> 4<sup>8</sup>); more emphatically by "lie" and "liar" (1<sup>6</sup> 2<sup>4</sup>. 2<sup>22</sup>). It must be observed that **ginwskein** invariably denotes knowledge, not by ratiocination, but by spiritual perception.

See, further, special note on **ginwskein**.

But the conception of spiritual knowledge, in all its presuppositions and in all its consequences, is equally remote from Rationalism and from Gnosticism. The perception of spiritual truth is as little attainable by logical faculty or common intelligence as it is by theosophic contemplation. Spiritual regeneration is the prerequisite of spiritual illumination. Those only who are "begotten of God" have the power to "see" and "know" Divine realities. God is Light; and had human nature been animated by a normal and healthy spiritual life, the Divine illumination would have flowed in upon it uninterruptedly by all its channels of affinity with the Divine. And, indeed, St. John's thought is that the Light never has been, never could be, wholly withdrawn. But "the Light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not" (John 1<sup>5</sup>). As the original state of every man is death (3<sup>14</sup>), so is it also blindness. And "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3<sup>3</sup>). The fundamental Johannine position is that the whole redemptive process has its origin, not in any conscious human act, but in a sub-conscious activity of the Divine Life in man; and the first fruit and manifestation of this activity is the power to "see," to "believe" on Him who is the Light, to "know" God whom He reveals.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, since Light is the element of conscious activity, of conscious obedience or disobedience (John 7<sup>24</sup>), of sincerity or insincerity (John 3<sup>19-21</sup>), the Epistle strongly emphasises the office of human volition in the response made to it. The Light is a message in the imperative, not only in the indicative mood; and the Epistle speaks not of "seeing," but of "walking in the Light." The conception, in both Gospel and Epistle, is that, while the light, which shines around all men, becomes a power of saving illumination only in those who, as

<sup>1</sup> See, further, Chapters X. and XIII.



"begotten of God," are responsive to its influence, none can be entirely unconscious of its being there, or entirely insusceptible to its claims upon him. But men may close the shutters of the soul's windows against it. With an instinctive premonition of what it would constrain them to see and acknowledge, to do and forego, men may and do employ devices of various subtlety to fortify the mind against its entrance. As in the primeval story the covert of the trees of the garden is preferred to the Light of God's presence, so still "This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil" (John 3<sup>19</sup>)

A brief study of the paragraph (1<sup>5</sup>-2<sup>2</sup>) will show that this interpretation of the Light fits into the context like a key into its proper lock. The thesis of the whole paragraph is that "walking in the Light" is the one necessary and sufficient condition of fellowship with God. This is first stated in the most abstract form. "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1<sup>5</sup>. 6). Here the affirmation is not (as in 2 Cor. 6<sup>14</sup>) that two elements so opposite in nature as light and darkness, holiness and sin, purity and impurity, cannot mix and coalesce. What is in view is the irreconcilable *effect* of light and darkness. Light is that which reveals; darkness, that which conceals. Light is the medium in which we come to see as God sees, to have a true perception of all moral objects—qualities, actions, and persons. To "walk in the Light" is, therefore, to have, in the first place, the will to see all things in the Light of God, and to acknowledge and act up to what is thus seen to be the truth. To "walk in darkness" is the effort, instinctive or deliberate, not to see, or the failure to acknowledge and act up to what is seen; to withdraw ourselves, our duties, our actions, our character, our relation

to the facts and laws of the spiritual realm, from the light which God's self-revelment sheds upon them. And to do this is, *ipso facto*, to exclude the possibility of fellowship with God.

That this is the Apostle's meaning becomes still more apparent as we follow the concrete development of the thought in the remainder of the paragraph. This is composed of three parallel pairs of antitheses (1<sup>6.7</sup> 1<sup>8.9</sup> 1<sup>10</sup>-2<sup>2</sup>), which may be arranged thus:

#### DARKNESS-SERIES.

1<sup>6</sup> "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."

1<sup>8</sup> "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

1<sup>10</sup> "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

#### LIGHT-SERIES.

1<sup>7</sup> "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."

1<sup>9</sup> "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

2<sup>1</sup> "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

From this it is evident that to "walk in the Light" is, first of all, to confess sin; to walk in the darkness, to ignore or to deny sin. All things assume a different aspect in the Light, of God; but nothing looks so different as we ourselves do. The first fact on which the light impinges is our sin. But, though it exposes sin in all its horror, we may loyally submit to and endorse the result—we may come to the Light and walk in it; or we may "rebel against the Light" (Job 24<sup>13</sup>) and "love the darkness." The "darkness," therefore, is not the "world," nor "sin, especially as impurity" (Rothe). It is, in this instance, self-concealment, the cloud of sophistry and self-deception which it is always the instinct of guilt to gather around itself. To "walk in darkness" is not necessarily, indeed, to live a double life under any of the deeper shades of deliberate hypocrisy. For the exclusion of the

Light, conscious dissimulation is comparatively ineffective. Simply to pursue the everyday life of business and pleasure, of purpose and achievement, without reference to the Will of God; to live by the false and mutilated standards of the world; to be blinded by the glare of its artificial illuminations—there are no more effectual and frequented ways than these of walking in darkness.

It is needless for our present purpose to pursue further the exposition of this paragraph.<sup>1</sup> And it must suffice to indicate in a sentence how, in the remainder of this whole section of the Epistle (1<sup>5</sup>-2<sup>20</sup>), the contrast between walking in the Light and walking in darkness is developed.

The Light of God not only reveals sin (1<sup>7-22</sup>), it reveals Duty (2<sup>3-6</sup>); especially, it reveals Love as the highest law for the children of God (2<sup>7-11</sup>); as it also reveals in their true character the "world and the things that are in the world," so that it is seen that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (2<sup>15-17</sup>). Finally, the light reveals Jesus as the Christ, the Incarnate Son of God (2<sup>18-28</sup>). He who denies the glorious reality of the Incarnation is a "liar," and is blind to the Light of God.

"God is Light" signifies the inward necessity of the Divine Nature to reveal itself, the fact of its perfect and eternal self-revelation in Christ, and the correlative fact of men's spiritual illumination thereby. This is the only conception of the Light that fits into the train of thought running through this whole section of the Epistle.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapters VIII. and IX.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE DOCTRINE OF GOD AS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LOVE.

*God is Righteous (2<sup>29</sup>).*

GOD is Life, self-imparting; God is Light, self-revealing. But what, in itself, is the Divine Nature, the communication, of which is Life and the revelation of which is Light? It is solely within the ethical sphere that the Epistle contemplates this question; and in the unity of God's moral being, two, and only two, elements are distinguished—Righteousness and Love. From these the whole moral activity of the Divine Life proceeds; and, as a necessary consequence, it is by the impartation of these same qualities to human nature that the whole development of the regenerate life is determined.

The words Righteous and Righteousness (**dikaioj**, **dikaioSunh**) are used only in the broadest sense. They express neither the Pauline idea of forensic status nor the specific virtue of justice, the *voluntas suum cuique tribuendi*, but the sum of all that is right in character and conduct. Righteousness includes all of which sin is the negation. "Every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of God" (2<sup>29</sup>), but "He that doeth sin is of the devil" (3<sup>8</sup>); and again, "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God" (3<sup>10</sup>), but "Whosoever is begotten of God doeth not sin" (3<sup>9</sup>). Righteousness and sin divide between them the whole area of moral possibility.

That such Righteousness belongs to, or rather is, the

character of God, and that this is the basis of all Christian Ethics, is everywhere implied, and is categorically asserted in (2<sup>29</sup>) **εἴη εἰδήτε ὅτι δίκαιοι ἐστίν, γινώσκετε<sup>1</sup> ὅτι καὶ πᾶς ὁ ποιεῖ τὰ δίκαια ἠὲ αὐτοῦ γεννηταί.** "If ye know that He is righteous, know (or, ye know) that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him."

The argument presupposes, in the first place, that Righteousness in God and in man is one and the same. Like begets like; the stream has the quality of the fountain. It presupposes, in the second place, that God, and He alone, is originally and essentially righteous—there is no other source from which human righteousness can be derived.

The Righteousness that belongs to the inward character of God extends also to His action; it ensures rightness, unfailing self-consistency, in all that He does. Thus, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous (**πιστοὶ ἐστίν καὶ δίκαιοι**) to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." When, on the ground of Christ's propitiation, God forgives those who by confession make forgiveness possible, He is "righteous"; and because He is "righteous," He is "faithful." He does not deny Himself (2 Tim. 2<sup>13</sup>). He does what is according to His character, because He does what is right.

But the activity of God's Righteousness, which is most conspicuous in the Epistle, is that in which it is directly and imperatively related to the whole moral action of His creatures. The<sup>2</sup> Righteousness of God is that which

<sup>1</sup> The delicate differentiation of the two verbs to "know" is very noticeable here. The **εἰδήτε** of the first clause expresses the knowledge absolutely, as a first principle assumed in all cogitation upon the subject; the **γινώσκετε** of the second clause expresses the art of mental perception by which knowledge, in the particular instance, is acquired. The full sense of the verse is, "If ye know, as ye do absolutely know, that He is righteous, recognise (or, ye recognise), as implied in this, that every one also," etc. See special note on **γινώσκω** and **εἰδέναι**.

<sup>2</sup> On the whole subject of this paragraph, see, further, Chapter XI.

renders sin inadmissible in them; inadmissible *de jure* in all, inadmissible *de facto* in those who are "begotten of Him."

This the writer maintains with unexampled strenuousness and rigour. The Righteousness of God is Law for all men and for all their actions. "Sin is lawlessness; and every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness" (3<sup>4</sup>). Nothing excites in St. John a warmer indignation than the supposition of compatibility between a life of actual wrong-doing and fellowship with the Righteous God. "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him" (2<sup>4</sup>). "Every one that doeth not righteousness is not of God" (3<sup>10</sup>), but is "of the devil" (3<sup>8</sup>). Not less absolutely is it insisted that all who are "begotten of Him" and in fellowship with Him partake of His Righteousness. "Every one that is begotten of God doth not commit sin, because His seed abideth in Him; and he cannot sin, because He is begotten of God" (3<sup>9</sup>). "We know that every one that is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not" (5<sup>18</sup>). It is an inveterate misreading of the Epistle that represents its author as being, almost exclusively, the "Apostle of Love." Intense as is St. John's gaze into the heavenly abyss of the Divine Love, it seems impossible that any writing could display a more impassioned sense, than this Epistle does, of the tremendous imperative of Righteousness—a more rigorous intolerance of sin. So long as the Church lays up this Epistle in its heart, it can never lack a spiritual tonic of wholesome severity.

It is true, however, that in its doctrine of Divine righteousness, thoroughly spontaneous as it is, the Epistle makes no remarkable contribution to the development of New Testament thought. It does no more than restate, in

a peculiarly forceful fashion, and with all the glow of an original intuition, that conception of the Divine Nature which is fundamental to the whole Biblical revelation. It must be conceded, moreover, that the assertion of the impeccability of the regenerate, into which the Writer, apparently at least, is led by the vehemence of the polemical interest, has tended to detract from the full usefulness of his teaching on this head. However effectively the unique form of expression employed may have been adapted to the peculiarities of the immediate situation, it has been to later generations a paradox and a puzzle rather than a source of instruction or a practical stimulus. It is far otherwise with the next of the great affirmations which constitute the Epistle's doctrine of God.

*God is Love (4<sup>8</sup>)*

Here the Epistle rises to the summit of all revelation; and, for the first time, enunciates that truth which not only is the profoundest, gladdest, most transforming that the mind can conceive, but is the beginning and the end—the truth in which all truths have their ultimate unity, the innermost secret of existence.

The New Testament word for Love, **agaph**, is virtually a coinage of Christianity. It may be that it is an old word reminted; but it is one of the curiosities, at least, of philology that, while the verb **agapan** is fairly common in classical Greek from Homer downwards, the noun **agaph** is not found in any extant classical text; a single passage in Philo supplying the solitary instance of its extra-Biblical use.<sup>1</sup> This does not prove, indeed, that it was unknown to non-literary Greek; and Deissmann may be

<sup>1</sup> Even in the Septuagint there are only fifteen occurrences, eleven of them in Canticles, where the sexual tinge is unmistakable, as also in 2 Sam. 13<sup>15</sup> and Jer. 2<sup>2</sup>. In Eccles. 9<sup>1.6</sup> it is opposed to **nišoj** in a more general sense.

right in supposing it to have been current in the Egyptian vernacular.<sup>1</sup> The fact remains, however, that though the Greek language is rich in terms<sup>2</sup> answering to "love" in its various shades of meaning, the comparatively unused **agaph** was, as it were, providentially reserved to express that purely ethical love the conception of which Christianity first made current among men.

In the Epistle the words **agaph** and **agapan** are used to express an energy of the moral nature in God towards men, in men towards God, in men towards one another. And one of its profound truths is that, in whatever relation it may operate, Love is one and the same. All love has its origin in God; and human love is the moral nature of God incarnate in man. "Every one that loveth is begotten of God" (4<sup>7</sup>). And, since nothing moral can exist merely in the form of action, Love is, primarily, a disposition, a permanent quality of the Will, an inherent tendency of the moral nature. The quality of this disposition is indicated by the fact's, that the object of Love in the human relation is invariably our "brother."<sup>3</sup> We may disregard the fact that brotherhood here denotes not physical but spiritual relationship; for the spiritual presupposes the physical analogue. And though, in fact, it is not brotherhood that makes Love (2<sup>11</sup> 3<sup>12</sup>), but Love that makes brotherhood, Love may be said to be that mutual disposition which ideally exists among brothers in the same family—the disposition to act towards our fellow-men as it is natural for those

<sup>1</sup> The supposed discovery of the word in a papyrus of the second century B.C., announced by Deissmann in his *Bibel-Studien* (1895), has been abandoned (*Expository Times*, September 1898, p. 567). But its adoption instead of **ewj** by the LXX may be thought to lend probability to the supposition of its Egyptian origin.

<sup>2</sup> **storgh**, the love that belongs to natural kinship; **ewj**, with its predominant suggestion of sexuality; **filia**, specially appropriated to friendship.

<sup>3</sup> 2<sup>10</sup> 3<sup>10.14.16.17</sup> 4<sup>20.21</sup>.



to do who have all interests in common, and who instinctively recognise that the full self-existence of each can be realised only through a larger corporate existence. Love is the power to live not only for another, but in another, to realise one's own fullest life in the fulfilment of other lives.

Love is such a disposition, and such a disposition of necessity issues in appropriate action. In the Epistle nothing is more incisively dealt with than the fiction of a love that is inoperative in practice. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (3<sup>17</sup>). That which terminates in the mere self-satisfaction of "feeling good," whatever it may be, is something else than Love. Love is the giving impulse. And it rejoices, not only in imparting benefits, the cost of which is imperceptible and the bestowal of which is a sheer luxury: it expresses itself most fully in sacrifice. It is that complete identification of self with another which makes it sometimes imperative, and always possible, to lay down even our lives for our brethren (3<sup>16</sup>), and which, indeed, realises an exquisite joy in suffering endured for the beloved's sake.

In human history, Love has its one absolute embodiment in the self-sacrifice of Christ. "Hereby know we love," says the Epistle in one of its pregnant sentences, hereby do we perceive what Love is, "in that He laid down His Life for us" (3<sup>16</sup>). This is the Absolute of Love—its everlasting type and standard. The world had never been without the dower of Love. It had known love like Jacob's, like David's and Jonathan's, the patriot's and the martyr's self-devotion. But till Jesus Christ came and laid down His Life for the men that hated and mocked and slew Him, the world had not known what Love in its greatness and purity could be.

And the Love of Christ in laying down His Life for us is the manifestation, under the conditions of time and sense, of the Love of God, eternal and invisible. God is Love; but what God is can be known only through His self-manifestation. Wherein does this consist? Not in word only. It was not enough that He should say that He is Love (cf. 3<sup>18</sup>). Not in the works of Nature and Providence alone. These are but starlight. The Epistle points us to the Sun (4<sup>9,10</sup>)

"Herein was manifested the Love of God toward us, that God hath sent His Son, His Only Begotten, into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is Love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son (as) a propitiation for our sins."<sup>1</sup>

The first of these two verses emphasises the fact that God is Love, and exhibits the proof of it ("Herein was the Love of God manifested"); the second, the nature of Love itself, so manifested. But, taking both in one view, we perceive that there are five factors which here contribute to the full conception of Divine Love.

(1) First, the magnitude of its *gift* is set forth. "His Son, His Only Begotten." Elsewhere, the title of Our Lord is simply "the Son," the argument turning upon the relation of Father and Son; or "His Son," or the "Son of God," where the element of Divine power and dignity in the Sonship is made more prominent. Here only,<sup>2</sup> where he would display the infinite Love in the infinite Gift, does St. John use the full title, **τον υιόν αυτού τον μονογενή?** The essence of the manifestation is in the fact, not that God sent Jesus, but that Jesus, who was sent, is God's Only-Begotten Son. The full being of God is present in Him. Other gifts are only tokens of God's Love. Its all is given

<sup>1</sup> See Notes, *in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> In the Gospel, only in the parallel passage, John 3<sup>16</sup>.

in Christ. It is His own bleeding heart the Father lays on Love's altar, when He offers His Only-Begotten Son (cf. Gen. 22<sup>12</sup> and Rom. 8<sup>32</sup>). (2) Secondly, the magnitude of the Love is exhibited in the person of the Giver. It was a father who thus sent his only-begotten son; but that father was God (**o[leoj**, not **o[patr**, as in 4<sup>14</sup>). It was the Divine Nature whose whole wealth was poured out in the sacrifice of Calvary. (3) Thirdly, the Love of God is manifested in the purpose of the mission of the Son. This purpose is that we might live through Him,"<sup>1</sup> in which is implicitly contained the "should not perish" of John 3<sup>16</sup>. The Love of God is thus seen to be His self-determination not only to rescue men from what is the sum of all evils, but to impart to them the supreme and eternal good, Life. (4) Fourthly, the Love of God is manifested in the means by which this purpose is achieved, God shrinks not from the uttermost cost of Redemption. His Son is sent as a "propitiation for our sins." He not only dies heroically on our behalf, as the good shepherd lays down his life in defending his helpless flock from the fangs of the wolf or the assault of the robber; but, as a father drinks a full cup of sorrow and humiliation in striving to make atonement for the criminal profligacies of an unworthy son, even so, Almighty God, in the person of His Son, humbles Himself and suffers unto blood for the sins of His creatures. Such is the Love of God to men; and what can be said of it, except that it is at once incredible that the fact should be so, and impossible that it should be otherwise? It is what never did, never could, flit within the horizon of man's most daring dream; it is that which, when it is revealed, shines with self-evidencing light. It needs no argument. Apologetic is superfluous.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **iha zhswnen di jauou?** Cf. John 3<sup>15.16</sup> 6<sup>51.57</sup> 10<sup>10</sup> 11<sup>25.26</sup> 14<sup>19</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "what doubt in thee could countervail  
Belief in it? Upon the ground

Such Love is *Divine*. The Being whose nature this is, is God.

But these statements ought, perhaps, to have been reserved until we had considered the final moment in the full conception of Divine Love, *its objects*. (5) "Herein is Love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us." The interpretation popularly put upon this verse, as equivalent to "Herein is love, that, although we did not love God, God loved us," is grammatically untenable,<sup>1</sup> and it misses the point in one of the profoundest sentences in the Epistle. The Apostle does not say that we have not loved God. What he says is that we *have* loved God, but that this is not love to call love. That we have loved God is nothing wonderful. The ineffable mystery of Love reveals itself in this, that God has loved us, who are so unworthy of His Love, and so repulsive to all the sensibilities, so to say, of His moral nature. The full glory of the Divine Love is seen in the fact that it is wholly self-created and self-determined.

It may be permissible to elucidate this truth somewhat more fully. As we have seen. Love is that mysterious power by which we live in the lives of others, and are thus moved to benevolent and even self-sacrificing action on their behalf. Such love is, after all, one of the most universal things in humanity. But always natural human

That in the story had been found  
Too much Love? How could God love so?  
While man, who was so fit instead  
To hate, as every day gave proof,—  
Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,  
Both could and did invent that scheme  
Of perfect Love; 't would well beseem  
Cain's nature thou vast wont to praise,  
Not tally with God's usual ways."

Browning's *Easter Day*.

<sup>1</sup> See Notes, *in loc*.

love is a flame that must be kindled and fed by some quality in its object. It finds its stimulus in physical instinct, in gratitude, in admiration, in mutual congeniality and liking. Always it is, in the first place, a passive emotion, determined and drawn forth by an external attraction. But the Love of God is the ever-springing fountain. Its fires are self-kindled. It is love that shines forth in its purest splendour upon the unattractive, the unworthy, the repellent. Herein is Love, in its purest essence and highest potency, not in our love to God, but in this, that God loved us. Hence follows the apparently paradoxical consequence, upon which the Epistle lays a unique emphasis, that our love to God is not even the most godlike manifestation of Love in us. It is gratitude for His benefits, adoration of His perfections, our response to God's love to us, but not its closest reproduction in kind. In this respect, indeed, God's love to man and man's love to God form the opposite poles, as it were, of the universe of Love, the one self-created and owing nothing to its object, the other entirely dependent upon and owing everything to the infinite perfection of its object; the one the overarching sky, the other merely its reflection on the still surface of the lake, And it is, as the Epistle insists, not in our love to God; but in our Christian love to our fellow-men, that the Divine Love is reproduced, with a relative perfection, in us (4<sup>12.19.20</sup>, cf. Eph. 4<sup>32</sup>-5<sup>2</sup>)

Such is the conception of the Love of God that St. John sets before us. In this entirely spontaneous, self-determined devotion of God to sinful men, this Divine passion to rescue them from sin, the supreme evil, and to bestow on them the supreme good, Eternal Life: in this, which is evoked by their need, not by their worthiness, which goes to the uttermost length of sacrifice, and bears the uttermost burden of their self-inflicted doom—in this, which is for ever revealed in the

mission of Jesus Christ, God's Only-Begotten Son—is Love.

This is at once the norm and the inspiration of all that is most truly to be called Love. Love is no merely passive, involuntary emotion awakened in one person by another. In the Epistle, as everywhere in the New Testament, it is a duty (4<sup>7.11</sup>) a subject of commandment (2<sup>7.8</sup> 3<sup>23b</sup> 4<sup>21</sup>), and is, therefore, a moral self-determination which, in man, must often act in direct opposition to natural instinct and inclination. And this is a self-determination to do good, good only, and always the highest good possible (4<sup>9</sup>), without regard to merit or attractiveness in the object (4<sup>10a</sup>) and that even at highest cost to self<sup>1</sup> (4<sup>10b</sup>).

Yet such a definition would be adequate only to one half of what Love is. Love is not solely benevolence issuing in beneficence. In its highest as well as in its lowest forms it contains the element of appetency. In its lower forms Love is predominantly an egoistic and appropriative impulse; in its highest form it becomes that marvellous power which reconciles and identifies the apparently opposite principles, egoism and altruism. One finds one's richest satisfaction in the happiness of others, one's own fullest self-realisation in promoting theirs. Love seeks not its own, yet makes all things its own. It is the utmost enrichment and enlargement of Life. "My beloved is mine"—a possession of which nothing can rob me. The more perfect the love, the more completely achieved is this mysterious result, this self-enlargement by self-communication, this self-losing self-finding. If I love my neighbour as myself, I regale myself with his prosperity, even as I share the bitter cup of his adversity; I am honoured in his praise, promoted in his advancement, gladdened in his joy, even as I am humbled in his shame or distressed in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. M. Gibbon, *Eternal Life*, p. 106.

his sin. In short, we might define the highest Love as that state of the moral nature in which the egoistic and the altruistic principles coalesce and are fused into one living experience. Such is the perpetual miracle of Love. Such is it in man. Such also is it in God, as it is delineated in the New Testament. No less than benevolence, God's Love displays the element of infinite desire and yearning quest. It seeks the lost as the shepherd seeks the strayed sheep upon the mountains; as a father's heart yearns after a wayward son. It becomes the source of an infinite Divine Joy over the sinner that repenteth; and because of the joy, it endures the cross and despises the shame. It is in God's Love, and transcendently in His self-sacrifice for the sinful and lost, that the Divine Life conies to its fullest self-realisation. And, though it is the self-communicating aspect of Divine Love that alone is presented in the Epistle, yet, always, Love is that for which self-communication is the fullest self-assertion, and all that Love is, is ascribed in its supreme perfection to God. God is Love.

(1) He is Love *essentially*. Like the sunlight which contains in itself all the hues of the spectrum, Love is not one of God's attributes, but that ill which all His moral attributes have their unity. The spring of all His actions, the explanation of all He does or ever can do is Love. (2) Therefore, also, His Love is *universal*. If there were any of His creatures whom He did not love, this would prove that there was something in His nature that was not Love, but was opposed to Love. Whatever be the mysteries of the past, present, or future, God is Love. That is St. John's great truth. He does not attempt to reconcile with it other and apparently conflicting truths in his theological scheme; possibly he was not conscious of any need to do so. But of this he is sure—God is Love. That fact must, in ways we cannot yet discern, include all other facts. No being is

unloved. Nothing happens that is not dictated or over-ruled by Love. (3) And if essential and universal, the Love of God is also eternal and unchangeable. It does not depend on any merit or reciprocation in its object, but overflows from an infinite fulness within itself. Our goodness did not call it forth; neither can our evil cause it to cease.

“Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
sends with the remover to remove.”

We may refuse to the Divine Love any inlet into our nature, may refuse to let it have its way with us, may so identify ourselves with evil as to turn it into an antagonistic force. This is the most awful fact in human life. But the sun is not extinguished, though shutters be closed and blinds drawn at midday; and though we may shut out God from our hearts, no being can by any means shut himself out from the great Heart of God. God is Love. It is the surest of all intuitions; the strongest cornerstone of the Christian Faith. Having known and believed the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord—the Love that came not by water only, but by blood also—we can tolerate no other conception of the Divine. (4) From all this it follows that we cannot ultimately conceive of God as a single and simple personality. Love, no more than Thought, can exist without an object. If we say that God was eternally the object of His own Love, we deny to Him the supreme prerogative of Love, self-communication. If we say that, either in time or from eternity, God created the universe in order to have an object for His Love, we make the Universe as necessary to God as God is to the Universe. His Love in creation was not the overflowing of the fountain, but the craving of the empty vessel. It is at this point that the Trinitarian doctrine becomes most helpful. It enables us to think of the Life of God not as an eternal solitude of



self-contemplation and self love, but as a life of communion:—the Godhead is filled with Love, the Love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit. So far from being a burden to faith, the doctrine of the Divine Trinity sheds a welcome light upon the mystery of God's Eternal Being, both as self-conscious personality and as Love. It is a mystery, but a mystery which "explains many other mysteries, and which sheds a marvellous light on God, on nature, and on man." It is the "consummation and only perfect protection of Theism"; and it will be ultimately found not only to influence every part of our theological system, but to be the vital basis of Christian Ethics.

### EXCURSUS

#### ON

#### *The Correlation of Righteousness and Love.*

God is Love; God is Righteous. The two conceptions appear to be equally fundamental; and a problem of no small perplexity is presented by the inevitable inquiry—what is their relation to each other? When it is said that God is Love, the only possible interpretation seems to be that Love is that essential moral quality of the Divine Nature in which all God's purposes and actions have their origin. But when it is said that God is Righteous, it seems equally inevitable to regard His Righteousness as determining all His purposes and ways. Both statements, moreover, are intuitively felt to be true. We can assert the one and then, the next moment, assert the other without any sense of contradiction. How, then, are we to think of the moral nature of God? Is it a unity, or is it a duality? Is it, to use a mathematical analogy, a circle having a single centre, or is it an ellipse formed around two different foci?

The latter solution of the problem has been most widely and authoritatively maintained. Righteousness and Love, it is held, are essentially different and mutually independent. They are not conterminous, Righteousness occupying the whole area of moral character and obligation, while Love covers only a part of it. God is righteous in all His ways; in some only is He loving. Righteousness is a necessity with Him; Love is secondary, and can be exercised only when it does not conflict with Righteousness. Let us consider whether this view is tenable.

(1) In the first place, Love is included in Righteousness. A distinc-

tion is drawn between duties of Right and duties of Love. But there certainly are duties of Love. Love is not a mood or inclination that may or may not be exercised at one's option. The maxim is laid down by Dörner<sup>1</sup> that duties of Right precede duties of Love—"We must be just before we are generous." But in what is this precedence grounded? Assuredly, not in any essential difference in the nature of the obligation. We are not under one sort of obligation to be honest and under another and inferior obligation to be kind. It is a mere and inevitable fact, indeed, that is expressed by the axiom, "We must be just before we are generous." We cannot in reality be generous before we are just. If we act as if we could, we are generous with what is not ours but another's; that is to say, we are not generous at all. The apparent self-communication is altogether unreal. And it is because the temptation to forget this is, for many persons, peculiarly strong that the maxim, "We must be just before we are generous," is so needful. But morally it is no whit less imperative that a man be generous according to his real ability, than that he be honest; that he forgive an injury, than that he refrain from committing one. Such difference as exists between duties of Right and duties of Love is not qualitative but quantitative. To succour the needy is as truly a duty as to pay one's mercantile debts; but to be dishonest is a more flagrant violation of the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," than to be ungenerous. The distinction between the two classes of duties is only a convenient expression of certain moral measurements, which experience has taught mankind to make, as to the duties that are the more universal and important, and the neglect of which works greater and wider injury.

The duties of love, then, are included in the area of Righteousness. According to all Christian Ethics, indeed, Love is the chief part of that sum of moral obligation which is Righteousness. (According to Matt. 22<sup>35-40</sup> and Rom. 13<sup>8-10</sup> it is the whole.) Love itself is the supreme duty, and the withholding of it the worst sin.

(2) But, further, it is clear that nothing that is truly called Love can be outside the area of Righteousness.

For since, *ex hypothesi*, Love always seeks for its object the greatest good possible to it, and cannot consent to sacrifice the greatest to any lower good, it sees for moral beings always the same thing that Righteousness seeks—their highest moral excellence. Human love may be blind and mistake its way, and give instead of bread a stone; but when enlightened it cannot, if true to its own ends, seek aught less than the best. And, on the other hand, enlightened Love never becomes an impulse to undutiful conduct in the person who loves, never permits the supposition that we can promote another's good by means that involve inferior conduct on our own part; on the contrary, it

<sup>1</sup> *System of Christian Ethics*, p. 91 (Eng. trans.).

becomes the strongest impulse to realise the full moral worth of one's own personality.

All that is truly called Love is included, in the area of Righteousness. (3) We come to a more disputed question when we ask—Is all Righteousness included in the area of Love? Can there be action that is righteous in which there is no Love? Or could there exist a person who, though destitute of Love, possessed the attribute of Righteousness? Without attempting to show in detail that all duties can be resolved into diverse applications of the law of Love, one may state the general question, whether, if Love were non-existent, consciousness of any moral obligation whatsoever is conceivable. The answer it seems to me, is that it is not conceivable. If my normal and proper state of soul towards my neighbour were one of absolute indifference to his well-being, I could no more stand in any moral relation to him than to a stone. We find, in fact, that this is the case. In those abnormal natures in which benevolence seems to be completely extinct, the whole moral consciousness seems to be equally a blank. It is true, indeed, that there are social virtues, such as truthfulness, honour, equity, that are frequently regarded as existing in an entirely self-centred form—"I shall keep honour with that scoundrel, not because it is due to him, but because it is due to myself." But such an attitude (not to say that it is not that of Christian morality) is not really so self-centred as it seems. He who thus acts is importing into the particular instance a feeling derived from his sense of obligation to mankind in general. He acts upon a code and habit of honour which are to him of such worth that he would not be compensated for their violation by any satisfaction derived from paying a rascal in his own coin. But this code and habit of honour are not self-centred. The self-respect to which honourable dealing with our neighbour is felt to be due is reflex. We could not be conscious that such conduct is necessary to self-respect, unless we were, in the first place, conscious that it is due from us to our neighbour.

It is in respect to Justice, and especially punitive Justice, that the question we are considering comes to its acutest point. And without discussing the ultimate origin of the idea of Justice, I again submit that if we were so constituted that the interests of our fellow-men were nothing to us, it would be impossible that we should be sensible of any obligation to justice, equity, or impartiality in our dealings with them. Whether or not the idea of Justice is directly derivable from Love as the distributive method by which Love deals with competing interests in such wise as to advance the best interests of all without detriment to any, it is at least evident that Justice is the instrument of Love. Love demands that we do justly. Nor is this less true of punitive Justice. In the popular understanding of the words, the Love of God is regarded as acting only in the direct communication of good; while the judicial, punitive, and destructive energies of the Divine Nature, which are evoked by evil, are assigned exclusively to Righteousness. But this

is a false antithesis, based upon an inadequate and one-sided conception of Love. Love, as seeking the highest good of its objects, is constrained to oppose, and to oppose passionately, all that works for the defeat of its purpose. Love is not merely a sweet, suave, and benignant disposition. Love has in it the sharpness of the sword and the fierceness of flame. Love hates—hates evil, which is opposed to Love. Love in the right-minded parent hates evil in the child; in the right-minded ruler, hates evil in the society which he governs, and encounters it with the full force of his opposition and displeasure. Love cares for social as well as for individual well-being. The more truly loving a parent is, the more inflexible will he be in rebuking and correcting evil within the home; in exercising justice, and preventing one member of the household from acting wrongfully towards another ; and, when the interests of the individual or of the whole family require it, in punishing and making an example of the wrong-doer, and even, should he prove incorrigible, in excluding him from the home. Yet all this Righteousness will he do for the ends and in the spirit of Love. Even so, the Love of God must assert itself in infinitely intense antagonism to all that works for the defeat of the eternal purpose of Love--Love that seeks the highest moral excellence of His creatures—for which He created and governs the universe. It is in accordance with that purpose that right shall be rewarded and wrong punished; nay, this must be inherent in the constitution of a universe created and ruled by Love. In the interests of the sinner himself, sin must be punished. Even if there be no hope of his amendment, in the interests of the moral universe God must still encounter sin with the full force of His displeasure. Yet all this Righteousness God will do for the ends and in the spirit of Love.

It is a strong point in the Calvinistic tradition to maintain that punitive justice cannot be derived from Love. Yet it is not only consistent with, it is a necessity of God's changeless purpose of Love that wrong be punished. And I fail to conceive the nature of a Justice that has no connection with this purpose. There is, doubtless, a genuine moral satisfaction in the humiliation of triumphant wrong, in beholding the evil-doer receive the due reward of his deeds; but this satisfaction is ultimately derived from sympathy with the central purpose of Love; it is the satisfaction of beholding the beneficent moral order of the universe reasserting itself, repairing the breaches that have been made in it, and guarding itself against similar infringements in the future. And, again, I fail to conceive how, apart from such a purpose of Love, the punishment of wrong would be right or rational; how, if the infliction of suffering--let us suppose the case—could be of no possible benefit either to the sinner himself or to any other being in the universe, present or future, there would still remain a ground of reason or of obligation for inflicting it. Nay more, I fail to conceive how a being without Love, wholly indifferent to the well-being of others, could

ever be conscious of Justice as a moral obligation, or be capable of finding any moral satisfaction in it. If, indeed, this were possible, if there could exist a being of whose moral consciousness Justice were the sole content,<sup>1</sup> for whom Love did not exist, or existed only as a secondary and accidental attribute, of whom it could be said<sup>2</sup> that "Love is an attribute which he may exercise or not as he will," that Mercy is optional with him," that "he is bound to be just, he is not bound to be generous," such a being would be morally of an infra-human type and vastly remote in character from the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. This whole theory rests, in fact, upon the idea which, as has been already said, is the negation of Christian Ethics, that Love is something over and above what is strictly right, a work of supererogation, a comely adornment of character, but not the very fibre of which its robe is woven.

The conclusion, then, at which I arrive is that Righteousness and Love are conterminous in area; that as little can Righteousness exist without Love as Love, truly so called, without Righteousness. But the question remains, how we are to conceive their relation to one another.

An interesting and fruitful view—true, I believe, as regards the fundamental position, though I cannot find myself in agreement with the conclusion reached—is that presented by Dorner.<sup>3</sup> "The essence of morality consists in an unchangeable but also eternally living union of a righteous will and a loving will. The two together and inseparably one constitute a holy love." Donner then construes Righteousness as the necessity of self-assertion in the Divine Nature, Love as the necessity of self-communication; and he has no difficulty in showing that without self-assertion ethical self-communication would be impossible. It would cease to be voluntary, and would become a merely instinctive benevolence, akin to a physical expansion like that of light or heat.

<sup>1</sup> One may try to imagine such a being, who should possess as his sole moral characteristic a passion for abstract Justice—for arriving at and executing equitable decisions regarding the merits of other beings—and who might find a peculiar satisfaction in thus administering Justice among men, or in a colony of ants, or a swarm of bees. But would such a characteristic be really moral? Would there be any ethical motive or value in such a passion for applying the rules of equity—there being no interest or sense of obligation to advance any one's well-being thereby—any more than in a passion for solving mathematical problems? Is there necessarily ethical value in the justice of a judge *qua* judge (the persons judged being to him but lay figures, representing so many judicial problems) any more than in the diagnosis of a physician? The crucial question is—Can any moral relation subsist between two persons apart from the obligation, recognised or unrecognised, to seek each other's good, that is to say, apart from Love? It does not seem possible. The prerequisite of all moral relationship is Love.

<sup>2</sup> See Steven's *Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 17S.

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Ethics*, pp. 76–79 (Eng. trans.).

But then it would seem to be equally true that, without self-communication, ethical self-assertion is impossible. The self-assertion or righteousness of God is that in all He does He must be true to Himself, must act according to the voluntary self-determination of His own moral nature. But that nature is holy love; and only by acting in holy love can God truly assert Himself. This, however, Dorner refuses to admit, maintaining that ethical self-assertion is possible without self-communication. And when we ask wherein this consists, he replies that it is in God's assertion of His non-communicable attributes—of His self-existence, His glory and majesty, of "Himself in the distinction which, to thought and in fact, exists between Him and the non-self-existing universe." "It is a guarding of the difference between Him and the world, even when He imparts himself to it and wills to be self-impacting." But this is far from satisfactory. It amounts to this, that in communicating all of His own nature that is communicable,—life, physical, rational, and spiritual,—God is both loving and righteous; while in asserting what is incommunicable His self-existence and supremacy as Creator and Lawgiver—He is not loving, but is exclusively righteous. But this does not seem to yield that living, inseparable union of a loving and a righteous will which Dorner rightly posits as "the essence of morality." For those of God's attributes that are not directly communicable may yet be employed for the ends of Love; as, for example, His self-existence for Creation, His power and omniscience for beneficent providential rule, His moral authority for the moral education and discipline of His creatures; and, if they were not so employed, His will would not be a loving will to its utmost possibility—God would not be Love. But if God's assertion of all His attributes is directed to the highest good of His creatures; if, as Christianity teaches, it is in blessing them, and, above all, in employing all His attributes, communicable and non-communicable, for their rescue from the death of Sin unto Life Everlasting; if Christ is the moral image of the Invisible God, and if it is in that He "counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant," that the Divine Self is supremely asserted and the difference between God and the world supremely manifested,—then His fullest self-communication is also His highest self-assertion. The twain constitute that living and inseparable union of a loving and a righteous will which is the essence of all morality. And, in short, a moral nature cannot be thus divided into compartments. Separate attributes exist only as abstractions. If a person is perfectly loving, he is loving always and in everything; if he is perfectly righteous, he is righteous always and in everything; and if he is both perfectly loving and perfectly righteous, he is loving in his righteousness and righteous in his love.

The weakness of Dorner's argument lies in regarding Love as exclusively self-communication, and not rather as that in which self-communication and self-assertion coalesce. Put accepting his definition

of the essence of morality as the living, inseparable union of a loving and a righteous will, we may, perhaps, reach a conception of the correlation of the Righteousness and the Love of God along the following lines.

1. The perfect moral state is that in which self-communication is also self-assertion. This is the mind that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2<sup>5-8</sup>). Such Love, therefore, is the content of all moral excellence (Matt. 23<sup>35-40</sup>, Rom. 13<sup>8-10</sup>). It is the inner principle without which even actions that are formally right are morally worthless (1 Cor. 13<sup>1-3</sup>). All graces and virtues are either special manifestations of Love, as gentleness, compassion, reverence; or are constitutional qualities of the will—as truthfulness, obedience, gratitude, perseverance, courage--or of the mind—as wisdom—which are ancillary to the perfect work of Love. All duties spring ultimately from the one duty of Love. Even the duty of justice or equity does so; for, if we were so constituted as to be conscious of no obligation to seek the well-being of others, there would be no reason, except a prudential one, for doing to others as we would that they should do to us.

2. Because Love is that power by which self-communication and self-assertion coalesce in the unity of Life, it is not only the sum of all moral excellence, but the source of the highest moral satisfactions. It is by means of Love that Life runs its full circle, as if a river should carry back: to its source all the wealth its fertilising influences have produced. And because it thus unites the egoistic and the altruistic principles, it is also the highest impulse to all duty. It is as much the supreme and universal power in the moral realm as gravitation is in physics.

3. As being, thus, the content of and the impulse to all moral excellence, and, at the same time, the source of the highest moral satisfactions, Love is the *summum bonnum*. Without it no real good is possible; and there is no blessedness conceivable beyond that of a society of persons all united in perfect love. Each communicates himself to all and all to each. Each seeks the joy and well-being of all, and, in turn, enjoys the joy and is blessed by the well-being of all. Such a society would be the perfect organism for the perfect life; and such an organism God is fashioning and perfecting in the Body of Christ.

4. God is Love; and, because He is Love, it is His Will to impart this highest good to all beings capable of participating in it. Because He is Love, it is His Will to make Love the law of His universe, His gift to all beings made after His own likeness, and His requirement from them. And this, I take it, is the Righteousness of God—that He asserts Love, the law of His own Life, as the law of all life that is derived from Him. This assertion necessarily acts in two directions; in the communication of Love, the highest good; and in antagonism to all that is opposed to it. These modes of action are not derived from conflicting or mutually independent principles, but are diverse applications of the same principle. If the eternal purpose of

God is to produce beings capable of the highest good and to impart it to them, then, by His very character as Love, He is also constrained so to order the universe that whatever tends to the defeat of that purpose shall meet His unceasing antagonism. This will take the form of what we call punitive Justice. And what makes the punitive Justice of God so terrible is that it is the Justice of one who is Love, and that even Infinite Love can find no alternative.

"Thus, then, we may see that the moral nature of God is a unity, not a duality. Righteousness is Love in the imperative mood; is Love legislative and administrative; is the consistency of Love to its own high and eternal end. The Righteousness of God is that He makes Love the law of His own action, and that He, in His Love, can tolerate nothing less and nothing else as His purpose and requirement for His creatures than that what He acts upon they also shall act upon, and that the character He possesses they also shall possess. And nothing else than this is Righteousness in man. Duty is the obligation which is inherent in the very nature of Love, and could not conceivably exist in a being destitute of Love, to seek the highest attainable good of all whom one's conduct affects, that is to say, to be faithful to Love's highest ends. And when, in popular language, Duty is contrasted with Love, the true significance of this is that Duty is the consistency of Love to its higher end, in the face of egoistic inclination or of temptation to decline upon some lower end.

It will be seen that the view here presented involves these fundamental positions. (1) All moral life is necessarily social. As self-consciousness is psychologically possible only by the distinction of the ego from the non-ego, so moral self-consciousness is awakened only in our relation to other personalities. An absolutely solitary unit (without God or neighbour) could have no moral consciousness. Our moral ideal of self is our conception of the ideal man in all his relations to God and his fellows; and apart from such relations moral self-love is inconceivable. (2) The supreme end is Life. All that we call morality is the "Way of Life," the means to that fullest, highest Life which St. John calls Eternal. And it may be said also that moral excellence (Love) is an end in itself; for it is only by our entering with that vivid, spontaneous response, which is at once self-communication and self-assertion, into all the relations, human and divine, amid which we have our being,



that Life is realised. Hence, while it has just been said that Life is the *summum bonum*, this may be also said of moral excellence, that is, of Love. Love is not only the way to Life, it is the living of the Eternal Life. (3) All this implies, as has been shown, a Trinitarian conception of the Divine Nature.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST.

THE centre of doctrinal interest in the Epistle is the Incarnation, in which St. John finds the single guarantee of a true manifestation of the Divine Life in man, and the single channel for its permanent communication to men. Before proceeding, however, to the study of the chief Christological passages, it will be convenient to advert to some few points that lie on the circumference of the subject, yet are of great interest.

The nomenclature of the Epistle is noticeably different in some respects from that of the Fourth Gospel. "Jesus Christ" has now become the proper personal name of our Lord (1<sup>3</sup> 2<sup>1</sup> 3<sup>23</sup> 5<sup>20</sup>). "Jesus" is not found except in conjunction with "Christ" or some other term of theological significance, such as "Son of God" (1<sup>7</sup>), or where the sense requires some such term to be supplied (4<sup>3</sup>). The absolute use of **εκεινοj** (2<sup>6</sup> 3<sup>3.5.7.16</sup> 4<sup>17</sup>) and of **αυτοj** (2<sup>8.12.27.28</sup> 3<sup>2.3</sup> 4<sup>21</sup>) almost as a name of the Saviour is peculiar<sup>1</sup> to the Epistle. Blending a certain idealising reverence with the allusiveness of familiar affection, this usage is singularly expressive of a state of mind to which, although the mists of time have gathered around the image of the historical Jesus, He is still the one ever-present living personality. As in old-style Scottish parlance, a wife would speak of her husband, present or departed as

<sup>1</sup> Unless we recognise the same usage in John 19<sup>35</sup>.

"himself";<sup>1</sup> so with the Apostle it is needless to say who He is. There is but one "He."

Other designations applied to Christ are "righteous" (**dikaioj**, 2<sup>1</sup> 3<sup>7</sup>) "pure" **agnoj**, 3<sup>3</sup>), "the Holy One" (**o[agioj**, 2<sup>20</sup>). The first of these (**dikaioj**) expresses the broadest conception of His moral perfection. In every aspect of character and conduct He absolutely fulfils the idea of "right." In **agnoj**, again, the primary idea is that of freedom from moral stain.<sup>2</sup> The word may indicate a previous state of actual impurity (Ps. 51<sup>12</sup>), and it necessarily implies the thought of possible impurity. Broadly, we might say that Purity (**agneia**) is the negative aspect of Love. The command to "purify oneself" (3<sup>3</sup>) is equivalent to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (2<sup>15</sup>). Purity is that element in holy character which is wrought out by the discipline of temptation; and thus the word imparts a peculiar significance to the passage in which it is applied to Christ. Hoping in Him, we are to purify ourselves, even as He Who, though tempted in all points like as we are, was and is pure (3<sup>3</sup>).

In **agioj** (=ψῖτῶ) the same root-idea of separation from evil has been merged in that of consecration to God. The sense is religious<sup>3</sup> rather than, per se, ethical. To Christ it is applied in a technical Messianic sense. He is the "Holy Servant" (**o[agioj paij**, Acts 4<sup>30</sup>), the fulfilment of the Old Testament ideal of the Servant of Jehovah. He is recog-

<sup>1</sup> Or a farm-servant, of his master. In Theocritus (xxiv. 50), Amphitryon, calling his retainers from their beds, cries, **astate dmoj talasif ronej, auoj ahti?** "It is himself (your master) that is calling." It is inevitable to compare the Pythagorean **auoj e@a**.

<sup>2</sup> Biblically, **agnoj** the equivalent of ῥῖπῶ=Leviticly clean. In classical Greek, the prevalent sense is that of freedom from moral defilement; more specifically, chastity. Thus in Homer **agnh** is the epithet of the virgin goddesses Artemis and Persephone. This specific sense is frequently retained in the N.T. (2 Cor. 6<sup>6</sup> 7<sup>11</sup> 11<sup>2</sup>, Tit. 2<sup>5</sup>, I Tim. 5<sup>2</sup>, I Pet. 3<sup>2</sup>). The broader sense is exemplified in 1 Pet. 1<sup>22</sup> (**taj yuxaj upwn hgnikotej**) and Jas. 4<sup>8</sup> (**agnisate kardiaj, diyuxoi**).

<sup>3</sup> Thus the Father Himself is **agioj** (John 17<sup>11</sup>); the Divine Spirit is **to agion pneuma**; the angels are **agioi**; Christians are **agioi** in virtue of their Divine calling (1 Cor. 1<sup>2</sup>, 2 Tim. 1<sup>9</sup>).

nised by evil spirits (Mark 1<sup>24</sup>, Luke 4<sup>34</sup>), and confessed by disciples (John 6<sup>69</sup>) as "the Holy One of God " (**o[agioj tou? qeou?**). He is **o[agioj o[al]hqinoj** (Rev. 3<sup>7</sup>), the "true" or "genuine" Holy One, who hath the Key of David—who wields all Messianic prerogatives. And it is obviously in the same sense that He is named "the Holy One" in the Epistle (2<sup>20</sup>). It is as the Messiah, the Anointed, that He bestows upon the members of the Messianic community the "anointing" (**xri?ma**) of the Spirit.

Passing from these points, we proceed to consider the great Christological thesis of the Epistle. That thesis is *the complete, permanent, and personal identification of the historical Jesus with the Divine Being who is the Word of Life* (1<sup>1</sup>), *the "Christ"* (4<sup>2</sup>) *and the Son of God* (5<sup>5</sup>); and it is characteristic of the author's method that this, which is to be the subject of repeated development in the body of the Epistle, is precluded in its first sentence. The abstract of the Apostolic Gospel which is there prefixed to the Epistle, as the fountain-head from which all its teaching is drawn, contains the two complementary truths: that Jesus is the "Word" in whom the Eternal Life of God has been fully manifested, and that this manifestation has been made through a humanity in which there is nothing visionary or unreal, and is vouched for by every applicable test as genuine and complete. The Incarnate Word has been "seen," "heard," "handled" (1<sup>1-3</sup>).<sup>1</sup>

In the Epistle this thesis is maintained in the form of a vigorous polemic against certain heretical teachers whom the writer calls "antichrists,"<sup>2</sup> in whom he discovers the true representatives of that arch-enemy of God and His Christ who figured so vividly in apocalyptic literature and in the popular belief. That we must recognise in these "antichrists" one or more of the many ramifications of Gnosticism, is beyond question. Though our knowledge of Gnosticism in the Johannine age is but dim and fragmentary,

<sup>1</sup> v. *supra*, pp. 46-48, 109.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XVI,

still, what we do gather from the scanty records of the Apostolic Fathers fits into the Christological passages of the Epistle so accurately that it renders their interpretation certain where otherwise it would be only conjectural. From the Epistle itself we learn that the heretical teachers denied that Jesus is the Christ (2<sup>22</sup>), or, more definitely, "Christ come in the flesh" (4<sup>3</sup>); they denied that Jesus is "the Son of God" (4<sup>15</sup>); and they asserted that He came "by water only" and not "by blood also" (5<sup>6</sup>). Plainly, what is here in view is, in the one or the other of its forms, the Docetic theory of Christ's Person; for it appears that the theory existed in two more or less defined types. There was the crude unmitigated Docetism described in the Ignatian Epistles, according to which Jesus was the Christ, but was in no sense a real human being. It was only a phantom that walked the earth and was crucified. The Incarnation was nothing else than a prolonged theophany.<sup>1</sup> The other is specially associated with the name of Cerinthus,<sup>2</sup> of whom Irenaeus reports (*Haer.* I. 26. i.) that he taught that Jesus was not born of a virgin, but was the son of Joseph and Mary, and was distinguished from other men only by superiority in justice, prudence, and wisdom; that, at His Baptism the Christ descended upon Him in the form of a

<sup>1</sup> An interesting specimen of a Docetic Gospel of this type is extant in the recently published Acts of John, the date assigned to which is "not later than the second half of the first century" (*Texts and Studies*, vol. v., No. 1, p. x). According to this Gospel, our Lord had no proper material existence. He assumed different appearances to different beholders, and at different times. Sometimes His body was small and uncomely; at other times His stature reached unto heaven. Sometimes He seemed to have a solid material body, at other times He appeared immaterial. It was only a phantom Christ that was crucified. During the Crucifixion, the real Christ appears to John on the Mount of Olives and says, "John, unto the multitude down below in Jerusalem I am being crucified and pierced with lances and reeds, and gall and vinegar are given me to drink; but I put it into thine heart to come up unto this mountain, that thou mightest hear matters needful for a disciple to learn from his Master and for a man to learn from his God." The Lord then shows to John the mystic Cross of Light and the Lord Himself above the Cross, not having any shape, but only a voice.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter II.

dove, and announced the unknown Father; that, at the end of His life, the Christ again left Jesus; that Jesus died and rose again, but that the Christ, being spiritual, remained without suffering. According to this view, Jesus was not the Christ, but only, for the period between the Baptism and the Crucifixion, the earthly habitation of the heavenly Christ. On either of the theories the Incarnation was only a semblance. The one denied reality to the human embodiment of the Divine Life; the other, admitting the reality of the human embodiment, denied its permanent and personal identification with the Divine. By some exegetes, traces of both forms of the Docetic theory have been discerned in the Epistle. We shall find, however, that the Cerinthian heresy alone offers a sufficient objective for all the Christological passages.

These passages are 2<sup>21-23</sup> 4<sup>1-3</sup> 4<sup>15</sup> 5<sup>6-8</sup>. And we shall, in the first place, simply state the doctrinal content of each. "Who is the liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" (2<sup>22</sup>). Here the assertion or denial that Jesus is the Christ has no relation to the early controversy regarding the Messiahship<sup>2</sup> of Jesus in the Jewish sense, a controversy which now could possess little more than an antiquarian interest.

In Gnostic nomenclature "Christ" was one of the aeons—spiritual existences emanating from the Godhead who appeared on earth in phantasmal or temporary embodiment in Jesus; and the Apostle also uses the name "Christ" as equivalent to the "Word" or "the Son of God," to signify the Divine pre-existent factor in the personality of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> For example, by Pfleiderer (ii. 433). Cerinthus was a contemporary of St. John; and if we accept Lightfoot's argument (*Apostolic Fathers*, i. 368), that the more crudely Docetic view must have been the earlier, the natural tendency being toward modification, it is evident that the polemic of the Epistle might, as a matter of date, have been directed against either or both forms of the heresy.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. especially Acts 18<sup>28</sup> where the subject of controversy, though verbally the same, is substantially quite different. There is no trace in the Epistle of conflict with Jewish or Ebionistic error.

Evidently, then, it is the Cerinthian heresy that is here repudiated. As to the manner in which this school of Gnosticism construed the personality of the composite Christ-Jesus during the period of union, we are ignorant; but the essential significance of the theory, truly and tersely stated, was that Jesus was not the Christ. There was only a temporary and incomplete association of Jesus with the Christ.

"Hereby recognise (or, ye recognise) the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth Jesus (as)<sup>1</sup> Christ come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God" (4<sup>2.3a</sup>). Here the statement is more specific, but to the same effect; it is still the Cerinthian heresy that is combatted. The emphasis is not upon the real humanity of Jesus so much as upon the personal identity of the pre-existent Divine Christ with Jesus. There is no mere association, however intimate, between Jesus and the Christ. Jesus is the Christ, come in the flesh.

A third time the Apostle returns to the same theme. "Whosoever confesseth that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (4<sup>15</sup>). Here the true con-

<sup>1</sup> **εἰ** tout& **γινώσκετε** τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ? **καὶ** πνεύματος οὐκ ὁμολογεῖ? **Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν** **εἰ** σάρκι ἐλῆλυότα **εἰ** τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, **καὶ** καὶ πνεύματος οὐκ ὁμολογεῖ? **τὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰ** τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστίν

Three different constructions of the crucial phrase in these verses are possible.

(a) **Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν εἰ σάρκι ἐλῆλυότα** may be taken as one object after **ὁμολογεῖ?**—"Every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ, Who is come in the flesh". (Huther, Westcott). Grammatically, this lies open to the objection that the article is (normally) demanded (**τὸν εἰ σάρκι ἐλῆλυότα**); in point of sense, that it contains no definite statement—does not specify in what sense we are to confess Jesus Christ, Who is come in the flesh. (b) **Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν** may be taken as a proper name (cf. 1<sup>3</sup> 2<sup>1</sup> 3<sup>23</sup> 5<sup>20</sup>). Thus the confession would be expressly that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; and would be opposed to that thoroughgoing Docetism which attributed to our Lord only the semblance of a human body (Weiss, Pfleiderer). But it is quite unnecessary to find here a reference to a different type of error. (c) For **Ἰησοῦν** alone may be taken as the direct object after **ὁμολογεῖ?** and **Χριστόν εἰ σάρκι ἐλῆλυότα** as a secondary predicate. "Every spirit that confesseth Jesus as Christ come in the flesh" (Haupt). This construction is rendered probable by so close a parallel as **ἐὰν τίς αὐτόν ὁμολογήσῃ Χριστόν** (John 9<sup>22</sup>), and, I think, certain by the fact that in the following clause **Ἰησοῦν** stands alone as object after **ὁμολογεῖ?**

fession, "Jesus is the Christ," appears as "Jesus is the Son of God." The terms are interchangeable, if not synonymous; and, in this instance, "Son of God" is preferred as bringing out the filial relation of Him who is sent to Him who sends (4<sup>14</sup>), and thus exhibiting the immensity of the Divine Love manifested in the mission of Christ.

Finally, we have the much-debated passage, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He that came by water and blood; not by the water only, but by the water and by the blood" (5<sup>5.6a</sup>). The obscurity of the whole passage is due, doubtless, to the fact that the first readers of the Epistle, for whom it was written, were already familiar with the author's handling of the topics that are here merely indicated. Such expressions as the "water" and the "blood" are a kind of verbal shorthand, intended merely to recall to his readers the exposition of those themes which they had heard from his lips. Without attempting a full account<sup>1</sup> of the extraordinarily numerous and diverse explanations, ancient and modern, of these words, it must suffice to say that an interpretation based on a supposed reference to the sacraments was inevitable (so Lutheran commentators generally; also, in part, Westcott). But, while Baptism and the Lord's Supper do exhibit sacramentally those elements in Christ's saving work that correspond respectively to His coming by Water and by Blood, to explain the text by direct reference to these is inadequate.<sup>2</sup> Equally inevitable was the effort to explain the passage by the account given in the Gospel of the efflux of water and blood from the Saviour's wounded side (Augustine and ancient commentators generally). But it may be said with consider-

<sup>1</sup> This may be found in Huther, pp. 456-458.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is made with reference only to the last mention (5<sup>6</sup>) of the "Water and the Blood. Subsequently (5<sup>7.8</sup>) there is, I think, a natural transition from the historical realities to their permanent memorials, the Christian Sacraments. See Chapter VII.



able confidence that while this passage in the Epistle may serve to explain the symbolical meaning which is apparently attached in the Gospel to that incident of the Passion, the incident in the Gospel sheds no light upon the passage in the Epistle. The clue to this is the Docetic tenet that the aeon Christ descended upon Jesus at His Baptisms and departed again from Him before His Passion. Thus it is evident that the "water" here denotes our Lord's Baptism, the "blood," His death on Calvary. The Cerinthian heresy taught that the Christ came by "water," but denied that He came by "blood" also. Hence St. John's repeated and emphatic assertion that He came "not by the water only, but by the water and the blood."

As Westcott rightly points out, "He that cometh," "He that came" (**o[le]xomenoj, o[el] qwn**), are terms used in the Gospels, and notably in St. John, as a technical designation of the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> When, therefore, it is said that Jesus the Son of God "came" by water and by blood, it is signified that first by His Baptism and then by His Death, Jesus entered actually and effectively upon His Messianic ministry. He "came" by water (**di iudatoj**).<sup>2</sup> In their own sense the Gnostics maintained that Christ "came" by water; in another sense, the Epistle asserts the same<sup>3</sup>—in what sense is clearly demonstrated in the Gospels, where the Baptism is invariably regarded as the actual beginning of His Messianic ministry (John 1<sup>31</sup>, Acts 1<sup>22</sup>; Mark's Gospel *begins* with the Baptism). When Jesus definitely consecrated Himself in the full consciousness of His calling

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John 3<sup>31</sup> 6<sup>14</sup> 7<sup>27</sup> 11<sup>27</sup> 12<sup>13</sup>; Matt. 11<sup>3</sup> 23<sup>39</sup>, and cognate passages in the other Gospels.

<sup>2</sup> The exact significance of **dia** with **iudatoj** and **aihatoj** is not easy to determine. The idea may be that of the door, so to say, through which Christ entered upon his mission.

<sup>3</sup> It might be supposed, were one to take this passage by itself, that the writer was half a Gnostic, that he held the view that Christ descended into Jesus at His baptism, while strenuously resisting the idea that the Christ departed from Jesus before His Passion.

(Matt. 3<sup>15</sup>); the Spirit was bestowed on Him "not by measure" for its accomplishment (Matt. 3<sup>16</sup>); and the voice from Heaven testified His predestination to it (Matt. 3<sup>17</sup>). But He came by Blood also. This the Gnostics denied; this the Apostle affirms.<sup>1</sup> He who was baptized of John in Jordan, and He whose life-blood was shed on Calvary is the same Jesus, the same Christ, the same Son of God eternally. For He "came" by blood. He did not depart by blood. He laid down His life only that he might take it again. Death was for Him only the entrance upon the endless career of His redemptive work, the unhindered fruitfulness of His life (John 12<sup>24</sup>).

If the foregoing exposition of the chief Christological passages has been right, it has been made clear that these passages all promulgate the same truth in substantially the same way. If one might express it mathematically, there is on one side of an equation the Divine, or, at least, super-terrestrial, Being Who is the "Word of Life," the "Christ," the "Son of God"; on the other side, the human Jesus. But the two sides of the equation are not only equivalent, they are identical. Without ceasing to be what He, is, the Son of God has become the human Jesus; and Jesus, without ceasing to be truly human, is the Son of God.

An investigation of the wider problems presented by the Johannine use of these titles, Logos, Christ, Son of God, cannot be undertaken here." Only the more immediate theological implications of the passages that have been passed under review may be adverted to. It is at once

<sup>1</sup> "Not by the water only, but by the water and by the blood." Both the repetition and its form are directly determined by the repudiated error. The first member of the clause denies what Cerinthus affirmed, the second affirms what he denied.

<sup>2</sup> See on these topics, Scott's *Fourth Gospel*; especially the admirable chapter on "The Christ, the Son of God."

evident that, in the Epistle, these titles imply the pre-temporal existence of the Person to whom they are applied. Further, while for the abstract monotheism of the Gnostic the "Christ" could be nothing more than an emanation from the Eternal God, for the writer of the Epistle He is Himself Eternal and Divine. He is the "Word of Life" (1<sup>1</sup>); and that this title implies relationship and fellowship within the Godhead itself is signified by the fact that the life manifested in Him is that Eternal Life which was in relation to the Father (**htij hñ proj ton patera**, 1<sup>2</sup>). This relation is otherwise expressed by the terms "Father" and "Son"; and these terms are employed in no figurative or merely ethical sense, but in their full signification. The Son, no less than the Father, is the object of religious faith (5<sup>13</sup>), hope (3<sup>3</sup>), and obedience (3<sup>23</sup>). He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also (2<sup>23</sup>). Our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ (1<sup>3</sup>). Believers are exhorted to "abide" in Christ (2<sup>28</sup>), as elsewhere to "abide" in God. The very syntax of the Epistle testifies how the truth of the essential Divinity of Christ has become the unconscious presupposition of all the Apostle's thinking; for again and again<sup>1</sup> it is left uncertain whether "God" or "Christ" is the subject of statement, an ambiguity which would be reckless except on the presumption of their religious equivalence.

It would be a questionable proceeding, indeed, to read into the Epistle the full Trinitarian doctrine of the hypostatic Sonship. The problem of recognising personal distinctions within the Godhead and at the same time preserving its essential unity—a problem of which the Trinitarian doctrine is, after all, only the mature statement

<sup>1</sup> Thus in 2<sup>25</sup> and 4<sup>24</sup> the reference of afros is quite ambiguous. In 2<sup>3</sup> **auŋon** ought grammatically to refer to Christ as the nearest antecedent, but does refer to God. In 2<sup>28</sup> **auŋoj** is Christ; while in 2<sup>29</sup>, without any note of transition, the unexpressed subject is God. In 3<sup>1-3</sup> again, **auŋoj** ought grammatically to refer to God (taking its antecedent from 2<sup>39</sup>), but actually refers to Christ.

—has not yet been fully confronted. Yet it is not too much to say that all the elements of that problem are present here in the fundamental implication that Jesus Christ, in His pre-incarnate form of being, existed eternally in an essential unity of nature with God.

This, however, is only an implication. The crucial truth of the Epistle is Christological, not theological; its doctrinal emphasis is not upon the relation of Divine Father and Divine Son, but upon the relation of the Divine Son to the historic Jesus. And it will be well to look more closely at the most explicit of the various forms in which this relation is defined. "Every spirit that confesseth Jesus as Christ come in the flesh (**İhsouñ Xriston eñ sarki> eļ hl uqota**) is of God " (4<sup>2</sup>). The statement, simple as it is, is of exquisite precision. The verb used (**eñsesqai**) implies the pre-existence of Christ. The perfect tense (**eļ hl uqota**) points to His coming not only as a historical event, but as an abiding fact. The Word has become flesh for ever.<sup>1</sup> The noun (**sarc**) indicates the fulness of His participation in human nature, the flesh being the element of this which is in most obvious contrast with His former state of being<sup>2</sup> (John 1<sup>14</sup>). Even the preposition **eñ** is of pregnant significance. It is not altogether equivalent to "into" (**eij**). The Gnostics also believed that Christ came into the flesh. But the assertion is that He has so come into the flesh as to abide therein; the Incarnation is a permanent union of the Divine with human nature. Finally, this union is realised in the self-identity of a Person, Jesus Christ, who is at once Divine and human.

Again, however, we must not read into this the results of later Christological developments. It may be argued

<sup>1</sup> In 2 John<sup>7</sup> we find the unique expression **eñxomenon eñ sarki**, emphasising Christ's continuous activity, or, perhaps, His future coining, in the flesh.

<sup>2</sup> It is out of the question to understand by **sarc**; "human nature as having sin lodged in it" (Haupt).

that the orthodox formula, "one Person in two natures for ever," is implied in the teaching of the Epistle; but there is nothing that asserts it. The truth taught in all its simplicity, and in all the majesty of its immeasurable consequences, is that of one Person in two states, a preincarnate and an incarnate state of being. Without change of personal identity, the Eternal Son of God is become and for ever continues to be Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God the Christ come in the flesh.

We next proceed to a most interesting and important part of our subject—*the practical significance* of the doctrine, as this is exhibited in the Epistle. For it is neither in the interests of abstract theology nor as the champion of ecclesiastical orthodoxy that St. John proclaims the truth of the Incarnation as the "roof and crown" of all truth, but solely from a sense of its supreme necessity to the spiritual life of the Church and the salvation of the world; because he perceives in the denial of it the extinction of the Light of Life which the Gospel has brought to mankind. Thus, in introducing the subject, he first of all sets himself to awaken in the minds of his readers an adequate perception of its gravity: "I write unto you not because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no He is of the truth " (2<sup>21</sup>).<sup>1</sup> He writes because they know the truth. His aim is not to instruct their ignorance, but to arouse them to realise the significance of their knowledge. He has no actually new elements of Christian truth to impart, but would quicken their sense of the irreconcilable opposition of truth and falsehood, and of its stupendous import in this instance. It was no merely speculative antagonism that existed between the truth they had heard from the beginning (2<sup>24</sup>) and the corrupt doctrine of the antichrists. The matter at issue was no mere difference of opinion. The alternative was between making truth or

<sup>1</sup> See Notes, *in loc.*

falsehood, and that on the greatest of all subjects, the guide of life. "Who is the liar," he passionately exclaims, "but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" and then, without conjunction or connecting particle of any kind, clause follows upon clause like the blows of a hammer, "This is the antichrist, (this is) he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son hath not even the Father; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also" (2<sup>22</sup>. 2<sup>23</sup>).

Here we perceive the first of the great practical consequences which depend upon the Incarnation. (a) It alone secures and guarantees the Christian revelation of God, and with its denial that revelation is immediately cancelled, "He that hath not the Son hath not even the Father"<sup>1</sup> (2<sup>23</sup>).

Contrary as it might be to the intention of the Gnostic teachers or to their interpretation of their own tenets, the result was that, by taking away the real Divine Sonship of Jesus, they subverted the Divine Fatherhood itself. It must be observed that the argument is not one of abstract logic, namely, that if there be no Divine Son there can be no Divine Father. It is concrete and experiential. What is in question is not God's absolute Being, but our "having" not Fatherhood and Sonship as inherent in the Divine Nature, but the revelation to men of the Father in the Son. Refusing to recognise more than a shadowy and dubious connection between the historic Jesus and the Eternal Son of God, Gnosticism took away the one medium through which a sure and satisfying revelation of the Eternal Father has been given to the world. It was still true that no man had seen God at any time; but it was not true that the Only-Begotten Son had declared Him; not true that he who had seen Jesus had seen the Father. With the denial of Jesus as the full personal

<sup>1</sup> ~~oude-ton patera ekei~~. "Has not even the Father"; or, at the least, "Has not the Father either." Cf. the translation quoted by Augustine: *qui negat Filium nec Filium nec Patrem habet*. For the intensive sense of ~~oude~~ cf. Gal. 2<sup>3</sup>.

incarnation of the Divine, the whole Christian conception of God was but the "baseless fabric of a vision," having no point of contact with the world of known fact. As regards Gnosticism, the Apostle's statement was entirely true. Its God was a being so absolutely transcendent as to be incapable of actual relation to humanity; and the gulf between absolute Deity and finite being remained unbridged by all its intricate hierarchy of semi-divine intermediaries. But the Apostle's contention, that to deny the Son is to be unable to retain even the Father, is no less verified in the history of modern thought. It is not matter of argument, but of fact, that the God-consciousness finds its true object most completely in Jesus Christ; and that when God is not found in Christ, He is not ultimately found either in Nature or in History. Theism does not ultimately survive the rejection of Christ as the personal incarnation of God. The process of thought that necessitates the denial of the supernatural in Him has Agnosticism as its inevitable goal.<sup>1</sup>

(b) But, if the validity of the whole Christian Revelation of God is involved in the fact of the Incarnation, this is most distinctly true of that which is its centre. It is highly significant that the writer whose message to the world is "God is Love" derives it so exclusively from this single source. He has nothing to say of that benevolent wisdom of God in Nature, of that ever-enduring mercy of God in History, that kindled the faith and adoration of Old Testament psalmists and prophets. His vision is concentrated on the one supreme fact, "Herein was the Love of God manifested towards us, that God sent His Only-Begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him" (4<sup>9</sup>). Compared with this, all other revelations are feeble and dim, are "as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine." Here is Love worthy to be called

<sup>1</sup> See the convincing historical demonstration of this in Orr's *Christian View of God and the World*. pp. 37-53.

Divine. And the one unambiguous proof of the existence of such Love in God and of His bestowal of such Love upon men absolutely vanishes, unless the Jesus who was born in Bethlehem and died on Calvary is Incarnate God. Here, again, it is in the practical significance of the Gnostic theories that we discover the source of St. John's indignation. It was not in the metaphysics of Gnosticism so much as in its ethical presuppositions and consequences that he discerned the veritable Antichrist. Its theory of the absolute Divine transcendence denied to God what, to the Christian mind, is the "topmost, ineffablest crown" of His glory—self-sacrificing Love. It was, in fact, the translation into metaphysic of the spirit of the world, of the axiom that the supreme privilege of greatness is self-centred bliss, exemption from service, burden-bearing, and sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> "They are of the world, and, therefore, speak they of the world, and the world heareth them" (4<sup>5</sup>). Ignorant of the Divine secret of Love, having no comprehension that greatness is greatest in self-surrender, and that to be highest of all is to be servant and saviour of all, unable, therefore, to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of a crucified Jesus, Gnosticism fashioned to its own mind a God wholly transcendent and impassible, a Christ who only scarred to suffer and lay down His life for men, a Gospel drained of its life-blood, a Gospel whose Divine fire, kindling men's souls to thoughts and deeds of love and righteousness, was extinguished. And the result of thus making man's salvation easy, so to say, for God—salvation by theophany—was to make it easy for man also—salvation by creed without conduct, by knowledge without

<sup>1</sup> "Omnis enim per se divum natura necesse est  
Immortali aevo summa cum pace fruatur,  
Semota a nostris rebus, seiunctaque longe.  
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periculis,  
Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri  
Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira."

Lucretius, ii. 645-50.



self-denial for righteousness' sake, without self-sacrifice for love's sake.

For the Gnostic it was not "hard to be a Christian." The natural outcome of a Docetic incarnation was a Docetic morality; righteousness which consisted in the contemplation of high ideals (2<sup>4.6</sup> 3<sup>7</sup>); love which paid its debt with fine sentiments and goodly words (3<sup>17. 18</sup>) The actual meaning of Docetism could not be more truly touched than by the pathetic question of Ignatius, **ειλε> wsper tinej a@coi ontej... legousin, to>dokein peponqenai auton, autoi>to>dokein ontej, egw ti>dedemai;**<sup>1</sup>

And here again, the significance which St. John finds in the Incarnation is of undiminished validity for modern thought. That God is Love has for us the force of an axiom; it has become part of ourselves. If there be a God, a Being who is supremely good, He must be Love; for

"A loving worm within his clod  
Were more divine than a loveless God  
Amid his worlds."

It may seem as if there were no intuition of the human spirit more self-evidencing than this; nor is there, when once it is seen. But, as a matter of history, the conviction, the idea, that God is Love, has been generated by nothing else than belief in Jesus Christ as Incarnate God, Who laid down His life for man's redemption. In the pre-Christian and non-Christian religions every quality, good and bad, has been deified except self-sacrificing Love. Power, beauty, fecundity, warlike courage, knowledge, industry and art, wisdom, justice, benevolence and mercy—the apotheosis of all these has been achieved by the human soul. The one deity awaiting to the world's

<sup>1</sup> *Ad Trail.* 10: "But if, as certain godless men aver, His suffering was only in semblance, themselves being only a semblance, why, then, am I bound with this chain?"

pantheon is the God Who is Love. And if we inquire what, in the world of actual fact, corresponds to this conviction that God is Love, we to-day are still shut up to the answer, "Herein is Love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins." With that as the key to the interpretation of the facts of life, we are able to read in them much that testifies, and are sure that, in the light of God's completed purpose, we shall find in them nothing that does not testify, that the universe is created and conducted by the Love of the Heavenly Father Who is revealed in Christ. Yet, even to those who are most jealous for the vindication of this, both nature and history are full of ugly and intractable facts. And, even at their clearest, the pages of natural revelation can give evidence for nothing more than a wise benevolence, a bloodless and uncostly love. If we ask what God has ever done for His creatures that it cost Him anything to do, the one fact which embodies the full and unambiguous revelation of this is that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (4<sup>14</sup>). Meanwhile, it may seem as if the Christian ethic could claim to exist in its own right, though severed from its historical origin and living root. The atmosphere is full of diffused light, and it may seem as if we might do without the sun. But if the history of thought has shown that, with the denial of the Incarnation, the Christian conception of the Being of God is gradually dissipated, into the mists of Agnosticism, it begins also to appear that Christian ethics have no securer tenure. To Positivism, with the enthusiasm of humanity as its sole religion, succeeds neo-paganism, with the enthusiasm of self as the one true faith and royal law. Like the giant of mythology who proved invincible only when reinvigorated by contact with mother-earth, the Christian ethic, the ethic whose supreme principle is Love, maintains and renews its conquering energy only as it

derives this afresh from Him who was historically its origin, and is for ever the living source of its inspiration.

(c) But, again, the Epistle exhibits the vital significance of the Incarnation for Redemption. The primary purpose of the Incarnation is not to reveal God's Love, but to accomplish man's salvation. God has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the World (4<sup>14</sup>); to be the Propitiation for our sins (4<sup>10</sup>). It is the same truth that underlies the more cryptic utterance of 5<sup>6</sup>: "This is He that came by water and blood; not by the water only, but by the water and by the blood." The reference to the Cerinthian heresy has been already explained; but the peculiar phraseology in which Christ's Passion is here insisted upon, the repeated assertion that He came by blood,—not by water only,—reveals the motive of St. John's energetic hatred of that heresy. For it is "the blood of Jesus, His Son, that cleanseth us from all sin" (1<sup>6</sup>). "Not by water only." The tragedy of human sin demanded a tragic salvation. And the Apostle's whole-hearted denunciation of the Docetic Christology was due to the fact that it not only dissolved Christ, but took away from men their Redeemer.

(d) But the final necessity of the Incarnation, for St. John, is that in it is grounded the only possibility for man of participation in the Divine Life, "He that hath the Son hath Life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not Life" (5<sup>12</sup>). When Christ came into the world, the most stupendous of all events took place. The Eternal Life, the Life that the Word possessed from the Beginning in relation to the Father (1<sup>2</sup>) was embodied in humanity, and became a fountain of regenerative power to "as many as received Him" (John 1<sup>12</sup> 3<sup>16</sup>). This is the ultimate significance of the Incarnation and the core of the Johannine Gospel,—a Christ who has power to place

<sup>1</sup> An ancient reading in 4<sup>3</sup>.

Himself in a unique vital relation to men, to pour into their defilement His purity, into their weakness His strength, into their deadness His own spiritual vitality; reproducing in them His own character and experiences, as the vine reproduces itself in the branches doing that, the ineffable mystery of which is only expressed, not explained, when we say that He is our "Life" (John 14<sup>19,20</sup> 15<sup>5</sup>).

And to deny the truth of the personal Incarnation, to dissolve the integrity of the Divine-human nature of Jesus Christ, is either, on the one side, to deny that human nature is *capax Dei*, or, on the other side, that it is the life of God that flows into humanity in Jesus Christ; on either supposition, to annul the possibility of that communication of the Divine Life to man on which salvation essentially consists. And here also the perspicacity with which the writer of the Epistle discerns the logical and practical issue is very notable. The history of theology, so far as I am aware, offers no instance in which the truth of the Incarnation has been rejected and a doctrine of Atonement or Regeneration, in anything approaching to the Johannine sense, has been retained.

Such are the practical aspects of the fact of Incarnation which the Epistle brings out. The full impersonation of the Divine Life, the perfect effulgence of the Divine Light, the supreme gift of the Divine Love, is this--"Jesus Christ come in the flesh."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE WITNESSES TO THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST.

THE doctrinal centre in the Epistle is, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, the Incarnation. The channel by which the full revelation of God and the gift of Eternal Life are conveyed to mankind is Jesus, the Son of God, the Christ "come in the flesh." Our present task is to examine the teaching of the Epistle as to the grounds on which this belief rests.

The correlative, intellectually, of Belief is "witness" (**marturia, martureiñ** 1<sup>2</sup> 4<sup>14</sup> 5<sup>6.7.9.10.11</sup>); and although the apologetic aim of the Epistle is fully disclosed only in the middle of the second chapter, the note of "witness" struck in the opening verses shows that this was in the writer's mind from the first.

#### *The Apostolic Gospel, 1<sup>1-3</sup>*

"That<sup>1</sup> which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life (and the Life was manifested, and we have seen, and announce unto you the Life, the Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard announce 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." Here the Epistle opens, as it likewise closes, in a strain

<sup>1</sup> For exegetical details, V. *supra*, pp. 43 sqq., and Notes, *in loc.*.

of triumph. The complex periodic structure, unique<sup>1</sup> in the Johannine writings, expresses with stately rhetorical effect the writer's consciousness of the unequalled sublimity of his theme, and his exultation in the double apostolic privilege of having himself seen and believed, and of bearing witness to those who have not seen, that they also may have the blessedness of believing (John 20<sup>29</sup>).

At first he plainly declares his personal acquaintance<sup>2</sup> with the facts of the Incarnate Life. He is not, like St. Luke, a sedulous investigator and recorder of the facts as certified by the most trustworthy witnesses; but is himself such a witness. His knowledge is derived from detailed and intimate observation;<sup>3</sup> and the testimony, certified by every faculty given to man as a criterion of objective reality, is that He who was from the Beginning and He who, in His earthly manifestation, lived and died and rose<sup>4</sup> again is (as against the Docetic Conception) the same Person, embodied in the same form of actual human existence. But before completing the statement that all that has been outlined in 1<sup>1</sup> is the theme of apostolic testimony, the writer parenthetically anticipates the question how such testimony comes to be possible. Human sense has been made the medium of the knowledge of the eternal Divine Life. For "the Life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness, and announce<sup>5</sup> unto you the Life, the Eternal Life which was

<sup>1</sup> The only parallel is the introduction to the washing of the disciples' feet (John 13<sup>1-3</sup>), where the motive is obviously the same as here.

<sup>2</sup> v. *supra.*, pp. 46 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> The evidence is stated on an ascending scale—hearing, sight, touch. Herodotus had long ago made the observation, **wta gar tugxanei aqrwpoisi epta apistotera of almvn**, i. 8.

<sup>4</sup> **o{ai|xei?ej h{wn eyhl af hsan**—a verbal reminiscence of Christ's words to the disciples after the Resurrection.

<sup>5</sup> The fine logical precision with which the words are ordered is noticeable, **apagge lomen**, emphasising the fact of communication; **marturoumen**, the truth, personally vouched for, of the communication made; **ewrakamen**, the experience on the strength of which the voucher is given.

toward the Father and was manifested to us." And then in the following verse, which resumes and completes there is repeated insistence upon the fact that the testimony borne is based upon personal and first-hand knowledge, "What we have seen and heard we announce also unto you,<sup>1</sup> that ye also may have fellowship with us." Having such a message to deliver he cannot refrain. His rejoicing in the Truth is such that he must impart it to others also. For this Truth is the medium of Christian fellowship;<sup>2</sup> nay, as he exultingly reminds himself and his readers, it is the medium not only of fellowship between Christians, but of their fellowship with God—to have "fellowship with us" is to have "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Having himself been brought into living fellowship with God through his knowledge of the facts in which the Son of God has been revealed to men, and the Father in the Son, he would now, by making them full partners in his knowledge, open to them the same door of entrance into the same fulness of Divine Fellowship." "As every stream of water makes for the sea, every rill of truth makes for fellowship of souls." But the crowning joy of this communication is that by means of it men are brought unto God and into the possession of Divine Life.

The apostolic "witness" thus furnishes the permanent content, the fact-material, of Christian belief. It is this-- "the word which ye heard from the beginning" (2<sup>24</sup>)--

<sup>1</sup> "Unto you also" (**καὶ ὑμῖν**) implies a contrast, not between former and present recipients of the message, but between the Apostle himself and his readers.

<sup>2</sup> Upon the exegetical intricacies of the verse see Notes, *in loc*. It would be impossible to find a more spontaneous expression than these words of the missionary spirit that is inherent in all truth, but, above all, in Christian truth. The same Christlike and apostolic feeling breaks out afresh in the verse that follows: "And these things write we unto you, that our joy may be fulfilled." *v. supra*, p. 42, note 2.

that reveals the Son of God in the reality of the Incarnate Life. It is, therefore, the touchstone of truth, the Church's safeguard against all the freaks of human fancy and the vagaries of speculation, "If it abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father" (22<sup>41</sup>). With unerring insight St. John declares the sovereign value of the Apostolic Gospel, and assigns its permanent function in the Church. As at the close of the Apostolic era the watchword of true advance is found to be "back to Christ," so always Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the historical manifestation of the Word of Life, at once the source and the test of all fruitful developments in theology or ethics. Whatever rights criticism may claim with respect to the literary medium by which the Apostolic Gospel has been transmitted, that Gospel has remained and must remain the "umpire and test" of truth in all emergencies, even as it is also the "good seed" of the kingdom of God.

*The Testimony of the Spirit.*

The knowledge of the Divine Revelation given to the world in Jesus Christ is derived ultimately from the testimony of the Apostles and a few other contemporary witnesses: and it is communicated by the same method as that by which information is ordinarily diffused among men: those who know tell it to those, who are ignorant. But is the belief of those who "have not seen and yet have believed" inferior in point of certitude to that of the original witnesses? The Epistle assures its readers that they are in no such position of inferiority. They have the testimony and teaching of the Spirit.

In the first cycle of the Epistle the paragraph in which this topic is introduced is 2<sup>20-27</sup>.<sup>1</sup> Having in the preceding

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the exegetical difficulties of this passage, see Notes, *in loc.*



verses characterised the heretical teachers as the true anti-christs, St. John, before proceeding to exhort his readers to stand fast in the Faith, prepares the ground for such exhortation by reminding them of the living Witness they had in themselves—the Spirit God had given them, who both set the seal of immediate conviction upon the Truth itself and enabled them unfailingly to distinguish it from all its counterfeits (**pañ yeudoj**, 2<sup>21</sup>).

And ye have an anointing (chrism) from the Holy One,<sup>1</sup> and ye know all things" (2<sup>20</sup>). The word "chrism"<sup>2</sup> (not the act of anointing, but that with which it is performed) seems to be suggested here by the title "anti-christs" which has been applied to the schismatics. They were **antixristoi**, counterfeits of Christ. The Apostle's readers had the true chrism, and, therefore, were able to detect their falsity. On the other hand, the use of the word without explanation assumes that it was familiar to both writer and readers as denoting the abiding gift of the Holy Ghost. Jesus is the "Anointed." It is He Who received the true Divine Anointing, "with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts 4<sup>27</sup> 10<sup>38</sup>). And this anointing He received not for Himself alone, but for all the members of His spiritual Body. During His visible presence among men the conditions of His earthly ministry precluded the full communication of the gift. But when, having overcome the sharpness of death, He ascended the throne of His kingdom, the oil of His coronation in the Heavens flowed down upon His people here on earth (Acts 2<sup>33-36</sup>). The precious ointment ran down to the skirts of the High priest's garments (Ps. 132<sup>2</sup>). The result of this "anointing is that "ye know all things." The specific office of the Spirit is to "guide into all the truth," to "take of Mine and declare it" (John 16<sup>13.14</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> "The Holy One," that is, Christ. *v. supra*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> See special Note appended to this chapter.

This now leads the writer to reassert (2<sup>12-14</sup>) that the motive of his writing does not lie in the assumption of his readers' ignorance. He has no positively new elements to add to their Christian knowledge, "I write unto you, not because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and (know) that no lie is of the truth" (2<sup>21</sup>).<sup>1</sup> . . .<sup>2</sup> "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 the anointing from Him teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, even as it taught you, ye abide in Him" (2<sup>27</sup>).<sup>3</sup>

The distinctive feature of this passage is that the testimony of the Spirit is regarded as a "teaching." And the question<sup>4</sup> that immediately arises is as to the conception of this "teaching" it implies. Examining this, we find, in the first place, that it is not regarded as superseding the Word, but as concurrent and co-operative with it. Their interdependence is signified, according to the Writer's habitual method, by alluding to them alternately (2<sup>20, 21</sup> the Spirit, 2<sup>2</sup> the Word, 2<sup>26, 27</sup> the Spirit). Their teaching is the same in

<sup>1</sup> See Notes, *in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> On the verses here omitted, see Chapter VI

<sup>3</sup> "In Him." Not in the "anointing," but in Christ. The purpose of the Spirit's work, in all its aspects, is the believer's perfect and abiding union with Christ.

<sup>4</sup> In the parallel passage (3<sup>24b-46</sup>) the action of the Spirit is charismatic and the testimony is objective, being given in the inspired confession of Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh (so also in 1 Cor. 12<sup>28, 29</sup> and Eph. 4<sup>12, 13</sup>). Is the "teaching" here referred to also charismatic? Is it given to the Church through inspired human utterance; or is it the subjective enlightening action of the Spirit of truth upon the minds of all believers? The latter interpretation is assumed without question by Protestant commentators ("das fromme Gemeindebewusstsein," Holtzmann). The other view is implied in Catholic expositions, such as that of Estius (quoted by Huther), "Habetis episcopos et presbyteros quorum cura ac studio vestrae ecclesiae satis instructae, sunt in iis quae pertinent ad doctrinae Christianae veritatem." This interpretation is much too definitely ecclesiastical; but, in view of the parallel passages, and of all we know regarding the place of inspired "prophets" and "teachers" in the N.T. Church, it seems to me that the "anointing" is here to be regarded as charismatic, and the "teaching" as given to the Church objectively, through those who were the organs of a special Inspiration.

substance—Jesus is the Christ (2<sup>22</sup>); and the result is the same—abiding in Him ("If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father" (2<sup>21</sup>); and, again (2<sup>27</sup>, "Even as it taught you, ye abide in Him"). The teaching, moreover, is continuous, shedding the light of truth upon all subjects as they arise in experience (2<sup>17</sup> "The anointing abideth in you . . . and teacheth you concerning all things"). But in another sense it was complete from the first (2<sup>27</sup> "even as it taught<sup>1</sup> you"). When the Apostle's readers first received the, gospel, the Spirit once for all led them to the centre of all truth. In that first "teaching," that first revelation to their faith of the Divine truth in Christ, lay enfolded all that, with the growth of experience and reflection, might afterwards be unfolded. Nothing at variance with it was admissible; nothing really new could be added to it:—"Even as it taught you, ye abide in Him."

The result of the Spirit's teaching is:—"Ye know<sup>2</sup> all things" (2<sup>20</sup>), and "need not that any one teach you" (2<sup>27</sup>).<sup>2</sup> These assertions cannot be understood as claiming infallibility for every believer (compared to this, Papal infallibility would be a trifle), or as denying all need of human agency in Christian instruction (so declaring the inutility of the Epistle itself). They must be interpreted in accordance with the general purport of the passage, which is to remind its readers that they already possessed in their fellowship a resource all-sufficient for discerning the real character of the antichristian doctrine. In view

<sup>1</sup> The aorist **edidacen** points to the definite occasion.

<sup>2</sup> **oidate panta**. The reading is here uncertain. The alternative **oidate pantej** has strong authority (**Ⲡ**, B, Theb. etc., v. Westcott, p. 93), and yields an excellent sense. Such knowledge is not the prerogative of an intellectual elite. Even if the "teaching" is a special spiritual gift, the knowledge imparted is the common property of the Christian fellowship (cf. 5<sup>20</sup>, Eph. 4<sup>13</sup>). It is certain that, on either reading, the passage contains a reference to and a repudiation of the esoteric pretensions of Gnosticism. Not the self-styled **pneumatikoi** are the taught of God. To be this taught is the privilege of all believers. They are the true Gnostics.

of what they have "heard from the beginning," and of the "anointing" which abides in them, St. John can say, "Ye know all things—all that it is needful to know, and all there is to be known about this matter. It is not required that I write unto you as if ye were ignorant of the principles of Christian truth that are here in question. Ye are taught not only by the Word, but also by the Divine Teacher, who continually enlightens your understanding, strengthens your convictions, and ministers to you an invincible assurance of the truth of the Gospel. In this respect ye are independent of other teaching."

Thus the conception of the Spirit's teaching found here is in perfect accord with that of the Fourth Gospel and of the New Testament throughout. The Spirit is not a source of independent revelation, but makes the Revelation of Christ effectual. And this is done by a process that may be considered as twofold, teaching and testimony. There is an operation of the Spirit that is educative, ever extending the area of the spiritual understanding:—"His anointing teacheth you concerning all things." The Word—Christ in the Word—is the Truth; the Spirit is the living Divine Teacher who works in us a progressive understanding of the contents of the Truth embodied in Him—unfolds its many-sided significance in relation to the various exigencies that arise for Christian thought and action. But the illumination wrought by the Spirit is also intensive. It is not only teaching, but testimony:—"He shall testify of Me " (John 15<sup>23</sup>). The Word—Christ in the Word—is the Light, the Truth; it is the Spirit that makes the light light, and the truth truth, to the soul. The joyous assurance of faith is His gift. Both of these elements are included here in the thought of the "anointing." The former is the more prominent—the "anointing" teacheth. By means of it the Church unerringly detects as a "liar" every one who denieth that

Jesus is the Christ (2<sup>22</sup>). But, underlying the whole passage, there is also the thought of the Spirit's testimony, "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know (oidate)<sup>1</sup> all things" (2<sup>10</sup>). The truth is placed beyond all reach of controversy, and passes into absolute knowledge. For it is not the proposition—Jesus is the Christ *per se* that is the bulwark against antichristian falsehood; it is the strength of conviction with which it is held. Not a correct, clear-sighted orthodoxy, but a firm and fervent assurance of the truth is the innermost citadel. "As His anointing teacheth you, *and is true and is no lie*, even as it taught you, ye abide in Him" (2<sup>27</sup>).

Thus far, then, the teaching of the Epistle is that Christian Belief is derived externally from the Apostolic Gospel, internally and concurrently from the witness of the Spirit. And each supplies a standard for its right development. Stated in modern language, the doctrine of the Epistle is that all Christian theology must approve itself as an interpretation of the historic Christ, and also as satisfying the genuine spiritual instincts of the Christian life. And no theology meets the one requirement that does not also meet the other. The continuous development of Christian doctrine in the Church furnishes an ever-growing testimony to the fulfilment of the twofold promise, hindered as that fulfilment may be by human imperfection,—"If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father," and "His anointing teacheth you concerning all things."

5<sup>5-12</sup>

This, the second passage of importance dealing expressly with the grounds of Belief, is one of much difficulty and obscurity.<sup>2</sup> We have already considered the meaning of

<sup>1</sup> Signifying absolute knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> As to the probable explanation of this, see Chapter III, p. 42 (note).

the unique phraseology in which the permanent reality of the Incarnation is here asserted. In opposition to the Cerinthian heresy, which taught that there was merely a temporary connection between the heavenly Christ and the human Jesus, beginning at the Baptism and terminating on the eve of the Passion, the Apostle testifies that Jesus is the Son of God (5<sup>5</sup>), and that He "came"--was manifested as the Christ, entered upon His Christly mission--both by the water of Baptism and the blood of the Cross. And, as warrant for this belief, he cites the testimony of five witnesses: the Spirit (5<sup>7</sup>), the Water and the Blood (5<sup>8</sup>), God (5<sup>9</sup>), the believer's own experience (5<sup>10</sup>).

5<sup>7</sup>.

*The Witness of the Spirit.*

"And it is the Spirit that witnesseth,<sup>1</sup> because the Spirit is Truth."

Almost as many explanations have been offered of the "Spirit" in this verse as of the "Water and the Blood" in the preceding verse. Undoubtedly, however, it is identical with the "Spirit" who inspires the confession of Jesus as the "Christ come in the flesh" (4<sup>2</sup>), and with the "anointing" that "teacheth you concerning all things,"—in short, the Paraclete of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

As to the substance of the Spirit's testimony, it is not only that Jesus came by the water and by the blood, it includes the whole truth advanced, that the Jesus who thus came is the Son of God (5<sup>5,6</sup>). As to the manner in

<sup>1</sup> **to marturoũn**. The generic neuter (cf. **pañ to gegennhmenon**, 5<sup>4</sup>) emphasises that precisely this is the function of the Spirit. Everywhere in Johannine Scripture the office of the Spirit is to teach or testify (John 14<sup>26</sup> 15<sup>26</sup> 16<sup>13-15</sup>)

<sup>2</sup> The relation between the work of Christ and that of the Spirit is signified by a fine parallelism which is to some extent lost in translation, **eštin olel qwa** (5<sup>6</sup>), **eštin to marturoũn** (5<sup>7</sup>). Jesus is *He that came*, once for all fulfilling the Messiah's mission; the Spirit is *that which beareth witness*, ever authenticating its Divine origin, interpreting its purpose and applying its results.

which the testimony is borne, this may be conceived either as direct or as indirect. In the Acts of the Apostles the descent of the Spirit, with all its sensible manifestations, is cited simply as a supernatural fact, bearing objective testimony to Christ's Resurrection and Ascension ("This which ye have seen and heard," Acts 2<sup>33.36</sup>; cf. I Cor. 14<sup>25</sup>) Such is the witness of the Spirit to the world; but to the Church it is given by direct inspiration. The distinction is clearly drawn by St. Paul, "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not; but prophesying is not to them that believe not, but to them that believe" (1 Cor. 14<sup>22</sup>). It is the latter aspect of the Spirit's testimony that is brought into prominence in the Epistle. Whether acting charismatically through the prophets or universally upon the minds of believers, it is by direct inward "teaching" that the Spirit testifies of Christ in the Church. Combining both aspects, we may say that the permanent witness of the Spirit consists, inwardly, in the Christian's intuitive assurance of the truth revealed in Christ, and, externally, in the whole manifestation of a life of supernatural character and power in the past and present of the Christian Church.

Next is added the reason why the Spirit is "that which witnesseth":—"because the Spirit is Truth." Again, this might be understood as signifying simply that the Spirit is an abiding reality. However the ideas and beliefs of men may change and oscillate, the presence of the Spirit is a permanent supernatural fact, and, therefore, is "that which beareth witness." Probably, however, the meaning is not different from that expressed in the familiar title, "the Spirit of Truth"—the Spirit, that is, whose nature it is to recognise and reveal the eternal Truth<sup>1</sup> of God. Perception

<sup>1</sup> There is an exact parallelism between what is said of Christ and of the Spirit. Christ came into the world "to hear witness to the Truth" (John 18<sup>37</sup>). And He is also Himself the Truth (John 14<sup>6</sup>), to which the "other Paraclete" testifies.

implies kinship. Only Love can know Love. Only Purity can understand Purity. Only Truth can recognise Truth. And it is because "the Spirit is Truth" that He recognises and reveals Christ who is the embodiment of the Truth (John 15<sup>6</sup>). The statement, thus understood, points clearly to the personality of the Spirit; and, indeed, suggests the Trinitarian conception of the Godhead. The ultimate Truth is what God is. And as the Father is the Truth in its essence, and the Son is the Word or outgoing of the Truth, so the Spirit is the witness of the unity of the Essence and the Word,—the witness in the Father of His unity with the Son, and in the Son of His unity with the Father. And thus the Spirit, imparted to men, becomes the author of Faith,—becomes in us also the consciousness of God in Christ, and of the Christ in God.

5<sup>8</sup>.

*The Witness of the Water and Me Blood.*

"For there are three that bear witness,<sup>1</sup> the Spirit, and the Water, and the Blood: and the three agree in one."

As regards the witness of the Water and the Blood, it is best to acknowledge that it is impossible to recover with certainty the precise conception in the writer's mind.<sup>2</sup> It is evident, however, that the controversial purpose of the passage must be taken as the starting-point towards any sound interpretation. Against the Docetic theory of

<sup>1</sup> "For there are three that bear witness." The connecting "for" (**oti**) is loosely used. It seems to indicate that, though the Water and the Blood were not at their first mention (5<sup>6</sup>) cited expressly as witnesses, this was already in the writer's mind. Then the bringing forward of the Spirit's witness suddenly suggests to him that the witnesses attain to the significant number three, "For in fact, the witnesses are three in number," etc. It is probable that in the reiterated emphatic "three" there is an allusion to the requirement of the Mosaic Law, that only in the testimony of two or three witnesses should capital charges be held as proven (Deut. 17<sup>6</sup>; cf. Matt. 18<sup>16</sup>, John 8<sup>17</sup> sqq.). This supposition is almost necessary to give point to "If we receive the witness of men" in 5<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter III. p. 42 (note).



a merely temporary habitation of the heavenly Christ in the human Jesus, St. John asserts the truth of a real and indissoluble Incarnation. The Jesus Who was baptized in Jordan and the Jesus Who was crucified on Calvary were in every respect the same Divine-human person. He "came"—entered into the sphere of His Messianic action—by Water and by Blood. His Baptism was the initial act, His Death the consummating act, of His self-consecration to the work of the world's redemption.<sup>1</sup> It is to this that the Spirit bears witness (4<sup>2</sup>); and since it is said that the witness of the Water and the Blood is to the same effect (**ei] to-xh ei]sin**), obviously this must be of such a nature as to confute the Docetic annulment of the Incarnation. Now, since in 5<sup>6</sup> the Water and the Blood undoubtedly refer to our Lord's own Baptism and Passion, the natural course is to seek in these, and in the historical facts connected with them, the "witness" of the Water and the Blood. Nor is it difficult to see how the Baptism of Jesus, with its attendant circumstances (the testimony of John the Baptist ; our Lord's own consciousness of sinlessness, implied in the fact that, though John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, He alone made no confession of sin ; the descent of the Spirit; the Voice from heaven), testified to the Messiahship, which with St. John is equivalent to the Divine Sonship of Jesus. But as to the witness of the Blood there is serious difficulty. To explain it (Weiss) by those incidents of the Crucifixion to which the Fourth Gospel attaches a special significance as fulfilments of Scripture—"A bone of Him shall not be broken," "They shall look upon Him whom they have pierced" (John 19<sup>33.37</sup>)--is altogether inadequate.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter VI. pp. 96, 97.

<sup>2</sup> It is sufficiently remarkable that the Resurrection finds no place in the apologetics of the Epistle, although the proofs" of its reality are so carefully set forth in the Fourth Gospel. The reason probably is that Cerinthus and his school did not deny the *resurrection of Jesus* (Irenaeus, i. 26. I).

The only interpretation left open is that the witness of the Water and the Blood is that of the Christian Sacraments. The objection to this is that it requires here in 5<sup>8</sup> a different sense for the Water and the Blood from what they have in 5<sup>6</sup>. But in view of the extreme condensation of the whole passage, the objection is not insurmountable. The transition from the facts themselves to the appointed and familiar memorials of the facts is thoroughly natural. The witness of the Sacraments, moreover, would tell with destructive effect upon the position of the Docetists. Holding the truth that Christ "came" by Water, they would, no doubt, accept also the Sacrament of Baptism; but the Lord's Supper must have presented an insuperable obstacle to their theory of the Crucifixion. Whether they retained the observance of it we cannot tell; but it is difficult to imagine what sacramental significance they could attach to this memorial of One Who before His Passion had been reduced to the level of common humanity.

On the other hand, the Apostle's words may suggest the question whether the worth of the Sacraments as permanent and, one might almost say, living witnesses to the historical reality, as well as to the ideal significance, of the facts they represent, is appreciated and emphasised as it ought to be. His declaration that Christ came by water, though not by water only, gives to Christ's own Baptism an importance that is not always recognised. It is evident that for the writer of the Epistle the Baptism (though it is not definitely recorded in the Fourth Gospel) was no mere incident in the life of Jesus, no merely formal inauguration of His Messianic ministry. It was by His Baptism "with the Holy Ghost and with power" that Jesus was qualified to be the Saviour of the world. The Holy Ghost by Whom His humanity was begotten in the Virgin's womb, Who formed and nurtured and trained in Him that

sinless manhood which brought back the lost image of God to earth, was then first poured out upon Him "not by measure," that from Him it might again proceed in life-giving stream through the world of souls. It was thus that the Divine Life became in Him a perennial and overflowing fountain of regenerative power; and to this as a fact of history, to say nothing more, the Sacrament of Baptism is the abiding witness in the Church. Christian Baptism apart from the Baptism of Christ would be meaningless. Only He who has the fulness of the Spirit can impart the Spirit.

But He came not by water only, but by the Water and the Blood. There was that in the Love of Christ—the Love of God—which water could not, which only blood could express. There was that in the need of man which water could not, which only blood could adequately meet. By death the grain of wheat must be quickened and become fruitful. The Life of Christ, endued with all fulness of spiritual power, and with all its fulness of spiritual power consecrated to God in His Baptism, must be poured out in the uttermost sacrifice, that it might bring forth the new life of the children of God. And of this fact, that it was the Christ, the Son of God, whose Body and Blood were offered for us upon the Cross, the Lord's Supper is the perpetual attestation. The Sacraments are impressive and incontrovertible witnesses to historical realities. Every successive generation of Christians has baptized, and broken bread as the first company of believers did, and has received in these Sacraments the same testimony to the foundation-facts upon which our salvation rests. Older than the oldest of New Testament Scriptures, of an authenticity which no criticism can impugn, they lead us back to the birth-hour of Christianity, and perpetuate in the Church the historical basis of its Faith. And not only does one generation testify to another in the Sacraments; Christ

Himself testifies in them to His Church. If they are His ordinance, if it is by His appointment that we baptize in His name and "do this in remembrance" of Him, this is the surest evidence that He was conscious of being to men the one and ever-enduring source of regenerative virtue and propitiatory cleansing; and in them He is ever repeating that claim and pledging Himself anew to its fulfilment. But the Spirit also witnesses in the Sacraments. By them He has in all ages revived and strengthened faith, inspired love, awakened hope, and imparted new impulse to Christian lives--has, in short, made Christ a Real Presence, not in material elements, but in the hearts of His disciples. Materialised as the conception of the Sacraments has sometimes become, formal as their observance in many cases may be, the zealous affection and honour in which the universal Church has always held them, as the centre of its fellowship and, as it were, the very hearth of the household of faith, have written the best of commentaries upon the Apostle's words, "There are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the Water, and the Blood."

Finally, the Apostle adds that these three witnesses "agree<sup>1</sup> in one"; they are to the same effect; they testify jointly to the truth which is the theme of the entire paragraph—that Jesus, who was baptized and crucified, is the Son of God. This combination of the historical (the Water, the Blood) and the ideal (the Spirit) is the strength of Christian apologetics. Without the one, Christianity becomes a mere Idealism, by which faith could no more conquer the world than the lungs could fill themselves in a vacuum. Without the other, the voice of truth awakens no inward response, lacks that self-evidencing power which alone makes it truth to the soul.

<sup>1</sup> **eiĵ to>eh eiṣin** "converge upon the same object." Cf. John 11<sup>52</sup> 17<sup>23</sup>.

5<sup>9</sup>.*The Triple Witness considered as the Witness of God.*

"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God, because He hath borne witness concerning His Son."

The sentence, however it be construed,<sup>1</sup> is highly elliptical, requiring, for a full statement of the sense, to be supplemented thus: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater (and, therefore, we ought the rather to receive it; and here this principle comes into operation), because this witness (of which I have been speaking) is the witness of God, because He has borne witness concerning His Son." Rugged and clumsy as the form of, the sentence is, its intention is thoroughly clear,—namely, to set forth the threefold witness of the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood as being, in reality, the witness of God. In the facts which the Christian Sacraments commemorate, in the Baptism with the Spirit which inaugurated the Christly ministry of Jesus, and in the Death and Resurrection in which that ministry was consummated and by which it passed beyond all limitations of time, and place, and sense; in the testimony of the Spirit creating and establishing a world-conquering faith in the crucified Jesus as the victorious Son of God:—in these facts, if anywhere at all, God has uttered Himself in unmistakable testimony to mankind. And if we receive the testimony of men, as we do,—if nine-tenths of what we call "knowledge" is derived from the testimony of men,—the refusal to accept the testimony of God, thus given, is not due to any uncertainty in it. God has given to men no other testimony so explicit and convincing.

<sup>1</sup> See Notes, *in loc.*

5<sup>10</sup>.

*But there is still another Witness, that of Experience.*

"He that believeth in<sup>1</sup> the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth<sup>1</sup> not God hath made Him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning His Son."

By "believing" the testimony of God, we "believe in" His Son. Our faith is directed towards the personal Christ, and rests in Him. And he who thus "believes in" the Son of God hath the witness (to the Divine Sonship of Jesus) in himself. To the historical evidence, even to the enlightening testimony of the Spirit, there is added in the believer a confirmatory witness in his personal experience of cleansing from sin and renewed life. He "tastes and sees"; believes and knows. He not only "sets to his seal" that the object of his faith is true: more and more he receives from it the experience of its truth. On the contrary, not to "believe in" Christ is equivalent to not "believing" God; and this is to "make Him a liar,"<sup>2</sup> because it is not to have believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning His Son. Here the deliberate and circumstantial repetition of what has been already said with emphasis in 5<sup>9</sup> brings out the gravity of the issue. The thought of making God a liar is an appalling one; and especially is it so when it concerns the witness that He hath borne concerning His own Son.

This argument, that the alternative to believing in Jesus as the Son of God is making God a liar, is one

<sup>1</sup> Sec Notes, *in loc.*, and special note on **pisteuein**, appended to Chapter XIII.

<sup>2</sup> "Hath made Him a liar." Cf. 1<sup>10</sup>. The two ways in which men make God a liar are—"If we say that we have no sin," and if we do not believe "five witness He hath borne concerning His Son." The two are related as closely as possible. If we have no sin, the (gospel of the Water and the Blood becomes meaningless and incredible.

that gains cumulative force as the history of the Church and the world advances. To assert of the Christian gospel and the Christian Church—the mightiest of all beneficent influences in the life of men and the development of human history—that the one is the proclamation of a myth, and that the other is founded upon delusion and has grown up in an atmosphere of vain credulity,—this is to ascribe to falsehood, instead of to truth, the power to promote the most Divine ends; it is equivalent to saying that God, if there be a God, is a liar,---one whose chosen methods of accomplishing His Will are those of dissimulation and deceit.

From the summary thus made of the passages that treat of the basis of Belief, it will be apparent that the apologetic problem is handled, though in briefest compass, with no little breadth and fulness. And this chapter may be closed with a summary of the results. The whole Christian revelation is contained in the Person of Jesus Christ, who is known solely by the facts narrated in the Apostolic Gospel. These facts, embraced under the headings, the Water and the Blood, are themselves evidential (5<sup>6-8</sup>). In them the Divine mission of Jesus is fully attested, and the eternal Life of God manifested on earth (1<sup>2</sup>). Knowledge of these facts is conveyed through the normal channel of human communication (1<sup>3</sup>)—by the Apostolic testimony, the trustworthiness of which is strongly asserted (1<sup>1</sup> 4<sup>14</sup>). Upon this, as its historical foundation, Christian Faith must always stand (2<sup>24</sup>). But, though Faith is not apart from human testimony, its certitude is derived from the witness of the Spirit, which continuously attests the truth of the human testimony (5<sup>6b</sup>). All this is collectively the witness of God (5<sup>9</sup>); for if God has spoken at all to men, it is in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, and in the witness that the Spirit of Truth bears to Him,

both in Christian Faith itself and in the whole influence of that Faith on the world's history. And, finally, he that believeth hath the witness in Himself. Christian Faith carries with it the experience of a moral regeneration. While there is no elaboration of any of those topics, it is with a quite amazing insight that the writer of the Epistle seizes all the positions in which Christian apologetic has ever since found its chief strongholds.

NOTE ON "ANOINTING" (**xriſma**), 2<sup>20</sup>.

This word is the last descendant of a long and interesting Biblical lineage, the successive steps in which may be briefly indicated.

1. The anointing of the body with oil is practised as a means of invigoration (upon infants, Ezek. 16<sup>9</sup>; upon the sick, Jas. 5<sup>14</sup>)

2. From the refreshing and pleasurable sensations thus produced, anointing (especially with fragrant unguents) is an act of courteous hospitality, betokening favour towards the guest (Ps. 23<sup>5</sup>). Failure to observe this custom is a mark of perfunctory and ungenerous entertainment (Luke 7<sup>46</sup>).

3. Thus it naturally becomes a symbol of joy and strength (Prov. 27<sup>9</sup>, Isa. 6<sup>13</sup>, Matt. 6<sup>9</sup>), and is symbolically used in the appointment of persons to high and sacred office as a mark of Divine favour and of Divine endowment with the gifts and aptitudes required by the office. (a) Kings are anointed (1 Sam. 10<sup>1</sup>; the anointing being accompanied by the gift of the Spirit); (b) Priests are anointed (Lev. 8<sup>12</sup>, Ps. 133<sup>2</sup>); (c) Prophets are anointed (1 Kings 19<sup>10</sup>, Ps. 105<sup>15</sup>, Isa. 61<sup>1</sup>); (d) the title "Anointed" (Messiah, Christ) is applied specifically to the kings of David's line (Ps. 2<sup>2</sup> 84<sup>9</sup>); and becomes the title of the expected Deliverer and Redeemer of Israel (Dan. 9<sup>25.26</sup>, John 4<sup>25</sup> 7<sup>27.31</sup>)

4. It is given to Jesus and accepted by Him (Matt. 16<sup>16.20</sup> John 6<sup>69</sup> 11<sup>27</sup>, Luke 24<sup>26</sup> etc.), and becomes virtually a proper name of Jesus (N.T. *passim*).

5. The **xriſma** with which Jesus is anointed is the Holy Ghost (Acts 10<sup>38</sup>; cf. Luke 4<sup>18</sup>, John 3<sup>34</sup>).

6. This **xriſma** is, after His Ascension, fully imparted to the Church (John 16<sup>3</sup>, Acts 2<sup>32</sup>; cf. Acts 10<sup>45</sup>, Eph. 4<sup>8</sup> sqq., 2 Cor. 1<sup>21</sup>).

It does not at all follow from the use of the word **xriſma** in 2<sup>20</sup> (which is unique in the N.T.) that it was a technical ecclesiastical term, or that the ceremony of actual Chrism, which very soon became a recognised adjunct to baptism and the laying on of hands, was already in use.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DOCTRINE OF SIN AND THE WORLD

THE Epistle presents no fully articulated doctrine of Sin; nor does it contain the material for such a doctrine. It suggests no exceptional preoccupation with the great Pauline problems of the inherence and operation of sin in human nature, or of its genesis and development in the individual and in the race. But if the Epistle adds little to the stock of New Testament ideas about sin, nowhere is the common Christian consciousness of sin and of its determining significance for man's relation to God more profoundly felt. Nowhere is the sense of sin as creating an antagonism in the moral universe that transcends all measurement more passionately expressed. Horror, hatred, fear, repudiation of sin pervade the whole Epistle. The essential tragedy of human existence is set forth in that single awful image of the world—"the whole world"—lying in the embrace of the Wicked One (5<sup>19</sup>). It is against the dark background of sin that the innermost glory of the Divine Nature shines forth in God's sending His Only-Begotten Son as a propitiation for our sins (4<sup>9,10</sup>); and in nothing does the Apostle's own soul speak more intensely than in the fervid declaration, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not " (2<sup>1</sup>).

In the Epistle the nomenclature of moral evil contains but three words—**amartia**, sin; **anomia**, lawlessness; **adikia**,

unrighteousness. We shall first consider those passages in which **αἰμαρτία**, or some cognate, is the prominent term.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of sin—the conception which the word calls up in every mind—is twofold. It denotes the character of an action as morally bad and in itself condemnable, and it implies the responsibility of the agent. The sinfulness of sin is the joint product of these two factors; and the consciousness of sin, universally and necessarily, contains both. Yet, in the actual view taken of sin, the one or the other is invariably the more prominent. According to the standpoint occupied, the emphasis may be either ethical or judicial—upon the quality of the act and of the moral nature displayed in it, or upon the culpability in which such act involves the agent. In the Epistle each of these aspects of sin is strongly presented. Of the two principal passages that have a direct bearing upon the subject, the first (1<sup>7</sup>-2<sup>2</sup>) contemplates sin as guilt, while in the second (3<sup>4-9</sup>) sin is contemplated in its ethical antagonism to the nature of God and of the children of God.

1<sup>7</sup>-2<sup>2</sup>

The judicial view of sin characterises the whole para-

<sup>1</sup> Logically, the following uses are to be distinguished:

(a) **αἰμαρτία** without the article signifies a sinful act (5<sup>15,17</sup>); **αἰμαρτιαί**, sinful acts (1<sup>9</sup> 2<sup>2,12</sup> 3<sup>5</sup> 4<sup>10</sup>); **αἰμαρτανειν**, to commit a sinful act (1<sup>10</sup> 3<sup>6</sup>). The unambiguously concrete **αἰμαρθημα** is not found in St. John.

(b) **αἰμαρτία** without the article is used also collectively, signifying sin in its concrete totality (3<sup>5</sup> **αἰμαρτια ἐν αὐτῷ βουκῆσθιν**=sin, as a whole, is excluded from the sphere of His being; 3<sup>9</sup> **αἰμαρτιαν οὐ ποιεῖ**? sin, as a whole, is excluded from the sphere of His doing).

(c) In the phrase **αἰμαρτιαν ἐκεῖν** (1<sup>8</sup>, John 9<sup>41</sup> 15<sup>22,24</sup> 19<sup>11</sup>) the idea is more abstract, the phrase connoting not so much the act of sin as the culpability of the doer.

(d) With the article, **ἡ αἰμαρτία** is a pure abstract, signifying sin in its constitutive principle (**ἡ αἰμαρτία**, 3<sup>4,8</sup>, in direct antithesis to **ἡ δικαιοσύνη**, 2<sup>29</sup> 3<sup>7</sup>). So in 3<sup>8</sup> **ὁ ποιεῖ τὴν αἰμαρτιαν**=he who expresses in actual deed the essential principle of sin).

graph.<sup>1</sup> According to the law of the moral universe, sin committed constitutes an objective disability for fellowship with God, which can be removed only by confession (1<sup>9</sup>), forgiveness (1<sup>9</sup>), and propitiatory cleansing (1<sup>7.9</sup> 2<sup>2</sup>). It is true that 1<sup>7.8</sup> are very generally interpreted from the ethical standpoint. But this is groundless. With regard to 1<sup>7</sup> ("The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin"), the significations of "cleansing" and "sin" are mutually dependent; and if, as I shall maintain in the next chapter, "cleansing (**kaqarizein**) is here attributed to the propitiatory power of Christ's blood, it follows that "sin" is regarded primarily as guilt. In 1<sup>8</sup> ("If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves") the judicial sense is unmistakable. The phrase "to have sin" (**exein a(h)martian**) is peculiar to St. John, and has a quite definite sense. Thus in John 15<sup>22</sup> our Lord says, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin." Here, beyond question, "to have sin" specifically denotes the guiltiness of the agent. In John 9<sup>41</sup> 15<sup>24</sup> 19<sup>11</sup> the sense is equally clear; and these parallels must be held as decisive for the meaning<sup>2</sup> here. "If we say that we have no guilt, no responsibility for the actions, wrong in themselves, which we have committed, we but deceive<sup>3</sup> ourselves." In 1<sup>9</sup> ("If we confess our sins,<sup>4</sup> He is faithful and righteous to forgive

<sup>1</sup> From the point of view of our present topic, that is. The primary matter in the paragraph is not sin, but the confession or denial of sin, regarded as walking in the Light and walking in darkness. See Chapter IV,

<sup>2</sup> Westcott rightly understands the saying, "that we have no sin," as the repudiation of responsibility; but he endeavours inconsistently to combine with this the thought that **exein a(h)martian** connotes the presence of sin "as a principle in the nature, in contrast with sinful act," or the "contracting of a character corresponding with the deeds" (p. 38). Plummer also, in full view of the parallels from the Gospels, which he quotes, explains the verse as, "If we deny that our nature is sinful."

<sup>3</sup> "The condition of inward truth is for every man the acknowledgment of sin" (Rothe); and, as he adds, "Only when man recognises himself as sinner, can he believe in the nobility of his manhood."

<sup>4</sup> The change to the plural form is significant. We may deny sin as a whole

us our sins") there is no ambiguity. To confess our sins is not only to acknowledge the presence in our life of wrong action, but is to confess this as needing forgiveness—to lay at our own door the full responsibility for it. In 1<sup>10</sup> ("If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar") the emphasis is directly on the fact of wrongdoing, the culpability of which has been asserted in the preceding verses. Again, in 2<sup>1,2</sup> the judicial emphasis does not admit of doubt. Sin is that which needs God's forgiveness; and, to this end, an Intercessor and a Propitiation have been provided.

The doctrine of the paragraph may thus be stated in three propositions. (a) Sin is action for which the agent is primarily responsible. Whether his action contain more or less of the special elements of wrong,—rejection of light, treason to God, his neighbour, or himself,—his own evil will be the direct cause of its having existed. And if we say that such guilt does not belong to us, our error is worse than ignorance—we lead ourselves astray (**ehutouj pl anwiten**) in outer darkness. Without doubt, the Apostle has here in view the doctrine of Gnostic Antinomianism, that the "spiritual" are free from sin, because sin is wholly of the flesh. But this heresy is older and newer than Gnosticism. In manifold forms it reappears in modern thought. For the modern materialist, as for the ancient Manichee, sin is a question of physiology; moral depravity only a manifestation of corporeal disorder. Or the evil in the world is due to the social environment, is the result of bad education and bad institutions. Against all such theories St. John lifts up the single word—Sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." (b) Sin is universal. "If we say that we have not sinned,

(1<sup>8</sup>), but confession must condescend upon particulars. Sin is known only by its concrete instances. The conscience does not deal with abstractions.

<sup>1</sup> v. *supra*, pp. 32-34.

we"—not only deceive ourselves—we "make God a liar " (1<sup>10</sup>). "All the institutions of the Divine economy, God's entire government and work upon earth, the whole manifestation of the Son of God, based upon the presupposition of human sin, are reduced to one comprehensive lie" (Haupt). At the contemplation of such denial, be it blind or wanton, the Apostle's soul is fired to passionate indignation. (c) The immediate effect of sin is to embarrass and pervert man's relation to God, to disqualify him for that fellowship with God for which he was created, and the loss of which is death (3<sup>14</sup> 5<sup>16</sup>). The sole measure of its otherwise immeasurable evil is that only by the blood of Jesus, God's Son, can there be cleansing from its stain and restoration to the Divine fellowship.

### 3<sup>4-9</sup>.

In the paragraph we have just considered the leading thought was that of walking in the Light; and by this the view of sin was governed. Sin was regarded only in its concrete manifestations—as a fact of observation and experience. In the second cycle of the Epistle the leading thought is that of the Divine Begetting. The Christian life is regarded as a Divine sonship—participation in the essential nature of God. Consequently, sin is now contemplated in its absolute ethical antagonism to the nature of God's children. "Every one that is begotten of God doeth not sin; because His seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God" (3<sup>9</sup>). Instead of the concrete **aphartia**, the abstract **h[aphartia**, denoting sin in its constitutive principle, becomes the distinctive term. The phrase "every one that doeth sin" (**ο[ποιων̄ τ̄να αφ̄αρτιαν**, 3<sup>4.8</sup>) expresses the manifestation in actual deeds of the essential principle of evil, which is called Sin. Sins are multiform; Sin is one. A sin is never an isolated act of wrong-doing. If so viewed, it is not seen in its full

significance. Individual sins are like islets, which appear as separate and casual specks on the surface of the ocean, but are, in reality, the mountain-peaks of a submerged continent. He who "does sin" only gives particular embodiment to a universal principle, **h[a]m[artia]**; just as the right-doer embodies **h[a] hqeia** (2<sup>29</sup>), and as the truth-doer embodies **h[a] hqeia** (1<sup>6</sup>). He shows, moreover, that this principle of evil is rooted in his own nature. He is not a sinner because he commits sins; he commits sins because he is a sinner. "Every one that doeth sin is of the devil; because the devil sinneth from the beginning" (3<sup>8</sup>). The outward sin is the index to the inward nature.

The word by which St. John defines the essential principle of sin (**h[a]m[artia]**) is "lawlessness" (**h[a]nomia**) "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness"<sup>1</sup> (3<sup>4</sup>). This conception of sin as being essentially lawlessness corresponds to the strong emphasis which the Epistle lays upon the commandments of God and their careful observance (2<sup>3.4</sup> 3<sup>22.24</sup> 5<sup>2.3</sup>). But the thought is not to be limited by any of the historical deliverances of the Law. Sin is fundamentally the denial of the absoluteness of moral obligation--repudiation of the eternal canon of Right and Wrong, upon which all moral life is based. In other words, to sin is to assert one's own will as the rule of action against the absolutely good Will of God. Thus it is but truth to say that every sin contains in germ the whole infinite of evil. It embodies that principle which, given effect to, would

<sup>1</sup> The genuine use of the article with both subject and predicate (to which there is no real parallel in the N.T.) indicates how exactly convertible the two terms are. There is no sin that is not lawlessness, and there is no lawlessness that is not sin. **anomia**, alike in classical Greek and in the N.T., signifies, not a state of being without law (though St. Paul uses **anomia** in this sense in I Cor. 9<sup>21</sup>), but an act of opposition to law. Elsewhere in our English versions it is translated "iniquity" (except in 2 Thess. 2<sup>7</sup>, where, as here, R.V. has "lawlessness"). In the N.T. it is used to translate various O.T. words;—פְּשָׁע (Rom. 4<sup>7</sup>), תַּחַת (Heb. 10<sup>17</sup>), and רָשָׁע (Heb. 1<sup>9</sup>). Here it must be understood in its strict etymological sense as "lawlessness."

overthrow the entire moral order of existence. One little lie has in it that which would subvert the Throne of God and extinguish the light of Heaven. All sins have sin in them, and "sin is lawlessness."

Though it does not occur in this paragraph, we may here consider another term by which an ethical significance is stamped upon sin—"unrighteousness" (**adikia**). The word naturally suggests the negative aspect of sin—sin as declension from the standard of rightness (**dikaionh**). And this sense satisfactorily meets the requirements of the three passages in which alone it occurs in St. John (John 7<sup>18</sup>, 1 John 1<sup>9</sup> 5<sup>17</sup>)

In the first of these, "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh the glory of Him that sent him, the same is true, and there is no **adikia** in him," the meaning obviously suggested is "unfaithfulness to the trust imposed in one," or, more generally, "dereliction of duty." And the same sense admirably suits 1 John 5<sup>17</sup>. The Apostle has been distinguishing between "sin unto death" and "sin not unto death" but before leaving the subject he adds, "All unrighteousness is sin." The purpose of the addition is evident. The danger to be apprehended from emphasising the distinction between mortal and non-mortal sin is that we may fall into an attitude of comparative nonchalance toward the less heinous offences; and to obviate this danger we are reminded that every deviation from moral uprightness, however venial it may appear, is sin.<sup>1</sup> The same meaning is most appropriate also in 1<sup>9</sup>, "God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from

<sup>1</sup> This explanation seems much more natural than that according to which the purpose is to indicate how wide a field there is for brotherly intercession, even if the sin unto death is regarded as beyond its scope—because all unrighteousness, which is never wanting, is sin, and its presence an urgent call to prayer (Westcott, Haupt, Weiss). Westcott here takes **adikia** as signifying "failure to fulfil our duty one to another." I am unable to perceive any ground for this limitation of the meaning.

all unrighteousness." As God is faithful to His own revealed character in forgiving our sins, so He is not unrighteous but righteous in "cleansing" us from every failure in righteousness, in relieving us, that is, from the religious disabilities imposed upon us by it.<sup>1</sup> Thus **ajikia** contemplates sin in its negative aspect as non-righteousness, unfaithfulness in the moral stewardship of life (cf. Luke 16<sup>8</sup>). And the Apostle emphasises the fact that all such unrighteousness, any morally inferior course of action, is sin, and contains the elements of positive guilt. This is continually overlooked. Men often think more of the distinctions and gradations of sin than of its essential wrongness. They speak of "peccadilloes," "foibles," "failings," of things that are "not quite right" (as if they were not quite wrong). The sinfulness of sin is wrapped around with euphemisms and circumlocutions. Concerning all this St. John has but one word to utter, "All unrighteousness is sin."

Thus far, then, the Epistle's doctrine of Sin may be summarised as follows. Sin is that which involves the culpability of the agent. Sins are of various kinds; but all failure in duty, all deviation from the right is sin. And all sin, in its real character, is repudiation of the supremacy of moral obligation—is revolt against the holy Will of God.

5<sup>16. 17</sup>

In the third cycle of the Epistle we encounter the perplexing topic of "sin unto death." It ought to be observed, however, that the introduction of this is merely incidental, and that the main subject of the passage is "sin not unto

<sup>1</sup> Here Westcott's interpretation is "the specific sins (**aijapartiai**) are forgiven; the character (**ajikia**) is cleansed." Thus an entirely different meaning is given to **ajikia** from that which he adopts in 5<sup>17</sup>, the inconsistency being necessitated only by the determination to interpret **kaqarizein** in an ethical sense. See Chapter VIII.



death"; while its actual purpose is to use this as an example of those things regarding which we may pray with perfect confidence of success (5<sup>15</sup>)

"If any man see his brother," to whom he is bound by the ties of Divine kinship (5<sup>1</sup>), regarding whom he is persuaded that, at the root, he belongs to Him "in whom there is no sin" (3<sup>5</sup>)—if he see this brother, nevertheless, "sinning a sin," plainly not abiding in Christ but taking the way that leads to certain separation from Christ, yet not so as to have irrevocably fallen from Him—if he see this, "he shall ask," and God will grant him in answer to his prayer, "life for them that sin not unto death." There is a sense in which every sin tends "unto death." Conscious or unconscious, it is fraught with injury and loss to life. It interrupts some channel of inter-communication between the Vine and the branch. But the Epistle has already declared the means by which the interrupted fellowship may be recovered. The renewed advocacy of Christ (2<sup>1</sup>) and the renewed cleansing of His Blood (1<sup>7</sup>), will unfailingly restore fulness of Life. But the condition of this is that we "walk in the light" (1<sup>7</sup>), that is, in the present, instance, that there be confession of sin (1<sup>9</sup>). In the case contemplated, however, the erring brother has not fulfilled this condition. He is ignorant of his sin, or is impenitent, or is withheld from confession by fear or obstinacy (Ps. 32<sup>3,4</sup>). It is in such an emergency that his brother may come to the rescue and do for him what he lacks the power or the will to do for himself—confess his sin and seek his restoration. And the Apostle affirms that such effort cannot be in vain; that God has so bound us together in the Body of Christ that one may by his prayer become the means of obtaining for another a fresh influx of "Life," by which he will be renewed unto repentance. Now, it is only by way of contrast with this that mention is made of the "sin unto

death." The Apostle is jealous of misapprehension as to the Christian's assurance in prayer. It might be extended beyond its proper scope, with the inevitable result of its being weakened everywhere; and against this he will guard his readers. He will not forbid them to place in God's hands even him who has sinned unto death, with the fervent supplication that "if it be possible" he may yet be snatched from his doom. But he does view as a possibility, and assert as a fact, that there are those for whose restoration and salvation we cannot pray with unconditional confidence as for a thing "according to His will."<sup>1</sup> "There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request."

What, then, are the characteristics of the "sin unto death," as we may gather them from this passage?

1. It is a sin which may be committed by Christians, and it is only as committed by Christians that it is here contemplated.

2. It is a sin which is visible, or, at least, recognisable. It is evident that the term "sin unto death" must have been one well understood by the first readers of the Epistle; and that it denoted a particular sin or kind of sin the characteristics of which were so definite that they were easy to perceive, and so familiar that they needed no description. On any other supposition the reference to this sin as an exception to the full exercise of brotherly intercession is entirely pointless.<sup>2</sup> It seems strange that

<sup>1</sup> This must be taken seriously, not as a mere concession to the infirmity of his readers' faith. It is not serious exposition to say that "some of St. John's disciples may have believed that when a man sinned a certain kind of sin it was contrary to God's will that he should ever be quickened to life again," and "that the Apostle does not pause to argue with them, does not even tell them that, in his own apprehension of it, the scope of the Divine mercy was far wider than in theirs, and must be of far wider scope than even he was able to conceive" (Cox, *Expositions*, 1885, p. 258).

<sup>2</sup> So Westcott, "Its character is assumed to be unquestionable, and its presence open and notorious" (p. 210). Plummer, on the contrary, strongly maintains that we must get rid of the idea that "sin unto death" is a sin that

what was so recognisable then is so unrecognisable now. Yet it is conceivable that, in our own religious dialect and modes of thought, there are phrases that to the Christian of two thousand years hence will be no less obscure, and conceptions no less difficult to locate in his religious and ethical system, than the "sin unto death" is to ourselves. The singular thing is that even to the earliest Patristic writers who touch the subject the "sin unto death" is already an enigma—its meaning as much a matter of conjecture or inference as to us.

3. It is "unto death" (**proj qanaton**). What does this expression signify? (a) It is pointed out that the distinction of "sins unto death" and "sins not unto death" is common with Rabbinic writers, and is based on the Old Testament legislation, according to which the punishment for many offences (cf. Lev. 18<sup>29</sup> 20<sup>9-21</sup>), especially for those committed with a "high hand" (Num. 15<sup>30, 31</sup>) was death, involving final "cutting off from the people." This, however, while it may possibly indicate the origin of the phrase, does not materially help towards an understanding of what it signifies in the atmosphere of New Testament thought. The interpretations which have been directly based upon the Old Testament usage—that "sin unto death" is sin punished by the civil authorities with death or by the Church with excommunication (thus the

can be recognised. "St. John's very guarded language points the other way. He implies that some sin may be known to be not unto death; he neither says nor implies that all sin unto death can be known as such." The commentator does not state clearly what interpretation of the verse he deduces from this. Apparently the thought is that we know that there is a sin unto death, but that all we know of it is that it is not included among those which we *know to be no/unto death*; and the purport of the verse would be that we ought to intercede with perfect confidence in cases of sin which we know are not unto death, and that where this is not known the Apostle does not exhort to intercession, because thus we might be interceding for one who has sinned beyond hope. But if this had been the Apostle's meaning, I cannot conceive that he would have expressed it by the simple positive statement, "There is a sin unto death; not concerning it do I say that he should make request."

older Catholic theologians)—do not commend themselves. Of the former alternative nothing need be said; of the latter, that not every sin incurring excommunication is "unto death." In 1 Cor. 5<sup>5</sup> the offender is excommunicated "for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." In such a case brotherly intercession would be an urgent duty; and, in any case, excommunication does not constitute the "sin unto death," but is only the solemn recognition by the Church that it has been committed. (b) Nor is the proposal to interpret the passage by the aid of Jas. 5<sup>14, 15</sup>, as referring to sin that is punished by God with bodily sickness or death (cf. 1 Cor. 11<sup>30</sup>), worthy of more consideration. In the whole usage of the Epistle **qanatoj** and have a spiritual significance, and there is nothing in the context to suggest that here "sin unto death" should be understood as sin punished by fatal bodily sickness. (c) And, if it is evident that **qanatoj** means spiritual death, —separation from fellowship with God,—it is also evident that sin **proj qanaton** means, not sin "tending towards death," but sin by which that fatal goal is reached.<sup>1</sup> Westcott<sup>2</sup> (p. 210) maintains that "St. John speaks of the sin as tending to death, and not as necessarily involving death. Death is, so to speak, its natural consequence, if it continue, and not its inevitable issue as a matter of fact." This view is quite untenable. Intended to put a humane and merciful interpretation upon the "sin unto death," how inhumane and unchristian a construction does it place upon the Apostle's directions regarding it! If there is a sin that does not already "necessarily involve death," but to which a *special* certainty attaches that, if it continues, death is the "inevitable issue," it is unimaginable that the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John 11<sup>4</sup> **auth h[aj]sqeneia ouk estin proj qanaton.**

<sup>2</sup> So Plummer, "Death is its natural, but not its absolutely inevitable, consequence."

Apostle should not enjoin the most urgent intercession, instead of positively saying that he does not enjoin it. Of all possible interpretations, this is unwittingly the most repugnant to Christian feeling. The only question which the Apostle's language leaves undecided is whether a resurrection even from this "death" is not possible. And concerning this his language is noticeably guarded. In the presence of such sin he does not command nor encourage intercession, neither does he forbid it. All he commits himself to is that for those who thus sin, Christian prayer cannot have that "boldness" which is its prerogative elsewhere. (d) The question remains—On what grounds can it be pronounced of any sin that it is "unto death"—that it effects a total severance from Christ? And the one answer which the first principles of Christianity permit to be given to this question is—final impenitence. Every sin that can be repented of can be forgiven; every sin that is repented of finds forgiveness. We cannot, however, define sin unto death simply as the sin of those who are finally impenitent.<sup>1</sup> For this particular sin is recognisable now, and cannot be now *recognised from* final impenitence. The question, therefore, presents itself in this form--what sins are of such a nature as to render final impenitence, so far as we have reason to believe, their certain issue? In the New Testament there is allusion to two sins, if they are two, by which this dreadful condition is fulfilled.<sup>2</sup> There is the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—that unpardonable sin—which our Lord's adversaries were, as He warned

<sup>1</sup> This is one of Augustine's explanations, "Si in hac tam scelerata mentis perversitate finierit hanc vitam," Westcott, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> There is an approximation to such fulfilment in a third case—that pointed to in Matt. 18<sup>17</sup>—where wilful sin is so obstinately persisted in by the offender, against all brotherly efforts to bring him to repentance, as to involve his exclusion from the Christian fellowship ("Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican"). But, as has been said, not every sin that involves excommunication is "unto death." Excommunication has in view not only the purity and self-protection of the Church, but the salutary discipline and ultimate restoration of the offender.

them, upon the verge of committing, when they accused Him of casting out evil spirits in the power of Beelzebub (Matt. 12<sup>24-32</sup>). In doing so they were deliberately outraging the eternal principle of goodness and truth, sinning against the Spirit of God, and extinguishing the light in their own souls; and this, because beyond repentance, would be beyond pardon. Intercession is silenced. Even the Saviour cannot plead, "Father, forgive them: they know not what they do." In this instance the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (or perilous nearness to it) is ascribed to malignant unbelievers. Within the Church such sin can be manifested only in one certainly recognisable form—deliberate, open-eyed apostasy from Christ (Heb. 6<sup>4-6</sup>).

It is true that the same fatal result may be reached by other paths. The professing Christian may so wilfully and obstinately persist in heinous sin, or may have become so inveterately and whole-heartedly a lover of the world that, even in the judgment of charity, he has finally chosen his sin rather than his salvation. Yet, human nature being the same in New Testament times as now, to determine and pronounce upon the merits of such final hardening of the heart must have been so precarious, if not impossible, that one is constrained to believe that the "sin unto death" was the sin of those who by deliberate and avowed action severed themselves from Christ and from the Christian community. It does not follow that those who so acted necessarily reckoned themselves as apostates; and I think it probable that what St. John chiefly had in view was the sin of the "antichrists" and false prophets, who "went out from us that it might be made manifest that they were not of us" (2<sup>19</sup>). Once more, however, it is to be observed that all the Apostle says of "sin unto death" is that it does not present an object of confident intercession. And though it was perhaps inevitable, it is unfortunate that the mention of the perplexing "sin unto

death" has always awakened a livelier interest than that which is the central truth of the passage—the Christian prerogative of fearless and expectant prayer for a restorative gift of Life to them that sin not unto death.

*The Derivation of Sin.*

According to the teaching of the Epistle, sin is not an abnormality of *human* life alone—a phenomenon of the **kosmos**; it belongs to a more gigantic system in which it has its origin, and in which, again, it bears its final fruits and reaches its goal. There are organised kingdoms both of Righteousness and of Sin, in the one or the other of which every man has his citizenship. The one has its prototype in Christ (3<sup>7</sup>); the other, in the devil (3<sup>8</sup>). As it is in Christ alone that we see what Righteousness is when it becomes the absolute principle of life, so it is in the devil only that sin is manifested to its last possibility. Sin in its proper nature is diabolical; it is what has made the devil to be the devil.

But the devil, **o[ponhroj**, is not only the prototype to which all sin tends and is ultimately conformed, he is also, in some important sense, the source from which all human sin is derived.<sup>1</sup> In what sense, we must more particularly inquire. The terms in which the relation of human sinning to diabolic influence, and those in which the relation of human righteousness to Divine influence are expressed, are strikingly parallel.

He that sinneth is of the devil (3<sup>8</sup>).

(**ek tou?diabolou estin.**)

The children of the devil (3<sup>10</sup>).

Believers have God as their Father  
(2<sup>13</sup> etc.).

We are of God (5<sup>10</sup>).

(**ek tou?theou estin.**)

The children of God (3<sup>10</sup>)

Unbelievers, the devil (**tou?  
upwñ**, John 8<sup>44</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> In the Pauline scheme, sin is regarded solely as innate in humanity, as having its temporal beginning and its hereditary source in the sin of Adam (Rom. 5<sup>14</sup>). St. John has nothing to say of the Fall of man, but traces sin back to a source external to human nature.

Is it to be inferred that the relations thus identically expressed are identical in fact? Some do not shrink from drawing the inference." It is an appalling thought that man may enter into the same relation to the devil in which he originally stands to God" (Rothe). "The life that animates the sinner emanates from the devil" (Huther). But such statements are over-statements. That the devil is immanently and directly the source of all sin, as the Holy Spirit is of all holiness, is a thesis that cannot be seriously maintained. This is to ascribe to his agency an omnipresence and an omniscience which, so far as one can conceive, are impossible to a finite being. True, the Johannine phraseology might bear such an interpretation, nay, most naturally would bear it, if it could; but it does not absolutely demand it.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, more is signified than merely moral affinity or likeness. The devil is an active influence to which there is a corresponding receptivity in the life of the "world" (5<sup>19</sup>) That he gave the first impulse to human sinning (John 8<sup>44</sup>); that he still gives fresh impulse to it (John 13<sup>2</sup>); that, directly or indirectly, all human evil may be described as the "works of the devil" (3<sup>8</sup>), and that thus he is the father of all who do wickedly, is clear Johannine teaching, "He that doeth sin is of the devil." He is of the devil's lineage, in the direct line of spiritual descent from him "who sinneth from the beginning."

Thus the personality of the Wicked One is not only recognised in the Epistle; it is related in no unimportant

<sup>1</sup> The analogous phrases, **ek thj ghj**, **ek tou kosmou**, **ek twñ katw**, show that such rigidity of interpretation as requires **ek tou?diabolou** to denote precisely the same relation as **ek tou?geou?** is not linguistically necessary. And while sinners are called **ta tekna tou?diabolou**, it is never said that they are "begotten" of the devil. Here, also, such expressions as **tekna thj sof ia j** (Matt. 11<sup>19</sup>), **tekna f wtoj** (Eph. 5<sup>8</sup>), even **ta tekna** (3 John 4), tend to show that **tekna tou?diabolou** need not express more than moral affinity (though, in fact, it does express more). This is recognised by Haupt ("God can beget life, Satan cannot").



sense to its doctrine of sin. Yet, regarding his person, St. John is as reticent as other New Testament writers. In the Epistle all that is said is that "he sinneth from the beginning"<sup>1</sup> (3<sup>8a</sup>). Plainly, "from the beginning" is here relative to human history. His is the sin from which human sin is derived. When and why and how Satan became Satan is to us unknown. He is the aboriginal sinner; and what he became he still is. The first to sin, he still abides in sin (**ap̄hartanei**). But, while there is in the Epistle no attempt to account either for the existence of the Wicked One or for his power (the "whole world" is his domain, 5<sup>19</sup>), there can be no doubt that, underlying all the Apostle's utterances on the subject, there is the ordinary assumption that he is a fallen angel. Meagre as is the support which the idea of the fall of Satan has in the New Testament (2 Pet, 2<sup>4</sup>; Jude <sup>6</sup>), speculation on the subject has no other possible issue. Any other conception is "inconsistent with the absoluteness, or subversive of the goodness, of God" (Steven, *Johannine Theology*, p. 145).

The New Testament conception of diabolic agency is one for which modern Christian thought has no small difficulty in finding a place."<sup>2</sup> But, as presented in the Epistle, three great thoughts—all, I believe, of permanent validity--are contained in it. (a) Sin in its principle has that character which we call diabolic. There is a darker strain of evil in

<sup>1</sup> "The devil sinneth from the beginning," **ap̄ l̄axh̄j ōdiabol ōj ap̄hartanei**. **ap̄ l̄axh̄j** is emphatic by position, and with it may be compared the parallel statement, "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8<sup>44</sup>). The words **ap̄ l̄axh̄j** cannot be understood absolutely, since then we are stranded upon an insoluble dualism (this interpretation, nevertheless, is maintained by Hilgenfeld and others); nor as "from the beginning of that being who is the devil," the intolerable consequence of which would be that God is the Creator of a being inherently evil—dualism 'of the rankest sort. Nor is it satisfactory to denude the words of all temporal reference, and to understand them as meaning that "in him is the principle of all the sin of the world" (Rothe). This use of **l̄axh̄j**, familiar in Greek philosophy, is unknown to the N.T. Not more satisfactory is the interpretation, "from the devil's own beginning as such."

<sup>2</sup> In Clarke's *Outlines of Theology*, e.g., there is not a single reference to it,

the world than human weakness, ignorance and folly, or overpowering circumstance can account for. There is the manifestation of an essentially evil will, of opposition to good, enmity against God. (b) The great moral conflict of which human history always has been and will be the theatre—which is fought out around every human soul—is a conflict of personal agencies, not of abstract moral ideas. It may be said that of impersonal influences, or of actual moral force residing in impersonal laws, the New Testament knows nothing. And to this mode of conception modern thought is in some measure returning. Modern psychology tends at some points towards the New Testament standpoint. (c) The third truth is the ultimate triumph of Christ over His great adversary, in their conflict for the possession of humanity, "The whole world lieth in the wicked one"; but "to this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." The "strong man armed" has encountered an antagonist mightier than himself. Evil is overcome with good. On the downfall of the kingdom of the devil arises the Kingdom of the Son of God.

*The World, the Social Organism of Sin.*

In the Johannine writings the word **kosmj** has a peculiar elasticity of application. Three chief uses (besides others more occasional) may be distinguished. When the **kosmj** is material, it signifies (a) the existing terrestrial creation (e.g. John 1<sup>10</sup>), especially as contrasted with the sphere of the Heavenly and Eternal.<sup>1</sup> When it refers to the world of humanity, it is either (b) the totality of mankind as needing redemption and as the object of God's redeeming love (e.g. John 3<sup>10</sup>) or (c) the mass of unbelieving men, hostile to Christ and resisting salvation (e.g. John 15<sup>18</sup>)  
In the Epistle the word occurs in the first of these senses

<sup>1</sup> Frequently, **olkosmj oušoj** (e.g. John 13<sup>1</sup>), but also **olkosmj** (John 16<sup>23</sup>).

(3<sup>17</sup> 4<sup>17</sup>), also in the second (2<sup>2</sup> 4<sup>9</sup> 4<sup>14</sup>), but most frequently and characteristically in the third (2<sup>15.16.17</sup> 3<sup>1.13</sup> 4<sup>1.3.4.5</sup> 5<sup>4.5.19</sup>). Of the world in this sense it is said that it had no perception of the true nature and Divine glory of Christ (3<sup>1</sup>; cf. John 1<sup>10</sup>), and that it is equally blind to the true nature of the children of God (3<sup>1</sup>); that it hates the children of God as Cain hated Abel (3<sup>13</sup>; cf. John 15<sup>18.19</sup> 17<sup>14</sup>); that the spirit of Antichrist dwells in it (4<sup>3.4</sup>), and that to it belong the false prophets and their adherents (4<sup>1.5</sup>); that it is wholly subject to the wicked one (5<sup>19</sup>; cf. John 12<sup>31</sup> 14<sup>30</sup> 16<sup>11</sup>); that whatsoever is begotten of God conquers it (5<sup>4</sup>; cf. John 16<sup>33</sup>) by the power of Christian Faith (5<sup>5</sup>); that it is not to be loved (2<sup>15</sup>); that the constituents of its life are "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life" (2<sup>10</sup>); and that it "passeth away" (2<sup>17</sup>). We shall for the present confine our attention to the last quoted passage:--

2<sup>15-17</sup>

"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. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." I shall not attempt to thread the maze of various interpretations that have gathered around the term "world" in this passage. The real possibilities are only two. The word may be understood as signifying the whole content of material, sensuous, and therefore transient existence—"the sum of all phenomena, within the human horizon, which are sensuous, and which awaken sensuous desires" (Rothe). This interpretation, however, has serious difficulties, both logical and moral. How can it be logically affirmed that

"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" which are subjective, constitute "all that is in the world" which is objective? And if this difficulty be waived, the more formidable moral objection remains:—How can it be said that the material and sensuous **kosmos**, which God has created for man to dwell in, and between which and human nature He has established so many links of necessary and also delightful correspondence, has no other effect than to excite immoral desire and ungodly pride, or that the natural environment of human life is so ill-adjusted—so inimical to its supreme spiritual interest;—that the one command regarding it must be an absolute "love not," and the one certainty, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him?" Had the writer been a Gnostic of the extreme ascetic type he might have been credited with such a thought, but it has no place in the New Testament. Recognising this, the exponents of this interpretation import into it, in one way or other, a subjective element. The "world" is the material and sensuous, not in itself, but in its relation to unregenerate human nature. Westcott's definition—"The order of finite being regarded as apart from God"—may be taken as one now generally accepted.

This definition is admirable as giving the widest idea that underlies St. John's use of the word; but it is by a process of logical abstraction that the idea is obtained. And it seems to me scarcely imaginable that the Apostle intended his readers to understand "the order of finite being regarded as apart from God" as the object of a command so terse and practical as "Love not the world." The same objection applies *a fortiori* to other varieties<sup>1</sup> of the same interpretation.

<sup>1</sup> "Quicquid ad praesentem vitam spectat, ubi separatur a regno Dei et spe vitae aeternae" (Calvin). "The world, that is, godlessness itself, through which a man has not the right use of the creatures" (Luther). "It is not an entity, an actual tangible thing—it is spun out of these three abuses of God's glorious

The simple solution, and that which satisfies every requirement of the passage, is to understand the "world" as the mass of unbelieving and unspiritual men—the social organism of evil. This is the sense, except when another is clearly indicated by the context, which the word bears throughout the Epistle (and is by far the most frequent in the Fourth Gospel as well). To the Apostle's readers "Love not the world" would convey, as it does more or less to Christians in every age, a very definite and needful warning, and one that has many parallels in the Apostolic writings (e.g. 2 Cor. 6<sup>14-18</sup>, Jas. 4<sup>4</sup>), "Love not the world." Do not court the intimacy and the favour of the unchristian world around you; do not take its customs for your laws, nor adopt its ideals, nor covet its prizes, nor seek fellowship with its life. "Neither the things that are in the world." For what are the things that are in this "world." This aggregate of unspiritual persons, with their opinions, pursuits, and influences—what are the elements of its life? They are such that "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." God lays down one programme of life for His children; the world proposes another and totally incompatible programme to its servants. And in exact proportion as men are attracted by the world's programme—the life of fullest gratification for all un-

gift of free will to man—the lust of the flesh," etc. (Alexander). "It is the reign of kingdom of the carnal mind—wherever that mind prevails, there is the world" (Candlish). "The world is whatever is ruled by selfishness" (Gibbon). "It is the place which we make for our own souls" (Alexander). There is, of course, profound truth in all this. We find the world of our own hue it reflects our own image. But the word **kosmos**, as here used, can scarcely signify such an abstract idea as the correspondence between the material and sensuous world and the unregenerate mind. On this interpretation, moreover, the only meaning that can be given to the Apostle's words is: "We must not love the world, because, owing to our evil subjectivity, the only effect it can have upon us is to excite the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"—which would be to render St. Paul's "Unto the pure all things are pure" a futility, and would be a libel, not upon the world, but upon the power of Christian Redemption.

spiritual instincts and appetites—they are tempted to mistrust and dislike the absolutely different programme of self-denying love and obedience which God lays out for them, and by which He would make them trustful, pure, patient, and strong. For, as the Apostle with inimitable terseness proceeds to expound, the essential constituents of the world's life are these, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life." This is literally "all that is in the world"; there is nothing nobler which it is in its power to give.

A. First, there is the "lust of the flesh" (the sensuous gratification which the flesh longs for). The evil significance of the phrase lies in "lust,"<sup>1</sup> not in "the flesh." Least of all New Testament writers can the Apostle; whose message of Redemption begins with the announcement that the Flesh has become the organ of the Divinest life, be credited with the mystical bias which sees in the bodily organism an inherent and intractable element of evil.

The bodily appetites are in themselves absolutely wholesome; without them neither the race nor the individual could long subsist; nor can anything be more innocent than the pleasure that accompanies their legitimate satisfaction. Their degradation comes not from the body itself, but from the soul. And it comes because life is not dominated by these nobler aims and affections under the rule of which the lower fulfil their appointed purpose in the harmony of nature. It is when the love of God, the love of one's neighbour, and the love of one's nobler self

<sup>1</sup> The fate which the word **epiquia** has suffered (and, similarly, "list" in English) is an illustration of the degrading power of sin. **epiquia** is occasionally found in the N.T. in its original unfallen sense of "desire" (Luke 22<sup>15</sup>, 1 Thess. 2<sup>17</sup>, Phil. 1<sup>23</sup>). But, distinctively, it characterises desire as evil, not necessarily because of the object desired, but because in the desire the higher nature is subordinated to the lower, instead of the lower to the higher. The "flesh" has not with St. John that special Pauline sense in which it comes to express the whole moral corruption of human nature, although, in certain passages, it naturally enough exhibits a tendency in that direction (John 3<sup>6</sup> 8<sup>15</sup>).

are shut out from the soul, that natural appetite becomes the corrupt "lust of the flesh," asserting itself in sloth, intemperance, and sensuality, or in the tyranny of the anxious thought, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?"

"What is he but a brute,  
whose flesh hath soul to suit,  
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?"

But, in truth, when the higher nature is thus made the slave and minister of the lower, animalism is no name for the level of degradation that is reached. The animal body seeks only its natural food. The "lust of the flesh" is in reality the hunger of the godlike soul deprived of its proper nutriment and flying to the body for a substitute, compelling it to devour "so many more of the husks as will satisfy the starving prodigal within, and make a swine's paradise for his comfort."<sup>1</sup>

B. The second element in the life of the "world" is the "lust of the eyes." Here we rise from the merely animal<sup>2</sup> into the region of the intellect and the imagination, to which the eye, among the bodily organs, is the chief ministrant. The most obvious example under this category—the master-lust of the Eye—is Covetousness.<sup>3</sup> But the phrase includes every variety of gratification of which sight is the instrument, from the love of mere material splendour and vulgar display in apparel and personal adornments, pomp and luxury in the appointments of public or private life, the spectacular excitements of the theatre, the arena, and the racecourse, to the most refined cult of the physically beautiful in nature or in art. Nay,

<sup>1</sup> Bushnell, *The New life*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> The eye also may minister to the "lust of the flesh" (cf. Matt. 5<sup>28</sup>); but the construction of the sentence, . . . **kai>** . . . **kai>** shows that the **epiqunia twñ of qal mwñ** is not a subdivision of the more general **epiqunia thj sarkoj**.

<sup>3</sup> "Homo extra Deum quaerit pabulum in creatura materiali vel per voluptatem vel per avaritiam," (Bengel on Rom. 1<sup>29</sup>).

if the Apostle's classification is to be regarded as at all exhaustive, we must give to the "lust of the eyes" a wider scope than the merely sensuous. It must include the craving for novelty of intellectual sensation (Acts 17<sup>21</sup>), the whole pursuit of knowledge, science, and art, when these are severed from the spiritual ends of life and are made, as in their own right, the object of man's devotion. The relation of intellectual and aesthetic culture to the spiritual life is a problem that did not urgently touch the Hebrew Christian, and probably did not gravely affect those classes of Greek and Roman society from which the members of the Church were chiefly drawn in the Apostolic age; and it is scarcely touched upon in the New Testament. But the principle on which it must be determined is the same as that which assigns their right place to the bodily appetites. The Creator Himself is the original and perfect artist. The Eye and all that it desires and delights in are His thought and handiwork. We cannot behold the beauty with which He has dowered all His works, from the tiniest crystal to the constellations, without believing that in all this we see the passing gleams of an Ideal Beauty, which as truly belongs to the Divine Nature itself as wisdom or power. In our own nature, made in His likeness, the sense of beauty seems to be a fact as ultimate as the sense of truth or of right and wrong. It is of God and for God.

"All earthly beauty hath one cause or proof  
To lead the pilgrim-soul to Heaven above;  
Joy's ladder it is; reaching from home to home."

But if the light of God be shut out from the desire for and the delight in beauty, whether physical or intellectual, it becomes merely "the lust of the eyes." The love of beauty divorced from the love of goodness, the art that is the gilding of idle, selfish lives, the love of knowledge that is merely the craving of an insatiable yet vain curiosity—these, so



far from being a ladder that leads up, are, no less than vulgar avarice, chains by which the soul, which is made for the Infinite Good, is bound fast to the sphere of earthliness.

C. Next, the Apostle displays the obverse of the medal. He has designated the cravings of human nature when it is without the Knowledge and Love of God, as the "lust of the flesh" and the "lust of the eyes." Now he declares what results from the attainment of these--the "vainglory of life." Vainglory (**h[a] azoneia**) does not so much signify arrogance towards one's fellows (**uþerhf ania**), as the fatuous pride of worldly possession and success, the vain sense of security that is based, like a house on the sand, upon a false estimate of the stability and worth of worldly things (cf. Dan. 4<sup>30</sup> Prov. 18<sup>11</sup>, 2 Chron. 32<sup>25</sup>, Acts 12<sup>20-23</sup>). But these two varieties of pride, though distinguishable in thought, are inseparable in fact. The supercilious consciousness of superiority to one's fellow-men is possible only when the sense of dependence upon God has been lost (1 Cor. 4<sup>7</sup>). And here the "vainglory of life" must be regarded as including both the egotistical and the atheistical attitude of mind. The same human life, the cravings of which, in those who are not animated by the love of God and the quest of Righteousness, are the "lust of the flesh" and the "lust of the eyes," has for its least transient satisfaction nothing better than this deluded self-security and empty self-satisfaction, against which all the facts of human experience offer in vain their unceasing protest. To live without looking up to God in dependence and submission, to live looking down on a larger or smaller number of one's fellow-men--this, which from the spiritual point of view is the worst and deadliest life can give, is, in the world's reckoning, its most enviable prize.

These, then, are the ideals the "world" of unspiritual men recognises; these are the marks that characterise it, the

forces that govern it; these are its wants and its wealth; and plainly to every one who knows the God revealed in Christ, these things are "not of the Father," have not their origin in His will, have no affinity with His nature, are directly antagonistic to the life He intends for men and to which He calls men. They belong to a life which, if it could succeed in realising itself, would be without need of God, righteousness, purity, love or moral sense of any kind; in which the world, as the sum of all the "permanent possibilities" of enjoyment, would take the place of God as the object of trust and the source of all good; and whose heaven would be a paradise of sensuous and egotistical gratifications without limit and without end. Such a life, in the very idea and principle of it, is not "of the Father," but is "of the world." In no sense is it normal or natural. It exists only as a corruption and caricature. It is possible only to a nature that is made for fellowship in the highest order of life, but is used as an equipment for the role of a more highly-endowed animal. It is "of the world"—has no other basis or foothold in actual existence than the perverted human will. It has in it no principle of individual development; for it presents no object adequate to the greatness of human nature, has no outlet or outlook towards the infinite Good for which man is made. And it has in it no principle of social development. Selfishness can never make a Kingdom of Heaven; for, in the nature of the case, every man's selfishness must collide with every other man's. But the Apostle does not philosophise upon the theme. He sweeps the whole phantasmagoria of worldliness aside. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof."<sup>1</sup> These words might well be understood as St. John's version of what has been the theme of preachers and moralisers from the beginning—"Tune to whose rise and

<sup>1</sup> "Thereof," **autou?** is not the objective genitive= the desire for the world, but the subjective= the desire felt by the world,

fall we live and die"—**panta rēi?** But if our interpretation of the passage is the true one, this is not the direct reference. The world is still the world of human society which is "in darkness until now." "Love not the world" is the sternly affectionate exhortation: "for that world, —that whole framework of society which is hostile to Christ and His Kingdom,—imposing as it looks, stable and impregnable and overpowering, is doomed. With all that it delights in and pursues, it is passing away. Even while I write it is moribund, its final dissolution is at hand."<sup>1</sup> But over against this prophecy of doom, the paragraph ends with the note of triumph—"He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Here the Will of God stands as the absolute contrast to the Lust of the World. The Lust of the world degrades and desecrates all the best things in life upon which it lays its hand,—renders them trivial, ignoble, and evanescent. But the Will of God consecrates, glorifies, imbues with a Divine worth and permanence even the lowest things of life, the humblest gift, the most commonplace drudgery, the most unheroic affliction, renders the lives of men day by day, uneventful as they may seem, of imperishable significance. The Will of God alone is great, and it lays an equalising touch upon all who truly serve it (Matt. 12<sup>50</sup>). The Will of God is the one Eternal Reality to which the life of the creature can attach itself, the one bond of permanence that makes human life and human history, not a thing of fragments and patches, but a vital part of an ordered and enduring whole. If a man do the Will of God, his deeds abide, his works "do follow him." The fruit he brings forth

<sup>1</sup> Cf. I Pet. 4<sup>7</sup>. The statement is not to be understood as a prophecy of the speedy conquest of the world by Christianity, or as pointing to the fact that this conquest was already visibly beginning (Westcott). The key to the sense is given in the next verse, "Little children, it is the last hour." The thought in the Apostle's mind is that of the nearness of Christ's Advent and the world's Judgment-day.

"neither withers upon the branches nor decays upon the ground. Angels unseen gather crop after crop as they are brought forth in their season, and carefully store them up in heavenly treasure-houses." Yet what the Apostle says is that he himself "abideth for ever." Already he has eternal life and is doing its works. What he is, that he will ever be. What he does, that he will ever do. The change will be only from the "few things" in which he has been found faithful to the "many things" of which he will be judged worthy. Doing the will of God, he has thrust his hand through the enclosing screen of the transient and laid hold of the abiding, and partakes of the immortality of Him Whose Will he does.

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

In all literature there is no more solemn magnificence of effect than is produced by these few simple words; in all Scripture there is no more ringing challenge to the arrogant materialism of the "world" than sounds out of the depth of their calm.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE DOCTRINE OF PROPITIATION.

MUCH that has been written on the Johannine theology exhibits a singular tendency to minimise its testimony to the specifically sacrificial and propitiatory aspect of Christ's redemptive work. It seems to be taken as axiomatic that, wherever it is possible, an ethical rather than a religious sense is to be assigned to any Johannine utterance regarding Redemption.<sup>1</sup> It is even asserted that the Johannine writings exhibit no trace of a doctrine of Redemption in the ordinarily accepted sense.<sup>2</sup> Nothing more than an unprejudiced study of the Epistle is needed to show how baseless these suppositions and assertions are. The fact of propitiation is placed in the forefront. The door through which we are conducted from the Prologue, with its announcement of Christ as the Life-giver, into the inner rooms of the ethical and Christological teaching, is sprinkled on its lintel and posts with the blood of Divine sacrifice. The most comprehensive soteriological statement is that "the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour<sup>3</sup> of the

<sup>1</sup> "The Johannine theology emphasises by preference the moral bearings of the Atonement" (DB iv. 346). So far as the Epistle is concerned, this statement cannot be sustained.

<sup>2</sup> Reuss, *Hist. Christ. Theo'*. ii. 443.

<sup>3</sup> **o[pa]th[er] a[pe]stak[en] ton ui[ou]n swth[ra] tou kosmu.** v. Notes, *in loc.* Although used in the first Apostolic preaching (Acts 5<sup>31</sup> 13<sup>23</sup>), the title **swth[er]** does not seem to have found early currency in the Church. Its earliest use by St. Paul is Phil. 3<sup>20</sup>, and it is characteristic chiefly of the later books, the Pastoral Epistles and Second Peter. Of the family of words, **swzein**, **swth[er]**, **swthria**, etc., **swth[er]** alone is found in the Epistle; on the other hand, the full title "Saviour of the world" is exclusively Johannine, being found only here

world" (4<sup>14</sup>). Salvation, which culminates in the one supreme good, Eternal Life, includes, as a present possession, the forgiveness of sins (1<sup>9</sup>), cleansing from all sin and unrighteousness (1<sup>7,9</sup>), being "begotten of God" (5<sup>1</sup> etc.), fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1<sup>3</sup>), our abiding in Him and His in us (4<sup>15</sup> etc.), the anointing of the Spirit (2<sup>20</sup>), fellowship one with another (1<sup>7</sup>), overcoming the world (5<sup>4,5</sup>), righteousness of life (3<sup>6</sup> etc.), love (3<sup>14</sup> etc.), assurance towards God (3<sup>19</sup> 4<sup>18</sup>), confidence in prayer (3<sup>20,21</sup> 5<sup>14</sup>). As a possession perfected in the future, it includes boldness in the Parousia (2<sup>28</sup>) and in the Day of Judgment (4<sup>17</sup>), complete assimilation to Christ as He will then be manifested (3<sup>2</sup>) and abiding for ever<sup>1</sup> (2<sup>17</sup>). Here the origin of Salvation in the love of God is exhibited in the twofold fact of the Father's having sent His Son, and of the Son's being sent as the "Saviour of the world" (emphasising, as this does, the human need that drew forth the manifestation of the Divine Love).

When we pass to the more specific question of the method by which Christ accomplishes His mission of saving the world, the answer, still general, is, "Ye know that He was manifested that He might take away sins" (3<sup>5</sup>).<sup>2</sup> Here the thought is only of the purpose for which Christ appeared on earth—the removal of sins; there is no reference to the definite means by which this is accomplished.

and in the confession of the Samaritans (John 4<sup>42</sup>). In classical writers the title **swthr** is applied to many deities, especially to Zeus; also, in later Greek, to princes of various dynasties, e.g. to Nero: **Nerwni . . . tw? swthfi kai> eufgethi thj oikoumenhj** (Inscr. quoted by Moulton). Both of these titles were regularly claimed by the Ptolemies. There is no reason, however, to believe that this current pagan usage at all influenced the Christian application of the term. In the Lucan passages (Luke 1<sup>47</sup> 2<sup>11</sup>, Acts 5<sup>11</sup> 13<sup>22</sup>) it bears evident trace of its O.T. origin (cf. Deut. 32<sup>15</sup>, Ps. 24<sup>5</sup> 25<sup>5</sup>, Isa. 17<sup>10</sup> etc., where the LXX translate **qeo? swthr**).

<sup>1</sup> It is noticeable that the Epistle contains no direct reference to the Resurrection; nor does the cosmic view of salvation (Rom. 8<sup>21</sup>, Col. 1<sup>20</sup>) come within its horizon.

<sup>2</sup> v. Notes, *in loc.*

The world can be saved only by the abolition of sin; and to this end all that Christ was and taught and did, by life, death, and resurrection—the whole human manifestation in Him of the unseen Divine Life (1<sup>2</sup>)—was directed. This neither requires demonstration nor permits of argument. "Ye know,"<sup>1</sup> says the Apostle. In the Christian consciousness of Christ and His work this is the first principle.

Thus, from another point of view, the work of salvation may be regarded as one of destruction. "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy<sup>2</sup> the works of the devil" (3<sup>8b</sup>). The "works of the devil" signify human sin in its entirety regarded as the product of original Satanic agency; and Christ saves the world by breaking up and destroying from its foundations the whole system and establishment of Evil that dominates human life. This he does by "taking away sins." The Epistle contemplates no other means by which the destruction of the "works of the devil" is to be accomplished than the taking away of sin through the spiritual forces of the Kingdom of God. How, failing this, they are to be destroyed, is a question regarding which the Epistle has no message.

We come closer to the core of our subject when we ask by what specific mode of action Christ takes away sin—a result after which morality has toiled and religion agonised, in vain, which has been at once the quenchless aspiration of conscience and its burden of despair. The first, though not the full, answer is, that the mode of action

<sup>1</sup> **oidate**. Here in its most absolute sense. See special note on **ginwskein** and **eidenai**.

<sup>2</sup> "Might destroy" (**ihā lus**^). Here **luein** has its characteristic sense (cf. John 2<sup>19</sup> 2 Pet. 3<sup>10-12</sup>), the disintegration and dissolution of a compact body, the "works of the devil" thus being pointed to as presenting a solid, organised opposition to the Kingdom of God—a system to be broken up and destroyed. A better sense is thus obtained than when the "works of the devil" are understood as the works men do after the devil's pattern—works that are the works of men, yet, in principle, the works of the devil.

was that of self-sacrificing Love. The mission of Christ, while we must think of it as having its inception in the love of the Father, Who sent the Son as the Saviour of the world (4<sup>17</sup>), is achieved only by the same self-sacrificing Love on the part of the Son. "Herein know<sup>1</sup> we Love, because He laid down His Life for us" (3<sup>16</sup>). This is the absolute revelation of Love—the ideal to which all that claims that title must conform.<sup>2</sup> And it is only as exhibiting the fact and the magnitude of Christ's self-sacrifice on our behalf that the "laying down"<sup>3</sup> of His Life is here contemplated. Reference to the Death of Calvary as a substitutionary<sup>4</sup> ransom is excluded by the context, in which it is held up specifically as our pattern, binding on us the obligation to lay down our lives in like manner for the brethren. No necessity, save that of Love itself, is indicated for that infinite self-sacrifice. Nothing is said as to the conditions of human need or Divine law under which it was indispensable to our salvation and avails for it. All this, however, is done, with notable emphasis and unmistakable significance, in the group of passages that next come under consideration.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XII.

<sup>2</sup> Comparison with John 10<sup>11.15.17</sup> and 13<sup>37</sup> (if not the tense of the verb itself, **ephe**) renders it certain that the words do not denote the continuous self-sacrifice of Christ's life (Gibbon, Findlay), but the definite and final surrender of life through death.

<sup>3</sup> "He laid down His Life" (**tha yuxha autou epheken**). This expression is peculiar to St. John. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10<sup>11.15</sup>). Christ lays down His life that he may take it again (John 10<sup>17</sup>). Peter vows to lay down his life for his Master (John 13<sup>37</sup>). The most illuminative parallel as to the precise meaning of "lay down" (**tigenai**) is John 13<sup>4</sup> "He layeth aside His garments" (**tichsi ta himatia**). As in the Upper Room Christ laid aside His garments, so on Calvary He laid aside life itself. v. Notes, *in loc.*

<sup>4</sup> The substitutionary idea is not excluded, neither is it necessarily included by **uper hmw**. This idea is definitely expressed by **anti** (e.g. Matt. 20<sup>28</sup>). The distinction between **anti** and **uper** is well brought out by comparison of Matt. 20<sup>28</sup> **lutron anti polwn**, and the version of the same logion in 1 Tim. 2<sup>6</sup> **antilutron uper pantwn** (Moulton, p. 105). Instead of **anti**, St. John uses the (in this connection) virtually equivalent **peri** (2<sup>2</sup> 4<sup>10</sup>)



4<sup>10</sup> "God loved us, and sent His own Son a propitiation for our sins."

2<sup>2</sup> "And He Himself (Jesus Christ the righteous) is the propitiation for our sins."

1<sup>7b</sup> "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

1<sup>9</sup> "God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In these passages we have a concatenation of ideas—propitiation, blood, cleansing, forgiveness — which are directly derived from the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, which are expressed, indeed, in technical Levitical terms. To elucidate their meaning, therefore, it is necessary to examine them in the light of their Old Testament associations.

Here the primary term is **ilasmj**,<sup>1</sup> which with its congeners is used by the LXX. to translate the corresponding group, Kipper and its derivatives.<sup>2</sup> The root-idea of Kipper is that of covering over;<sup>3</sup> but its use in the Old Testament is restricted to the "covering" of sin; and, like so many other ideas, it undergoes a remarkable process of moral elevation and religious development. The primitive conception is that found in the patriarchal narrative (Gen. 32<sup>28</sup>), where Jacob proposes to "cover" Esau's face with a gift, that is, to render him blind to the injury done, by means of the gift thrust upon his

<sup>1</sup> Properly, the act, but in the N.T. the means, of propitiation. In the N.T. the word occurs only in this Epistle ; nor is the verbal family to which it belongs abundantly represented (**ilewj**, Matt. 16<sup>22</sup>, Heb. 8<sup>12</sup>; **ilaskesqai**, Luke 18<sup>13</sup>, Heb. 2<sup>17</sup>; **ilasthrion**, Rom. 3<sup>25</sup>, Heb. 9<sup>5</sup>). Etymologically, **ilewj** is connected with **ilaroj**, cheerful; and in classical Greek signifies, as applied to men, kindly or gracious ; as applied to a deity, propitious.

<sup>2</sup> *Kipper* is rendered by **ilaskesqai** (Ps. 6<sup>53</sup> 78<sup>38</sup> 79<sup>9</sup>), but much more frequently by the intensive **epilaskesqai**; while **ilasmj** is the regular translation of *Kippurim*, " atonement." It also stands for "sin-offering" (Ezek. 44<sup>27</sup>) and "forgiveness" (Ps. 130<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>3</sup> By some Semitic scholars the idea of *wiping away* is preferred. Driver suggests that both senses have a common origin in *wiping over* (DB iv. 128b).

attention. Crude as the instance is, it clearly exhibits the idea that runs through the whole complicated usage of the metaphor—that of rendering offence invisible, null, inoperative as a cause of just displeasure and punishment.<sup>1</sup>

The class of passages that shed the light of clearest analogy upon our present study are those that deal with legal or ritual propitiation. In this the agent is the priest; the means, usually, a sacrifice; the object, the person or thing on whose behalf the sacrifice is offered. Propitiatory efficacy is assigned to a large variety of sacrifices, but especially to the sin-offering and to blood as containing the "life." And it is peculiarly relevant to the exegesis of the Epistle to note the effects of propitiation, which are expressly the forgiveness<sup>2</sup> of sin (1<sup>9</sup>) and cleansing<sup>3</sup> (1<sup>7b, 9</sup>). Upon the whole subject, though one might quote from more recondite sources, a better statement could not be furnished of the action which, with its agents, instruments, and consequences, is denoted by propitiation than is given by Driver (DB iv. 131<sup>b</sup>). "It is to cover (metaphorically) by a gift, offering, or rite, or (if God be the subject) to treat as covered; the ideas associated with the word being to make (or treat as) harmless, non-existent, or inoperative, to annul (so far as God's notice or regard is concerned), to withdraw from God's sight, with the attached idea of restoring to His favour, freeing from sin and restoring to holiness—especially (but not exclusively) by the species of sacrifice called the sin-offering." Such is the word and such is the conception employed in the Epistle to express the mode of action by which Christ has accomplished and still accomplishes His mission as the

<sup>1</sup> Thus Moses proposes to make propitiation for the sins of the people by intercession (Ex. 32<sup>30</sup>). Elsewhere it is God who "covers," that is, treats as covered, overlooks, pardons the offender (Ezek. 16<sup>63</sup>) or the offence (Ps. 65<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Lev. 4<sup>20</sup> **επιλειπεται περι αυτων ολιβερον, και αφεσεται αυτοις ηλ**  
**αφαιτια.**

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Lev. 12<sup>7</sup> **επιλειπεται περι αυτην ολιβερον, και καθαριει αυτην**

Saviour of the world. "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the whole world" (22).

Two great truths emerge. First, propitiation has its ultimate source in God. Paganism conceives of propitiation as a means of changing the disposition of the deity, of mollifying his displeasure and rendering him literally "propitious." In the Old Testament the conception rises to a higher plane; the expiation of sin begins to supersede the idea of the appeasing sacrifice, and language<sup>1</sup> is chosen as if to guard against the supposition that a feeling of personal irritation, pique; or resentment, such as mingles almost invariably with human wrath, mars the purity of the Divine indignation against sin. And this ascent from pagan anthropomorphism reaches the climax of all ethical religion in St. John's conception of the Divine atonement for human guilt:—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins" (4<sup>10</sup>). The action of which, in some sense, God is Himself the object, has God Himself as its origin. Propitiation is no device for inducing a reluctant deity to forgive; it is the way by which the Father in Heaven restores His sinning children to Himself.

Nevertheless, it is a real work of propitiation in which this love is exhibited and becomes effective for our salvation. "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (2<sup>2</sup>). To interpret the virtue of the **ἰλασμοῦ** as consisting merely in its supreme exhibition of God's all-embracing, all-forgiving love, as if to assure men that no barrier to fellowship exists save in their own fears, is to empty the word of all that it distinctively contains. One may or may not accept the teaching of the New

<sup>1</sup> This is witnessed to (in the LXX.) even by grammatical construction. In classical Greek the regular construction of (**ἐπι**)**ἰλασκεσθαι** is with the person (deity or man) in the acc., as the direct object. This construction occurs only in a single O.T. passage (Zech. 7<sup>2</sup> **ἐπιἰλασκεσθαι τὸν κύριον**), where the propitiation seems to be effected by prayer.

Testament; but it is, at any rate, due to intellectual honesty to recognise what that teaching is. And, beyond dispute, **ἱλασμός** can mean but one thing—that which in some way (we may not be able to say, and I do not here attempt to say, in what way or upon what principle) expiates the guilt of sin, which restores sinful offenders to God by rendering their sin null and inoperative as a barrier to fellowship with Him. The fundamental implication is that not until the moral fact of sin is thus dealt with, can the relations of God and man be established on a permanent, that is, on a moral basis. And because sin is thus dealt with by Christ, He is the "propitiation for our sins." The *ultima ratio* of propitiation lies at once in the Love of God and the guilt of man. It is at once the act in which alone the pure, spontaneous, all-forgiving Divine Love finds its total expression, and the act through which alone that Love, in consistency with its own highest aims and obligations, can go forth on its mission of reconciliation. It is through this channel of suffering and death, determined and cut out by human sin, that the life-giving stream which arises in the heart of the Eternal Love must find an outlet into the barren and unclean waste.

In saying so much, we have been guilty of a slight anticipation. In the statement that Christ is the propitiation for our sins, nothing more is implied than that, sin being a valid and by us insuperable obstacle to God's fellowship with us and ours with Him, the power by which this obstacle is removed springs from the Person of Christ.

This must now be considered in the light of the more definite statement, "If we walk<sup>1</sup> 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" (1<sup>7</sup>). In the Old

<sup>1</sup> v. *supra*, pp. 59, 60, 65.

Testament, propitiation was normally effected by the offering of an animal victim through death. Any other mode of making over a life to God was unknown to the Levitical ritual, and, indeed, to any pre-Christian conception of sacrifice. And thus it is invariably assumed in the New Testament that the sacrifice of Christ was consummated and offered in the Death of the Cross. That this is St. John's presupposition is clear from this reference to His Blood.

Neither here, however, nor anywhere in the New Testament, is the Blood a synonym for the Death of Christ. In the Levitical ritual the atoning virtue is assigned in a peculiar degree to the blood as containing the "life" (Lev. 17<sup>11</sup>). The warm, fluid blood was considered as the life of the animal, not a symbol of the life, but the life itself; and the essence, ritually, of the sacrificial act consisted in the offering of the life-blood to God; so much so that it might be regarded as a principle of the whole ritual system that "without outpouring of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9<sup>22</sup>). The meaning of this manipulation of the blood is variously explained; but the points of real importance are these: that, according to the analogy of the Old Testament, and in consonance with every type of New Testament teaching,<sup>1</sup> the propitiatory virtue of all Christ is and has done and does is here regarded as concentrated in His Blood; and that what this term connotes is the Life offered to God in His Death, not death itself regarded as mere deprivation of life. And now appears the immense significance of the words by which the Blood is defined. For what manner of life is it that is offered in this Blood? It is the life of perfect immaculate humanity—the life of Jesus; but it is at the same time Divine life ("the Eternal Life that was with the Father and was manifested to us")—the life of Jesus, His

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Rom. 3<sup>25</sup> 5<sup>9</sup>, Eph. 1<sup>7</sup> 2<sup>13</sup>, Col. 2<sup>20</sup>, Heb. 9<sup>12,14</sup>, 1 Pet. 1<sup>2,19</sup>, Rev. 1<sup>5</sup>.

Son.<sup>1</sup> It was this Divine-human life that was yielded up in spiritual sacrifice through physical death<sup>2</sup> in the Blood of the Cross.

The efficacy of this Blood is that it "cleanses from all sin"<sup>3</sup> (**kaqarizei h[ra]j a[po]pashj a[ph]artiaj**). Here, again, the connection of ideas is strictly Levitical. In the Old Testament ritual, purification from moral or ceremonial uncleanness was constantly effected by expiatory sacrifice, and especially by blood.<sup>4</sup> One may almost say that, "According to the law, all things are purified with blood" (Heb. 9<sup>22</sup>).

It is usually assumed without question, however, that, in this passage "cleansing" denotes not the removal of the guilty stain of sin, but cleansing of the character, deliverance from the power and defilement of sin itself (Lucke, Ebrard, Huther, Haupt, Rothe, Westcott; opposed, however, by Calvin, Weiss, Plummer). It is difficult to account for this; certainly there is no foothold in the Old Testament for such an interpretation of **kaqarizein**. There, the object of sacrificial cleansing is never the character; but is moral or ceremonial offence, regarded as leaving upon the offender a stain which makes covenant relations with God impossible till it is removed.<sup>4</sup> This impossibility is conceived either as objective, consisting in the re-action of the Divine purity against the uncleannesses of

<sup>1</sup> The addition of **tou[ai]fu[au]tou[is]** is a refutation of the Cerinthian doctrine that the Divine aeon, Christ, departed from Jesus before the Crucifixion; but the refutation consists in the assertion of the truth, which is the heart of Christianity, that it is by Divine sacrifice we are redeemed. "Early Christian writers use very extreme language in expressing this truth. Clement of Rome speaks of the **paqh[ma]ta qeou?** Ignatius of **ai[ma] qeou?** and **to[pa]qoj tou[geou]?** Tatian has **tou? peponqotoj qeou?** Tertullian, *passio[is] Dei* and *sanguine Dei*" (Plummer). Such language may be extreme, but it is more Christian than the doctrine of the impassibility of the Divine Nature.

<sup>2</sup> As it is in the Epistle, through the laying down of Christ's **yuxh** (3<sup>16</sup>).

<sup>3</sup> Better, "from every (kind of) sin."

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Lev. 16<sup>30</sup> **e[ph]il a[se]tai peri[ui]w[n] kaqarisai u[ph]a[j] a[po]pasw[n] tw[n] a[ph]artiwn u[ph]w[n].**

men, or as subjective, consisting in man's consciousness<sup>1</sup> of such uncleanness, depriving him of confidence to draw near to God. Elsewhere in the New Testament the usage is identical with that of the Old.<sup>2</sup> Nor is there any support in the context for a different interpretation in the present case. True, it is the very glory of salvation by the Blood of Christ that it cleanses the character from evil affection at the same time as it removes the guilt of sin, that Divine pardon and moral renewal are organically inseparable. And this, moreover, is the truth to the assertion of which this Epistle is as a whole devoted. But the question here for the Apostle and his readers is still only this, how we, being such as we are,—we whose life and character, when brought into the Light of God, are only revealed in their actual deformity and guilt,—can nevertheless enter into immediate fellowship with Him in Whose Light we stand thus revealed. And the answer is that, when we walk in the Light, confessing our sins, "the Blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin"—removes from us the stain of our guilt, and makes us clean in God's sight.<sup>3</sup>

The statement of this is varied and expanded in 1<sup>9</sup> "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."<sup>4</sup> Still we are in the circle of Levitical

<sup>1</sup> Even in Ps. 51<sup>10</sup> (according to Davidson, *Hebrews*, p. 206) a "clean heart" is a conscience void of offence, the result of forgiveness.

<sup>2</sup> The objective sense—cleansing from the guilt of sin in God's sight—is exemplified in Heb. 1<sup>3</sup> 9<sup>22,23</sup>, Tit. 2<sup>14</sup>, 2 Pet. 1<sup>9</sup>; the subjective deliverance from an evil conscience, in Heb. 9<sup>14</sup> to Acts 15<sup>9</sup>. The only passages in which **kaqarizein** has an ethical sense are 2 Cor. 7<sup>1</sup> and Jas. 4<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by the parallelism of the whole passage. 1<sup>7,9</sup> 2<sup>1,2</sup> are parallels: "If we walk in the light" (1<sup>7</sup>)="If we confess our sins" (1<sup>9</sup>) = "If any man sin" (2<sup>1</sup> implying, of course, the confession of sin). So, "the blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin" (1<sup>7</sup>) = "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1<sup>9</sup>) = "We have an advocate with the Father, and He is the propitiation for our sins" (2<sup>1,2</sup>)

<sup>4</sup> **adikia**. v. *supra*, pp. 134-35.

ideas,<sup>1</sup> in which forgiveness and cleansing are as closely as possible related to each other, and both to propitiation. For, though unexpressed, the idea of propitiation is implicit here in the assertion that God is "faithful and righteous" in forgiving sin and cleansing from unrighteousness. Here "faithful"<sup>2</sup> is the wider concept, which includes the more specific "righteous." When upon our penitent confession (the psychological condition that makes forgiveness possible *de facto*) God sets us free from the sins and disabilities by which we stand debarred from His fellowship, He does what is according to His own unalterable character, because He does what is right. He is "faithful" to His own nature; and it is His nature to "delight in mercy" and to be "ready to forgive"; yet to forgive, not with a weak and injurious mercy, but only in such a way that no wrong is done, no truth slurred over, that sin is recognised and dealt with as being what it is. The human conscience itself, when truly awakened, has always declined to find a solution of the problem of sin in forgiveness granted either by arbitrary will or by a leniency that shrinks from inflicting pain more than from vindicating right and showing its abhorrence of wrong. The New Testament proclaims that God is faithful and righteous in forgiving sin (cf. Rom. 3<sup>26</sup>), because He first reveals in word and in action the true nature and guilt of sin; and then freely pardons all who, walking in the light of that revelation,—the light that shines with concentrated power from the Cross,—confess and forsake their sins. And the human conscience in every age has borne witness that where men

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lev. 4<sup>20,26,36,33</sup> 5<sup>10,13</sup> etc. So also in Matt. 26<sup>28</sup> our Lord declares that His Blood is "poured out as an expiation for many, in order to the forgiveness of sins."

<sup>2</sup> **pistoj kai-dikaioj**. When faithfulness is ascribed to God, the sense is that He is faithful to Himself, acts in consistency with His essential attributes (2 Tim. 2<sup>13</sup>); or that, as a consequence, He is faithful in respect of His promises (Heb. 10<sup>23</sup>); or that He is faithful to those who trust Him (1 Cor. 10<sup>13</sup>). The first and radical sense is that which the word requires here.



do thus walk in the Light, this result follows: the Blood of Jesus cleanses away sin in the sight of God; to which He bears witness in cleansing the conscience from its stain and giving peace with Himself.

The last of this group of utterances speaks of Christ as our Paraclete. Earnestly the Apostle affirms the aim of all his writing to be "that ye sin not" (2<sup>1</sup>). Nevertheless, the present state being what it is, he contemplates the possibility—may we not say, the certainty?—of sin occurring in the life even of those who are walking in the Light. In such an event we are not left without a resource: "We have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous" (2<sup>1</sup>). The word Paraclete<sup>1</sup> is exclusively Johannine (a statement which includes the LXX. as well as the N.T.); and its meaning is everywhere the same. No single English word, indeed, covers the whole breadth of its various applications and suggestions; but these are always different shades of the same meaning, not different-meanings. It may be said to signify in general a friendly representative who defends one's cause, usually by influential intercession. In the Gospel the Holy Spirit, as the Paraclete, maintains Christ's cause with the believer (John 14<sup>20</sup> 15<sup>26</sup> 16<sup>14</sup>), and champions the believer's cause

<sup>1</sup> The questions of etymology, sense and usage, have been very fully discussed, and these discussions are so easily available (Westcott, *St. John* xiv. 16; *Epistles of St. John.*, p. 42; best of all, DB iii. 665) that they may be very briefly dealt with here. The active meaning "Comforter" is nowhere tenable, the word being by formation the passive verbal of **parakalein**, to "call to one's aid," and being capable of no other sense than "one called in to aid the caller." The term is most frequently associated with courts of justice, denoting a powerful friend or learned "counsel" who pleads the cause or interposes on behalf of the accused (Latin, "advocatus" or "patronus"; but the meaning is wider than our "advocate"), and is distinctively the opposite of **kathgoroj** (cf. 2<sup>2</sup> with Rev. 12<sup>10</sup>). It is used several times by Philo in the definite sense of "advocate" or "intercessor" (Westcott, *St. John*, p. 212). In Lucian, *Pseudol.* 4. (**paraklhteoj hpin . . . o[ E]legxoj**), the speaker summons the personified Elenchus or Conviction to aid him in showing up his adversary in his true colours, —a remote but somewhat interesting parallel to the office of the Paraclete in John 16<sup>8-11</sup>.

against the world (John 16<sup>8-11</sup>); and here Christ is the penitent sinner's Advocate, and pleads his cause with the Father.

In this connection these words, "with the Father" (**proi ton patera**), are extremely significant. It is God's Fatherhood that renders such advocacy possible, and at the same time demands it. On the one hand, the words repudiate the caricature of Christ's Intercession as a process of persuasion acting upon a reluctant will. On the other hand, the writer could not by conscious intention have chosen words more directly contradictory of the assumption that the Divine Fatherhood, rightly understood, excludes all necessity or possibility of mediation and intercession. The all-forgiving Love of the Father is like the waves of a great reservoir, pulsing and throbbing against the barrier until the flood-gate is opened; when instantly the pent-up waters are sent bounding along the dried-up channel. That opening is, from the human side, repentance and confession (1<sup>9</sup>); but, if New Testament teaching is unanimous on any point, it is regarding this, that from the Divine side also an opening of the flood-gate is needed, and that this is effected through Christ's work of propitiation and intercession. An Advocate with the Father! The words seem a paradox. Is not a father's heart the best advocate of an erring child? Will not a father's love have anticipated every plea that can be urged in his behalf? That must be understood. But it must be understood also that even the Father's love can urge nothing in apology for *sin*—nothing that is of force to absolve from its guilt. Yet there is One who can urge on our behalf what is at once the most appalling condemnation of our sin, and the only sufficient plea for its remission—Himself.

This Paraclete the Apostle now names and describes with reference to His personal qualifications for the office. He is Jesus Christ. Elsewhere the writer distinguishes

between those two appellations, and brings out the proper and original force of each (2<sup>23</sup> 4<sup>2</sup> 5<sup>1.6</sup>); but here Jesus Christ is used simply as a proper name, the full designation by which the Saviour of the World is known in history. It is as Jesus Christ, the "Word made flesh," that He is our Paraclete. In virtue of His uniquely intimate union with humanity in nature, experience, and sympathy, He remains for ever its perfect and universal representative; and as, when He was on earth, He pled for friend (John 17, Luke 22<sup>31</sup>) and foe (Luke 23<sup>34</sup>), so still in the Heavenly places He upholds our cause.

But if it is as Jesus Christ that He is qualified to represent man, it is especially as Jesus Christ the Righteous<sup>1</sup> that He is fitted to be the sinner's Advocate. The epithet may apply directly to His advocacy. Not only without share in the sin of those for whom He pleads, He is untainted by any secret sympathy with it. He has resisted sin unto blood; He has suffered all things on account of sin. He sees it as it is, and confesses it as beyond apology or extenuation. His righteousness in interceding corresponds to the Father's righteousness in forgiving (1<sup>9</sup>). Or we may, perhaps, better understand "righteous" as applying universally to the Advocate's nature and character. In Him the Father sees His own essential Righteousness (2<sup>29a</sup>) revealed. In Him there stands before God the Divine Ideal of humanity (2<sup>29b</sup>). It is as man in whom that ideal is consummated, as Jesus Christ the Righteous that He is qualified to undertake the cause of mankind before the Righteous Father (cf. Heb. 7<sup>26.27</sup>). This interpretation best agrees with what follows.

"And He<sup>2</sup> is the propitiation for our sins. And not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (2<sup>2</sup>). Here a

<sup>1</sup> The proper sense of **Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸν δίκαιον** is, "Jesus Christ being, as He is, righteous." See Notes, *in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> He (**αὐτοῦ**) is emphatic, "He himself."

necessary relation between the office of Paraclete and the fact of propitiation is clearly indicated, again on Levitical lines. As it was through the blood of sacrifice that the High priest<sup>1</sup> enjoyed the right of entering within the veil and making intercession for the sins of the people (Heb. 9<sup>7</sup>), so Christ's prerogative of advocacy is grounded on the fact that He has made propitiation (Heb. 9<sup>12</sup>). On the other hand, as it was only in the High priest's appearing before God with the atoning blood that the act of atonement was completed, so it is by Christ's advocacy that the propitiation becomes actually operative. The two acts not only are united in one Person, but constitute the one reconciling work by which there is abiding fellowship between God and His sinning people.

But the most notable point is that it is Himself--Jesus Christ the Righteous--who is the propitiation. (So also in 4<sup>10</sup>) St. John does not speak of Christ as "making propitiation." He Himself, in virtue of all that He is, He who has lived the Life of God in man, in whom that Life has triumphed over the world and reached its last fulfilment in the self-surrender of death He is the propitiation<sup>2</sup> for sin, and He is our Paraclete through whose permanent ministry before the Father, propitiation becomes salvation unto the uttermost (Heb. 7<sup>25</sup>).

What conception can we form of the reality denoted by Christ's office of Paraclete? It has sometimes been

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the identification here of the Paraclete with the High priest, it is interesting to note the statement that "Philo often uses it (Paraclete) of the High priest interceding on earth for Israel, and also of the Divine word or Logos giving efficacy in heaven to the intercession of the priest upon earth" (Plummer). The one passage usually quoted is not, however, quite to this effect. "It was necessary that the priest who is consecrated to the Father of the world should employ, as a Paraclete most perfect in efficacy, the Son, for the blotting out of sins and the obtaining of a supply of abundant blessings (*De Vita Mosis*, III. xiv. 135).

<sup>2</sup> Or as the Epistle to the Hebrews has it, it is "through His own Blood" that "He entered once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption."

understood in a crassly anthropomorphic sense; and we must agree with Calvin, who repudiates the materialism of those "qui genibus Patris Christum advolvunt, ut pro nobis oret." Our Lord Himself negatives the idea of oral intercession (John 16<sup>26. 27</sup>)

On the other hand, His intercession is sometimes rarefied into a merely symbolical expression of the truth that His work of propitiation is of enduring validity. But no such abstract idea adequately represents the thought and the feeling of the Apostle's words, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father." The title Paraclete itself suggests, on the manward side, a ministry that is intensely personal and compassionate, intimately and sympathetically related to the moral crises of sin and temptation, distress and need, that arise in individual lives (Heb. 2<sup>17</sup> 4<sup>15</sup>). And if the New Testament understands by Christ's Intercession such a ministry toward men, it is also, without doubt, understood as containing a correspondent activity toward God. In what this consists--though it is not essentially more mysterious than Christ's intercession on earth—is necessarily beyond our conception. More we need not and cannot know than that Jesus Christ the Righteous--Propitiation and Paraclete--abideth for ever, and is the living channel through which the Eternal Love gives itself to sinful men, and all the spiritual energies of the Divine Nature stream forth to take away the sin of the world.

From the examination thus made of the principal passages in the Epistle that bear directly on Propitiation, it must be evident that its type of doctrine, under this category, exhibits a striking affinity with that of the Epistle to the Hebrews —an affinity which does not, perhaps, imply direct derivation, but does imply that both are so far products of the same school of thought. For both, the fundamental religious concepts are those of

the Levitical system. Both instinctively run Christian truth into Old Testament moulds. The entire theological scheme in *Hebrews* has as its nucleus the thought of "religion as a covenant, or state of relation, between God and a worshipping people, in which necessarily the high priest occupies the place of prominence" (Davidson, *Hebrews*, p. 197). St. John eschews the terms "covenant" and "High priest"--possibly because they were unfamiliar to those for whom he wrote, or, if familiar, debased by pagan associations. With him "covenant relationship" becomes **koinwnia** (1<sup>3</sup>), filial fellowship with God, the mutual indwelling of God and His people.<sup>1</sup> And unmistakably this is the standpoint from which he approaches the problem of sin and its removal. St. John does regard sin ethically, and insists with startling emphasis upon its absolute antagonism to the nature of God and His children (3<sup>9</sup>); and it is open to any one to maintain that he ought to have adhered to this point of view throughout, and to have contemplated the removal of sin simply by ethical process, so that the atonement would be "the believer himself brought into harmony with the Divine mind, purpose, and will through the Mediator."<sup>2</sup> But this St. John does not do. Like the author of *Hebrews*, he contemplates sin primarily, in its religious consequences, as an objective disability for fellowship with God. As such, it can be removed only by "cleansing," which carries with it "remission"; and "cleansing" again is accomplished only by "propitiation" and specifically by "blood." For these ends a sacrifice and a priestly mediator are indispensable. The sacrifice is provided. The "Blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth from all sin"<sup>3</sup> (1<sup>7</sup>). And He who is the propitiation is Himself also the Priest (Heb. 9<sup>11-14</sup>), who consummates the sacrifice by

<sup>1</sup> v. *infra*, pp. 195-6.

<sup>2</sup> Sears, *Heart of Christ*, p. 501 (quoted by Stevens).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John 17<sup>19</sup>, where our Lord expressly represents Himself as the *covenant-sacrifice*, which consecrates His disciples as the People of God.

intercessory presentation of it before God; for, though in the nomenclature of St. John the Paraclete supplants the Priest, the office of the Paraclete is indubitably identical with that of the great High Priest of God's people, as it is delineated in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

But it is maintained<sup>1</sup> that "The problem of sin, which was central in the mind of Paul, to John appeared something secondary. In the true Johannine doctrine there is no logical place for the view of the death of Christ as an atonement. So far as that view is accepted we have to do, not with John's characteristic teaching, but with the orthodox faith of the Church, which he strove to incorporate with his own at the cost of an inner contradiction." Now, on any theory of its authorship, the Epistle must be regarded as essentially a Johannine document; and it is not going beyond our province to consider how far, if at all, it sustains these assertions. It is true that we do not find in it the same fierce grappling with the problem of deliverance from sin as in the Epistle to the Romans; that the truth to which the earlier thinker fights his way, as with tears and blood, the later gets not in possession by his own sword, but finds and accepts as beyond all controversy. And yet there is no lack of intensity in his statement either of the problem of sin (1<sup>8.10</sup>) or of its solution (1<sup>7.9</sup> 2<sup>1.2</sup> 4<sup>9.10</sup>). These words represent, no doubt, "the orthodox faith of the Church"; yet what words can possess a clearer note of immediate spiritual intuition? What more fervent and memorable expressions of the common doctrine of the New Testament are to be found? What words are more constantly used in the devotions of the Church, for the confession of sin and the expression of confidence in its removal by the Divine sacrifice, than the words of this Epistle? It seems strange that these should be the words

<sup>1</sup> By the school of which Mr. Ernest Scott is the ablest as well as the most recent representative among us.

of a writer who was only endeavouring to engraft the orthodox doctrine upon another truth that was vital to his own soul.

The doctrine of Propitiation has no "logical place" in St. John's "characteristic teaching," but is accepted "at the cost of an inner contradiction," only if that can be true of a doctrine which at the same time is for him the climax of all truth--the supreme revelation of the supreme principle of all moral life, human and divine. Organic relation cannot be closer than that which exists between St. John's doctrine of Propitiation and his doctrine of the moral nature of God. If "God is Love" is the master-light of all spiritual vision, this is the sole and perfect medium of its outshining: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins" (4<sup>10</sup>). Here is no mere echo of an orthodox belief; no repetition of a stock idea. St. Paul had already compared the love of God in the Death of Christ with the utmost men will do for one another (Rom. 5<sup>7,8</sup>); but "St. John rises above all comparisons to an absolute point of view."<sup>1</sup> Christ's mission of propitiation not only has its motive in the Divine Love, it embodies and contains the complete fulness of that Love. Other acts and gifts are tokens and expressions of it; but "Herein is Love"—the whole and sole equivalent in act of what God is in essence. In this passage we have a conception which, as it seems to me, surpasses anything to be found elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures,<sup>2</sup> of the sacrifice of God in Christ as a Divine act which, while it is free and optional, as being unsolicited and undetermined by anything external to the Divine nature itself, is an absolute self-necessity of that nature. St. John's doctrine of propitiation is related to his

<sup>1</sup> Denney, *Death of Christ*, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> The only parallel is that which is *implied* in the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son (Luke 15).



doctrine of God by the logic of moral necessity. If God is Love, nothing is more necessarily true than that He suffers on account of human sin; and to deny Him the power to help and save men by bearing their burden, is to deny to Him the highest prerogative of Love.

But it may be said that propitiation stands in no logical relation to the other and more prominent half of St. John's doctrine of Salvation--Regeneration. God saves men by the Divine Begetting, by the direct impartation of that Eternal Life which has been made communicable to them through the Incarnation of the Word. How and why, it may be asked, is this spiritual and ethical salvation from sin conditioned by the expiation of its guilt? We may not be able to answer this question. It is conceivable that St. John himself could not. But it does not follow that there is an inner contradiction. The difficulty does not attach itself to the Johannine theology exclusively. It belongs in some form to every type of theology in the New Testament. It only becomes specially obvious in St. John because with him the doctrinal centre is Life—the Life of the Word made Flesh becoming the new Life of mankind. And if we inquire, as we naturally do, why the Divine-human Life of Christ must pass through death, and thereby become a propitiation for human sin, before it could become the principle of new Life to men, St. John gives us no explicit answer. He tacitly presupposes the answer that in its various forms is given or assumed throughout the New Testament, that God, in bestowing the sovereign grace of pardon and sonship, must deal truthfully and adequately with sin as a violation of the moral order—as a fact, if we may say so, both of the Divine conscience and of the human conscience, which is its image. And with St. John, as with other New Testament writers, the necessity and the efficacy of *sacrifice*

as the means by which this is accomplished are simply axiomatic.

But when we proceed to the endeavour to extract from the data of the Epistle the principle or principles upon which we may account for this, we encounter a task to which exegesis is not adequate, and which constructive theology has not yet finally achieved. It has become a commonplace to say that the New Testament contains no theory of the Atonement. Yet it is evident that the Apostolic writers were not only religiously conscious of reconciliation with God by the mediation of Christ, but were also intellectually interested in the mode of its accomplishment. The Epistles to the Romans and to the Hebrews abundantly witness that the fascination which the problem of Christ's Death has for the modern mind was no less intensely felt by the Apostolic mind. The tantalising feature of the case is that its need of explanation seems to have ended where ours begins. When the work of Christ was described as a propitiatory sacrifice, and was seen to embody the full truth which the sacrificial system of the Old Testament faintly and imperfectly expressed, no need of further elucidation suggested itself to the writers of the New Testament.

We are only driven back upon the further inquiries—what is the root-idea of sacrifice, and what is its relation to the end in view? How was it conceived by the earliest Christian teachers and their disciples? Did they feel that any rationale of sacrifice and its cognate institutions was either necessary or possible? What was to them the explanation has become itself the problem.

One intensely illuminating ray St. John does shed upon it. The sacrifice of Christ is the sacrifice of God. This is the Epistle's great contribution to Christian thought—the vision of the Cross in the heart of the eternal Love. How

<sup>1</sup> See the admirable article "Sacrifice," *DB* (Paterson).

suggestive are these two statements when placed side by side: "Herein is Love—that God loved us, and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins" (4<sup>10</sup>) and "Herein do we know Love (recognise what it is), because He laid down His Life for us" (3<sup>16</sup>)! God's sending His Son and Christ's laying down His Life are moral equivalents. The Cross of Christ is but the manifestation of another Cross that invisible Cross which the sin and folly, the trustlessness and ingratitude, of His children have made for the Father who is Love. How hard it has been for human thought to assimilate the ethics of Christ, needs no stronger proof than the fact that the impassibility of God had for so long the place of an axiom in Christian theology. When we speak of God as Father, when we say that God loves beings who are false, lustful, malicious, who are stubborn and impenitent, who in their blindness and perverse wilfulness rush upon self-destruction, what immeasurable sorrows do we imply in the depths of the Divine Love! And it is out of those depths that the Cross of Christ emerges. He who bled on Calvary was first in the Bosom of the Father; and what is the Gospel of a crucified Christ, but the proclamation of the infinitely awful, blessed truth that God Himself is the greatest sufferer from our sin; that the Righteous Father drinks the bitter cup His children's unrighteousness has filled? As in all things, Christ is in this the Word of the invisible God. He bore our sins in His sufferings and Death, not by any external infliction, but by the inward necessity of holy Love,—because He would live out the Life of God in this hostile world. In this there is nothing "transactional," "official," "forensic," nothing but inevitable spiritual reality. Holy Love cannot but bear sin, sorrow over it, suffer for it, and thereby, according to the redemptive law, become sin's propitiation.

What is that redemptive, law? There is no other problem over which Christian thought, since "Cur Deus

Homo," has brooded so intently; and there is no doctrine the history of which more clearly shows that ethical always precedes theological advance. Its history becomes an index to the moral development of Christendom, as we find each successive theory reflecting the moral standards and ideas of the time in which it arose. And it is idle to imagine that the theories that find favour in our day will prove more satisfying to our successors than those of preceding ages do to us. Always as the Spirit of Christ comes to more perfect fulfilment in the individual and in society, shall we come to a more perfect understanding of the sacrifice of Christ.

Yet the labour of past generations has not been fruitless.

There is not one of the great historical theories of the Atonement which, when its crudities and exaggerations have been carried away by the tide, does not leave some residuum of solid gain. There is no aspect under which the work of Christ has revealed itself to reverent minds but contains some element of essential value. This has not been sufficiently recognised. Criticism has been prone to seize upon incidental falsities and exaggerated expressions rather than upon abiding truths. It has been too generally assumed that the work of Christ is explicable by some single formula; and the part seen has been taken for the whole. We cannot doubt, indeed, that a unity there must be in which all its manifold aspects meet; one principle which is the master-key to all its complexities. "If we could find it, we might be surprised at its simplicity; we certainly should wonder at its Divine beauty and naturalness." Meanwhile, may we not recognise that the different aspects it reveals, when approached from different points of view, are not mutually destructive, but mutually complementary?

Inadequate as is the "moral influence" theory, when it

regards the work of Christ exclusively as the undoing of the effect of sin in the character, its essential truth is so obvious that it is the common element in all the theories. To make sinful men know that God grieves over them, that He longs to touch and win them to penitence and newness of life, that for this end He has willed to go to that length of self-sacrifice, the only measure of which is the Cross,—who does not acknowledge that this is supremely aimed at and achieved in the work of Christ?

And if there be taken away from the despised Anselmic theory its accidental taint of feudalism with its defective moral ideals, that theory also, when it contemplates the work of Christ in relation to the Divine personality, contains a profound truth. If we conceive of God as a Being to whom the notions of moral satisfaction and pleasure and their opposites are in any way applicable, must we not also conceive of the obedience of Christ—obedience not only flawless in will and deed, but obedience which exhausted the possibilities of obedience, which transcended all the obedience of earth because perfect as that of heaven, and which transcended all the obedience of heaven because wrought out through the pains, humiliations. and temptations of earth, obedience as perfect and divine as the Will to which it was rendered,—must we not conceive of that obedience<sup>1</sup> as a perfect satisfaction, "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour," as, in literal truth, an atonement, a moral compensation for the sin of the world? If the race, which without Christ were a tragic moral failure, so that, to speak after the manner of men, it would have grieved and repented God that He had created it, becomes with Christ a moral triumph, so that looking upon that Face He can rejoice in having said, "Let us

<sup>1</sup> "Obedience" is intended here to include, and to include as its chiefest content, the Death of Christ. Anselm distinguishes between the two. My purpose is simply to give the essence of the "satisfaction" type of theory.

make man,"--is not Christ in a very real sense a propitiation for the sin of the world?

Is there not essential truth also in the so-called "governmental" theories by which the work of Christ is related specifically to the public moral interests of mankind and of the whole rational universe? In the universal Christian consciousness, the Cross of Christ is a solemn and unique testimony to the guilt of sin. It achieves in the realm of Divine government that vindication of moral law which it is sought to achieve in mundane communities by the infliction of adequate penalties for transgression. The Cross of Christ has made sin a vastly more appalling thing. Wherever its influence is felt it has inspired in the conscience a new sense of the enormity of sin. It becomes in experience a supreme factor in the moral administration of God's Kingdom; and can it be supposed that this lies apart from its essential purpose, or that there is not in this respect also a real propitiatory efficacy in the work of Christ?

And is there not essential truth also in the much-reprobated "penal" theory? More than any other, this theory has been wounded in the house of its friends. It has sometimes represented God as one with whom the quality of mercy is sadly strained, as a vindictive Shylock who must and will have a *quid pro quo*. But God is Love; and Justice, even punitive Justice, is one of the indefeasible functions of Love.<sup>1</sup> There is a law of retribution inherent in the very constitution of a universe created and governed by God who is Holy Love,—a law, that wherever sin is, suffering follows for the sinner himself or vicariously for others. And may we not conceive that there is an exactness in the operation of this law, whereby, whenever wrong is placed in the one scale, suffering is always accumulated in the other until the

<sup>1</sup> v. *supra*, pp. 82-84.

balance is adjusted; and that only by working itself out in the full harvest of suffering can wrong exhaust its power, and make way for the possibility of a new and happy rightness? And may we not conceive that one truth—the greatest truth—revealed in the Cross, is that in Christ God Himself fulfils this law on behalf of His creatures, and drains the bitter cup men's sin has filled? But, if such a generalisation be too vast and venturesome, there are still obvious and undeniable facts. Relieve the penal doctrine of the forensic technicalities with which it has been loaded, and the truth remains that God in Christ has borne the penalty of human sin, as the worthy father of an unworthy child, or the faithful wife of a profligate husband bears its penalty, as by the inherent vicariousness of Love the good always suffer for the bad. Does not every Christian, whatever his theology, instinctively recognise this, and say, when he looks to Gethsemane and Calvary, "There is the true punishment of my sin; there in the suffering flesh and spirit of my Saviour, I behold the genuine fruit of sin; a Divine woe borne for me which I shall never bear, but which, I pray, shall more and more bear fruit in my penitence and devotion?" It is fact of history that Christ has suffered for human sin; it is fact of faith that God in Him has so suffered, fulfilling on our behalf the retributive law that balances sin with suffering, and that now no suffering is left save what is laden with good to ourselves or to others. In this also we must recognise a direct and vital element in Christ's work of propitiation.

If, then, we find in every theory alike that the work of Christ is the undoing of the work of sin, that in one theory sin and its undoing are regarded in relation to the moral disposition of man; in another, to the Personality of God; in another, to the public interests of the Divine government; in yet another, to the inherent constitution

of the moral universe,--we may conclude that none of these different conceptions will be lacking, whatever others may be present, in the final interpretation of the Apostle's words, "Herein is Love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."



## CHAPTER X.

### ETERNAL LIFE.

IN the foregoing chapter it has been made good, I trust, that the aspect of salvation in which sin is regarded as a fact of conscience and as a barrier to fellowship with God—the aspect denoted by the word propitiation—does not lack adequate and powerful presentment in the Epistle. But the theme which supremely engages the writer's thoughts, which he has most profoundly made his own, is the *terminus ad quem* of salvation—the Infinite Good, in the possession of which the reality of fellowship with God consists, and which is expressed throughout the Epistle by one word and by no other—Life (with or without the adjective "eternal"). With this theme the Epistle begins (1<sup>2</sup>) and ends (5<sup>20</sup>), while the purpose of the whole expressly is, "That ye may know that ye have Eternal Life " (5<sup>13</sup>). Its predominance is complete; it is the centre to which every idea in the Epistle is more or less directly related. And, indeed, its unique development of the Christian conception of Life and Regeneration may be set beside its doctrine of the moral nature of God and its doctrine of the Incarnation, as one of the three great contributions of Johannine thought to the teaching of the New Testament.

Nowhere do the Scriptures furnish a definition of Life; but for the most part the Biblical conception of spiritual life is derived directly from experience. It denotes a rich complex of thought, emotion, and activity,

in which man is conscious of that which fulfils the highest idea of his being. Life consists in the enjoyment of God's favour (Ps. 30<sup>5</sup>); it is the result of loving God and obeying His voice (Deut. 30<sup>19.20</sup>); it is the fruit of true wisdom (Prov. 3<sup>18</sup>), and of the fear of the Lord (Prov. 14<sup>27</sup>). Everywhere in the Old Testament, Life is conceived as the enjoyment of those blessings that flow to men from a vivid experience of God's favour and fellowship. It is upon these things men live, and altogether therein is the life of the Spirit (Isa. 38<sup>16</sup>). Nor is it otherwise in the New Testament. Life is an experience of the supreme and eternal blessings of the Kingdom of God. It is the goal toward which men are to struggle onward by the narrow way (Matt. 7<sup>14</sup>); for the attainment of which no sacrifice is to be deemed too costly, because in its possession every sacrifice is more than plentifully recompensed (Mark 10<sup>30</sup>). The door of entrance to it is repentance (Acts 11<sup>18</sup>), and the way of attainment, patient continuance in well-doing (Rom. 2<sup>7</sup>). It is the end of that emancipation from sin and servanthship to God of which holiness is the immediate fruit (Rom. 6<sup>22</sup>); the harvest which they reap who sow unto the Spirit (Gal. 6<sup>8</sup>); the prize of which we are to lay hold by fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6<sup>12</sup>). In these and in all kindred passages the conception of Life is derived directly from the data of actual or anticipated experience. Life is a result, not a cause. It is conscious participation in the highest good for which man is made, which he can find only when his whole nature has been redeemed from the dominion of false ideals, and has been harmonised with the Divine order, by the perfect knowledge and love of God, and by unhampered and enthusiastic devotion to His will.

Now the definition of life, so conceived, will simply be a generalisation from its phenomena, that is, from its functions and characteristics as experienced and observed

in the living organism. Thus in the physical sphere, the physiologist finds that such organisms invariably exhibit the phenomena of Assimilation, Waste, Reproduction, and Growth, and defines Life as the co-ordination of these functions. The biologist, again, regarding the phenomena from a different point of view, reaches the wider generalisation that life is correspondence to environment, "the continuous adjustment of internal to external relations" (Spencer).

In the same way, spiritual life may be defined as a correspondence of spiritual faculty to spiritual environment, the right relation of trust, love, and hope, of conscience, affection, and will, to their true Divine objects. "The mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Rom. 8<sup>6</sup>). Or it may be defined physiologically by the functions and energies with which it is identified; it is "Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14<sup>27</sup>; cf. Gal. 5<sup>22, 23</sup>) And our Epistle, more than any other New Testament writing, patiently places beneath our hands the material for such a definition of Life. Its subject-matter consists chiefly in the delineation of Eternal Life, positively and negatively, by means of its invariable and unmistakable characteristics, Righteousness, Love, and Belief of the Truth. These are its primary functions. Confronted by the Truth of God in the person of Jesus Christ, every one in whom the Life is quickened believes— beholds in Jesus the Incarnate Son of God; confronted by the Will of God, as moral duty or commandment, he obeys; confronted by human need, he loves, not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth (3<sup>18</sup>). Life, accordingly, might be defined from the Epistle as consisting in Belief, Obedience, and Love, as the co-existence of these in conscious activity, carrying with it a joyful assurance of

<sup>1</sup> "Every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of God" (2<sup>29</sup>). "Every one that loveth is begotten of God" (4<sup>7</sup>). "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God" (5<sup>1</sup>)

present fellowship with God (3<sup>10-24</sup> 4<sup>15-18</sup>) and of its glorious consummation in the future (3<sup>2</sup>)

Yet any definition from such a point of view would omit all that is most distinctive in the Johannine conception of Life. According to that conception, Life is cause, not effect; not phenomenon, but essence; not conscious experience, but that which underlies and produces experience. Eternal Life does not consist in the moral activities of Belief, Obedience, and Love, and still less is it a consequence flowing from the activities; it is the animating principle that is manifested in them, of which they are the fruits and evidences. Instead of "This do and thou shalt live" (Luke 10<sup>28</sup>), St. John says conversely, "Every one that doeth righteousness is<sup>1</sup> begotten of God"; instead of "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1<sup>17</sup>), "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is<sup>1</sup> begotten of God." The human activity--doing righteousness, believing, loving—is the result and the proof of life already imparted, not the condition or the means of its attainment.

Thus the Johannine conception of spiritual Life is completely analogous to the commonly-held conception of physical Life. Physical Life, as has been said, may be defined from its phenomena. It is correspondence to environment; or it is the association, in a definite individual form, of Assimilation, Waste, Reproduction, and Growth. Such a definition covers all the phenomena that distinguish the organic from the inorganic; and if no other existence than that of phenomena is recognised, it represents the furthest limit of thought on the subject. But the mind does not naturally rest in such a definition. We intuitively assume a something behind the phenomena, an entity of which they are the manifestation. To the ordinary way of

<sup>1</sup> **ο[ποιῶν . . . γεγενῆται** (2<sup>29</sup>); **ο[ἀγαπῶν** (4<sup>7</sup>); **ο[πιστεῶν . . . γεγενῆται** (5<sup>1</sup>). The tenses sufficiently show that in each case the Divine Begetting is the necessary antecedent to the human activity. But this is the presupposition of the Epistle throughout, See Chapters XI., XII., VIII.

thinking, the "continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations" is not a definition of what Life is, but merely a highly generalised statement of what Life *does*. Life is not correspondence to environment; it is what determines such correspondence. What Life is in itself we may not be able to say. Indeed, we cannot say. It is the mystic principle, the *natura naturans*, of which Nature is at once the revelation and the veil. Science fails to throw a ray of light across the gulf between Life and Death. But the idea of Life as an animating principle, the essence in which inhere all the potencies developed in the living organism, is one which, though it expresses what science is confessedly ignorant of, is necessary to science itself.

This conception of physical Life is by no means foreign to Biblical thought. The "life," the animating principle of the bodily organism (חַיָּוִת), is in the "blood" (Gen. 9<sup>4</sup>, Lev. 17<sup>11</sup> etc.). God is the fountain of all Life (Ps. 36<sup>9</sup>); and to every creature (Ps. 104<sup>30</sup>), as to man (Gen. 2<sup>7</sup>), it is a direct impartation by God's own quickening Breath. But it is not until we come to the Johannine writings that we find this mode of conception expressly applied to the spiritual Life. And we shall now proceed to consider how it is expressed and applied in our Epistle.

The designation most frequently employed is simply "the Life" (חַיָּוִת 1<sup>1</sup>. 2 3<sup>14</sup> 5<sup>12</sup>. 16) Elsewhere the Life is qualitatively described as "eternal" (חַיָּוִת אֵלֶּיךָ, 3<sup>15</sup> 5<sup>11</sup>. 13) Twice (1<sup>2</sup> 2<sup>25</sup>) the form חַיָּוִת אֵלֶּיךָ is used, by which the separate ideas of "life" and "eternal" are more distinctly emphasised. A comparison of these passages makes it certain that these forms of locution are used quite interchangeably. The ideas of duration and futurity which are originally and properly expressed by the adjective אֵלֶּיךָ<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> אֵלֶּיךָ=belonging to an aeon—specifically, to "the coming aeon," אֵלֶּיךָ אֵלֶּיךָ.

have become in Johannine usage only one element, and that not the primary element, in its significance. Always Life is regarded as a present reality (e.g. 3<sup>14</sup> 5<sup>12</sup>); and the adjective "eternal" is added even when the reference to its present possession is most emphatic (3<sup>15</sup> "Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him)." Eternal Life is not any kind of life prolonged *ad infinitum*. The life of a Dives, though he should be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously through everlasting ages, would come never one inch nearer to the idea of Eternal Life. The category of time recedes before that of moral quality. Eternal Life is one kind of life, the highest, the Divine kind of life, irrespective of its duration. It is the kind of Life that is perfectly manifested in Christ (1<sup>2</sup> 5<sup>11</sup>). Every hour of His history belonged to the eternal order. Every word He spoke, every deed of obedience and love He did, was an outgoing of Eternal Life. The Divine nature was in it. And in whomsoever it exists, whether in heaven or on earth, the possession of that nature which produces thoughts, motives and desires, words and deeds, like His, is Eternal Life. But though, abstractly, the idea of Eternal Life might be considered as timeless, it would not be accurate so to describe the Apostle's actual conception of it. It was from "the Beginning" in the "Word" (1<sup>1</sup>). It is the absolute Divine Life (5<sup>20</sup>), therefore imperishable. It stands in triumphant contrast to the pathetic ephemerality of the worldly life (2<sup>17</sup>). And while there is no passage in the Epistle (not even 2<sup>25</sup>) where Life, with or without the adjective "eternal," does not primarily signify a present spiritual state rather than a future immortal felicity, the latter is not only implicit in the very conception of Eternal Life as the *summum bonum*, but comes fully to light in the vision of the impending Parousia (2<sup>17</sup> 2<sup>28</sup> 3<sup>2</sup> 4<sup>17</sup>).

Of this Life, God, the Father revealed in Christ, is

the sole and absolute source. He is the true God and Eternal<sup>1</sup> Life (5<sup>20</sup>) Eternal Life is His gift<sup>2</sup> to men; potentially, when He "sent His Son into the world that we might live through Him" (4<sup>9</sup>); actually, when we believe in His name (5<sup>13</sup>). For of this Life, again, Christ is the sole mediator. If "the witness is that God gave us Eternal Life," this is because "this Life is in His Son" (5<sup>11</sup>). By the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten Son the Eternal Life in its Divine fulness became incorporate with humanity, and remains a fountain of regenerative power to 'as many as receive Him" (John 1<sup>12</sup>). And here St. John's doctrine of the Logos enables him to carry New Testament thought on this subject a step further than the Pauline view of Christ as the Second Adam and the "Man from heaven " (1 Cor. 15<sup>22. 45-49</sup>) In what sense the Life of God is in Christ and is mediated through Him, is unfolded in the opening verses of the Epistle, where it is said that the subject of the entire Apostolic announcement is "the Word of Life" (**peritou logou thj zwhj**), this announcement being possible because "the Life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the Life, the Eternal Life, which was in relation to the Father, and was manifested unto us " (1<sup>2</sup>).

Here the mediation of Life through the historic Christ (1<sup>1</sup>) is grounded in the relation, eternally subsisting within the Godhead itself, of the Word to the Father (1<sup>2</sup>). For, whatever be the exact interpretation of the title, "the Word of Life,"<sup>3</sup> the main intention of the whole passage is to identify the Life manifested and seen in Christ with "the Life, the Eternal Life, which existed in relation to the

<sup>1</sup> v. *supra*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> 5<sup>11</sup> **zwhn aiwnon edoken hmiñ o qeoj**. The force of the verb **didonai** and of the aorist tense is as here stated. The tense points to the definite historical act, the Incarnation, by which Eternal Life was communicated to humanity; the verb asserts comprehensively that "God has sent His Only Begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him."

<sup>3</sup> See Notes, *in loc.*

Father" (**htij h# proj ton patera**).<sup>1</sup> And that this refers to the Life of the pre-incarnate Logos, is plain from the exact parallelism of expression employed regarding the Logos Himself (**o||ogoj h# proj ton qeon**, John 1<sup>2</sup>). In the Gospel it is said that the Logos existed "toward" (**proj**) God, that is, as a personality distinct from God, yet eternally and by necessity in relation to God. Here the same statement is made with regard to the Life that is in the Logos. That "the Logos existed in relation to God," and that "the Life existed in relation to the Father," are practically equivalent statements.<sup>2</sup> The latter interprets the former. The Logos is that Person whose Life from everlasting was found in His fellowship with the Father, in that continual perfect reciprocity toward the Father which corresponds to the continual and complete self-impartment of the Father toward Him. It is thus that Christ is the one and only mediator of the Divine Life. It is His own relation to the Father that He reproduces in men (John 1<sup>12</sup> 17<sup>23</sup>). The Life that was manifested in His Incarnation and that is given to men through Him is no other than that which He had as the pre-incarnate Word in His eternal fellowship with the Father.<sup>3</sup>

We proceed next to the teaching of the Epistle regarding the communication of this Life to men.

(a) The necessity of Regeneration is fundamental to the

<sup>1</sup> See Notes, *in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> This by no means implies that the Logos and the Life are equivalent terms, or that the Life is here hypostatised. The Life is impersonal—the common element in the personality of God, of the Logos, and of the "children of God."

<sup>3</sup> The distinction between the Logos and the Life, and their mutual relation, are well brought out by the exquisite precision of the Apostle's language in the parallel statements, "The Word became flesh" (John 1<sup>14</sup>) and "The Life was manifested" (1 John 1<sup>2</sup>). It could not have been said that the "Life became flesh," because the Life in both states of the Logos was the same, and just in this consisted the reality of the Incarnation. Nor could it have been said that the "Word was manifested"; for the Person of the Logos was not revealed, but rather was veiled. But it was when the Divine Person became flesh that the Divine Life was first fully revealed.



whole theological scheme. Life, which consists in union with God--which is nothing else than participation in the Divine Nature--is not inherent in man as he is naturally constituted. The state of every man is a priori that of death, of spiritual separation from God ; and those who know that they have Eternal Life know that it is theirs because "they have passed from death into life"<sup>1</sup> (3<sup>14</sup>) For those to whom the Apostle is writing, and with whom he includes himself, the recognition of their present state as one of Life is heightened by the remembrance of a former state which they now see to have been one of Death. And the same contrast between an original self-nature that is averse to the highest good and a new nature that desires and pursues it, is present in all Christian consciousness, though it may not be connected with the memory of a definitely marked transition. Between these opposite poles, Death and Life, all Christian experience moves. Always it is an experience of salvation; of Life as haunted by the shadow of Death; of good as a triumph over potential evils, a "following" which is also a "fleeing" (I Tim. 6<sup>11</sup>)

(b) This transition from Death into Life is effected by that act of Divine self-communication which in the Epistle is constantly and exclusively expressed by the word "beget" (**gennan**).<sup>2</sup> The word, nowhere defined or expounded, is in

<sup>1</sup> **metabebhkamen ek tou?qanatos eij tha zwha. tou?qanatos**, the Death that is death indeed; **thj zwhj**, the Life that is life indeed.

<sup>2</sup> The invariable formula is **gegennhtai**, or **gegennhmenoj, ek tou?qeou?** (or **ek au?tou?**). The perfect tense denotes at once the past completion of the act, and its abiding present result. "Is begotten" is the inevitable translation; yet "has been begotten" would be, in every case, less ambiguous, making it clear that the Divine Begetting is the antecedent, not the accompaniment or consequence, of the action associated with it in the sentence. The phraseology is varied in 5<sup>4</sup>, where we find **pan to gegennhmenon ek tou?qeou?** and, very remarkably, in 5<sup>17</sup>, where the normal **o gegennhmenoj** in the first clause becomes **o gegennhqeij** in the second. On both, see Notes, *in loc*.

A practically equivalent phrase is **eitai ek tou?qeou?** to have the source of one's life in God. This phrase, however, is of wider significance than the former, and is applied not only to regenerate men (3<sup>10</sup> 4<sup>4.6</sup> 5<sup>19</sup>), but to a "spirit" (4<sup>1.2.3</sup>) to Love (4<sup>7</sup>), and, negatively, to the "things that are in the world" (2<sup>16</sup>).

itself of far-reaching significance. It implies not only that salvation—Life--has its ultimate origin in God, but that its communication, by whatsoever means, is directly and wholly His act. The human subject of this act cannot, indeed, be regarded as merely passive; but only because the gift communicated is itself the gift of Life, of power, and activity.

Whatever human response of faith, love, and obedience there is to Divine truth and grace, the power to make that response is "begotten" of God. It is not the product of man's own character, but of the new life imparted to him. Whatever action of the human will there is in passing from death into life, the human will is necessarily moved therein by the Divine Will. Death cannot make response to life. The Divine Begetting is antecedent to all else (cf. John 1<sup>13</sup>)

(c) As to the instrumentality, Divine or human, through which this regenerative act is wrought, the Epistle is silent. And at this point there is a gap in its system of thought which, so far as I am aware, has not been adequately recognised. For while, on the one hand, the Divine Begetting is everywhere regarded simply as the immediate act of God as the Father, on the other hand the Son has been sent "that we might live through Him"<sup>1</sup> (4<sup>9</sup>), and the Life which God gave to men is "in Him" (5<sup>11</sup>); but no attempt is made to supply the requisite link of connection between the mediating of Life by the Son and the immediate begetting of Life by the Father.

If it be asked how God begets in men that Life which is "in His Son," or what necessity or efficacy the Incarnation of the Son has in relation to the Divine Begetting,

<sup>1</sup> It is never said that Christians are "begotten of Christ" or are "of Christ." Christ is the medium, not the source of Life. The distinction is clearly marked by the prepositional phrases, **ei#ai ek tou?yeou?** and **zh# di |au|ou?** (4<sup>9</sup>). Cf. 1 Cor. 8<sup>6</sup>, where the same precision of language is noticeable, **o|pathr, ef ou\$ta>panta . . . |hsouj Xristoj, di |ou\$ta>panta.**

the Epistle supplies no answer.<sup>1</sup> The truth is that here we find the most noticeable *lacuna* in the theology of the Epistle—its silence regarding the work of the Spirit as the immediate agent in regeneration. The Johannine thought of the Father as the final but also the direct source of Life, and of the Son as its sole medium, leads on imperatively to the Trinitarian doctrine of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, and given to men as the Spirit of Christ. The same Holy Ghost who was the author of the Incarnation, who begat the full Life of God in the humanity of Jesus, is now given by Him to men to beget and foster in them the same Life that is in Him. This is the supreme gift of the Incarnation, that by the power of the Divine Spirit the Life of God has received perfect and permanent embodiment in our humanity in the person or Jesus Christ, and that by the power of the same Divine Spirit acting upon men through the revelation of Christ, and breathed into their souls by Christ, they are "begotten of God" unto Life Eternal.

(d) Those who are "begotten of God" are *ipso facto* the "children of God" (**tekna qeou?**). This **tekna qeou?** is peculiarly Johannine,<sup>2</sup> and is to be distinguished from the Pauline "sons of God"<sup>3</sup> (**uiφi**), which is never applied by St. John to Christians. While the latter title emphasises the status of sonship (**uiφqesia**) bestowed on believers, the Johannine **tekna**<sup>4</sup> connotes, primarily, the direct communication of the Father's own Divine nature; and, secondarily, the fact that the nature

<sup>1</sup> In the Gospel we read (John 5<sup>21,26</sup>) that "As the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom He will. . . . For as the Father hath life in Himself, even so gave He to the Son to have life in Himself." But this passage itself stands in need of elucidation. For, while it asserts for the Son a power of "quickenings" equal to and co-ordinate with the Father's, the Father's "quickenings" and the Son's cannot be conceived of as separate Divine activities.

<sup>2</sup> John 1<sup>12</sup> 11<sup>52</sup>, 1 John 3<sup>1.2.10</sup> 5<sup>2</sup> But it is also Pauline, Rom. 8<sup>16.17.21</sup>, Phil. 2<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 8<sup>14.19</sup>, Gal. 3<sup>26</sup> 4<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> **tekna**; from the root **tek-**, to beget. Cf. the German *zeugen*,

thus communicated has not as yet reached its full stature, but contains the promise of a future and glorious development. We are children of God, but what it fully is to be children of God is not yet made manifest (3<sup>2</sup>).

It is, indeed, the surpassing dignity thus bestowed upon us, the sublimity, beyond all understanding, of the privilege, that first calls forth the Apostle's exclamation of amazement (3<sup>1</sup>). That we should be called the children of God<sup>1</sup> — "Behold, what manner of love!" But instantly the subjoined "and such we are" (**kai~~e~~smen**) arises from the Apostle's heart, asseverating that the title, magnificent as it is, is no more than the truth. And in how completely literal a sense the Apostle's conception of the Divine Begetting is to be taken appears very strikingly in 3<sup>9</sup>. "Everyone that is begotten of God doeth not sin, because His seed abideth in him." This unique **sperma au~~t~~ou?** ("His seed") has been variously<sup>2</sup> explained; but unquestionably it signifies the new life-principle which is the formative element of the "new man," the **teknon qeou?** It is the Divine germ that enfolds in itself all the potencies of "what we shall be," the last perfection of the redeemed and glorified children of God.

This abides in him who has received it. It stamps its own character upon human life, and determines its whole development.<sup>3</sup>

(e) This Life, as it streams through humanity, creates a family-fellowship (**koinnia**) at once human and Divine. In, its human aspect this fellowship is conceived on spiritual much rather than on ecclesiastical lines. It is realised in the actual Christian community, and there only. But there spurious elements may intrude themselves; as is proved when schism reveals those who, though they have

<sup>1</sup> Not **au~~t~~ou?** which, grammatically, would have sufficed, but **qeou?** emphasizing the wondrousness of the fact.

<sup>2</sup> See Notes, *in loc.*

<sup>3</sup> *v. infra*, pp. 221, 226-8.

belonged to the external organisation, have never been genuinely partakers of its life (2<sup>19</sup>).<sup>1</sup> Only among those who walk in the same Light of God does true fellowship exist (1<sup>7</sup>). These are truly "brethren," and are knit together by the duties (3<sup>16</sup>) and the instincts (5<sup>1</sup>) of mutual love, and of mutual watchfulness and intercession (5<sup>16</sup>).

But this human relationship grows out of a Divine. It is the fellowship of those who are in fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ—who "abide" in God, and God in them. No thought is more closely interwoven with the whole texture of the Epistle than this of the Divine Immanence, by which the Life of God is sustained and nourished in those who are "begotten" of God; and no word is more characteristic of the Johannine vocabulary, alike in Gospel and Epistles, than that by which it is expressed—"abide" (**menein**).<sup>2</sup>

Between the Fourth Gospel and our Epistle, however, there is a noticeable difference in the statement of this great doctrine.<sup>3</sup> In the Epistle the formuke almost exclusively employed and constantly repeated are these—"God abides in us," "We abide in God," "God abides in us and we in Him." In the Gospel, on the other hand, the reciprocal indwelling is that of Christ and His disciples (John 15<sup>4-10</sup>) which has its Divine counterpart in His "abiding" in the Father (15<sup>10</sup>) and the Father's abiding in Him (14<sup>10</sup> 17<sup>23</sup>). This diversity is consistent with the point of view occupied in the two documents respectively. The Gospel is Christocentric, the Epistle Theocentric. In the Gospel we ascend from the historic revelation, the

<sup>1</sup> See, further, Chapter XVI.

<sup>2</sup> **menein** occurs some forty times in the Fourth Gospel as against twelve times in the Synoptics; twenty-five times in the Epistles, which is as often as in all the other N.T. Epistles collectively. Its use to express the fact of God's (or Christ's) mystical union with His people is peculiar to St. John,

<sup>3</sup> For details, see Chapter XVII.

visible Christ, to that conception of the invisible God which He embodies. In the Epistle we start from that conception. Instead of the concrete presentment of the living Christ, there is an immediate intuition of the Divine nature revealed in Him. While the theme common to both is the "Word of Life," the special theme of the Gospel is the Word who reveals and imparts the Life; in the Epistle it is the Life revealed and imparted by the Word. To discover in this traces of the Monarchianism<sup>1</sup> of the second century is unwarrantable. For here Christian thought is merely following its natural and inevitable course. It has not been able to rest in any merely Messianic conception of Christ's Person and character. It has realised that the question of questions still is—What is God? and that the ultimate significance of the life lived from Bethlehem to Calvary is the answer which is supplied to that question—"He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Thus, while the aim of the gospel is to display the divinity of Christ, it is the converse of this which is chiefly presented in the Epistle; instead of the metaphysical God-likeness of Christ, it is the moral Christ-likeness of God. And it is the writer's immediate contemplation of the moral nature of God and his governing idea of salvation as participation in that nature that inevitably cause him to carry up the thought of the indwelling Christ to the ultimate truth of the indwelling God.

Yet, while this diversity of view exists, there can be no doubt, it seems to me, that the whole conception in the Epistle has had its origin in the Gospel similitude of the Vine and the branches (John 15<sup>1-10</sup>). According to the analogy there presented, the vitalising union by which the influx of Divine Life is maintained in those who are "begotten" of God, consists in two activities, not identical,

<sup>1</sup>Holtzmann, J. P. T., 1882, p. 141; followed by Pfleiderer (2, 392, 446, 447), and by Grill (p. 303) but not by Haring (*Theologische Abhandlungen*, p. 191).

not separable, but reciprocal—God's abiding in us, and our abiding in Him. These are two distinct actions, Divine and human, yet so bound up together in the unity of life that either or both can always be predicated regarding the same persons and certified by the same signs--the three great tests of Righteousness, Love, and Belief which meet us everywhere in the Epistle).

The "abiding" of God in us is the continuous and progressive action of that same self-reproducing energy of the Divine nature the initial act of which is the Divine Begetting. By the same power and mode of Divine action Life is originated and sustained. The Epistle, it is true, seems to give two slightly diverse conceptions of this matter. As the human parent once for all imparts his own nature to his offspring, so, in virtue of the Divine Begetting, the Divine nature is permanently imparted to the children of God (3<sup>9</sup> "His" i.e. God's, "seed abideth in him"). But, whereas in the human relationship the life-germ thus communicated is developed in a separate and independent existence, in the higher relationship it is not so. The life imparted is dependent for its sustenance and growth upon a continuous influx of life from the parent-source. Thus the analogy followed is taken from the facts of

1 It may be useful to exhibit this in tabular form.

I. That God abides in us is certified---

(a) by our keeping His commandments (3<sup>24a</sup>);

(b) by our loving one another (4<sup>12</sup>);

(c) by our confessing that Jesus is the Son of God (4<sup>15</sup>), or by (the exact equivalent of this) the Spirit God hath given us (3<sup>24b</sup> 4<sup>13</sup>)

II. That we abide in God is certified--

(a) if we walk as Christ walked (2<sup>3</sup>), if we sin not (3<sup>3</sup>), if we keep His commandments (3<sup>24a</sup>);

(b) if we abide in Love (4<sup>16</sup>);

(c) if we have the Spirit that confesses Jesus as the Son of God (4<sup>13</sup>).

III. The full reciprocal relation, that God abides in us and we in Him, is certified--

(a) if we keep His commandments (3<sup>24b</sup>);

(b) if we abide in Love (4<sup>16</sup>);

(c) if we have the Spirit of God (4<sup>13</sup>), the Spirit, namely, that confesses that Jesus is the Son of God (4<sup>13</sup>).

vegetable rather than of animal life; originally, as has been said, from the similitude of the Vine and the branches. The branches of a tree are actually children of the tree. Structurally, a branch is a smaller tree rooted in a larger. Even a single leaf with its stalk is simply a miniature tree, exactly resembling what the parent tree was in its first stage of growth, except that it derives its sustenance from the parent tree instead of from the soil. Thus a great vine is, in fact, an immense colony or fellowship of vines possessing a common life. It is the sap of the parent vine that vitalises all the branches, "weaves all the green and golden lacework of their foliage, unfolds all their blossoms, mellows all their clusters, and is perfected in their fruitfulness." So does the Life of God vitalise him in whom He abides, sustaining and fostering in him those energies—Righteousness, Love, and Truth,—which are the Divine nature itself. The language used is in no sense or degree figurative. Rather are the Divine Begetting and Indwelling the realities of which all creaturely begettings and indwellings are only emblems. Though the manner of it is inexplicable, as all vital processes are, this actual communication of the actual Life of God is the core of the Johannine theology.

But this abiding of God in us has as its necessary counterpart our abiding in Him. In this reciprocity of action, priority and causality belong, as always, to God, without whom we can do nothing; yet not so that the human activity is a mere automatic product of the Divine. We can invite or reject the Divine Presence; keep within or avoid the sphere of Divine influence; open or obstruct the channels through which the Divine Life may flow into ours. Hence, "abiding in God" is made a subject of instruction and imperative exhortation (2<sup>27.28</sup>; cf. 2<sup>25</sup> 5<sup>18.21</sup>). And when the word "abide" (**menein**) is thus used, the idea of persistence or steadfast purpose, which is



inherent in it, comes into view. As the abiding of God in us is the persistent and purposeful action by which the Divine nature influences ours, so our abiding in God is the persistent and purposeful submission of ourselves to that action. The only means of doing this which the Epistle expressly emphasises is steadfast retention of and adherence to the truth as it is announced in the Apostolic Gospel (2<sup>24</sup>; cf. John 8<sup>31</sup>) and as it is witnessed by the Spirit (2<sup>27</sup>). Yet, although "keeping God's commandments," "abiding in love," and "confessing" Christ are exhibited primarily as the requisite effects and tests of our abiding in God, these effects become in their turn means. It is by these that practical effect is given to the message of the gospel and the teaching of the Spirit; and thus only is the channel of communication kept clear between the source and the receptacle of Life.

This study of the Epistle's doctrine in detail entirely sustains the preliminary view of the Johannine conception of Life with which we began. Life is conceived, fundamentally, not as the complex of Phenomena observable in the living organism, but as the principle or essence that underlies and produces these. So spiritual Life is not simply the collective whole of the qualities, activities, and experiences of the spiritual man; it is the essence in which these qualities inhere, and from which these activities and experiences proceed.

But now we can advance to a more concrete conception. What is this Life? The Apostle says only that God, the true God revealed in Christ, is Eternal Life. And only this can be the ultimate definition. Life of every grade is the result of a Divine Immanence; and Eternal Life is the Immanence of God in moral beings created after His own likeness. And, although the Epistle does not directly represent the Holy Spirit as the agent of this Divine Immanence, Christian Theology in doing so has only taken

the next step in an inevitable process of thought. Eternal Life is the Divine nature reproducing itself in human nature; is the energy of the Spirit of God, of the Father, and of the Son in the spiritual nature of man.

This whole Johannine conception of Life as an essence or animating principle is subjected to vigorous criticism. From the Ritschlian standpoint it is objected that this idea of Life is purely philosophical, that it is not given in religious experience, but seeks to interpret it in accordance with certain philosophical presuppositions.<sup>1</sup> This is so far true. Life in St. John's sense is not an object of conscious experience, but is an inference from experience. It is like the wind which is known only by the sound thereof (John 3<sup>8</sup>). But it is true also that the philosophy presupposed is not the philosophy of the schools. The idea of Life as an essence or principle is natural to the thought, and is presupposed in the ordinary language of all mankind. To this extent, we are all naturally metaphysicians. It is to produce a pure phenomenalist that a philosophical discipline is needed.

Thus, while it is true that early Christian thought was, in certain directions, influenced and fertilised by contact with Hellenism, and while it may be true that the Johannine doctrine of Life, in particular, has been formed under the influence of principles and modes of thought indirectly borrowed from Greek philosophy,<sup>2</sup> it is to be remembered that the tendency to infer causes from effects and to reason from phenomena to essence was not the peculiar property of the Greek intellect. St. John's conception of Life was certain, sooner or later, to emerge in Christian theology; for New Testament thought it lies in the natural line of development.

It is implicit in that whole strain of thought in our Lord's Synoptic teaching which regards doing as only

<sup>1</sup> See, *e.g.*, the chapter on Life in Scott's *Fourth Gospel*.

<sup>2</sup> *v.* Scott's *Fourth Gospel*, pp. 243 sqq.

the outcome of being, and which is emphasised in such utterances as "Either make the tree good and its fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by its fruit" (Matt. 12<sup>33</sup>). It is implicitly contained, moreover, in the whole Pauline doctrine of the new creation and of the mystical indwelling of Christ in the members of His Body. And it is not difficult to imagine how, as the fruit of further reflection upon the facts of Christian experience, it became with St. John a clear and dominant idea. Just as we have in the Johannine doctrine of the Logos the last result, within the New Testament period, of the Church's endeavour to furnish a *rationale* of its own experience in relation to the Person of Christ, so the Johannine doctrine of the Life is the ripest fruit, within the same period, of the Church's reflection upon its own characteristics, of its endeavour to find a conception intellectually adequate to the new experiences of faith, holiness, and love which it possessed, and which it was conscious of as forming the one essential distinction between its own life and the life of the world. When the Christian compared himself with his former self, how were the new vision of truth, the new aims and affections that arose out of the depths of a new nature to be accounted for? Or, when he compared himself with the "World lying in the Wicked One," how came it that he saw where others were blind, worshipped where others scoffed; that he stood on this side, others on that, of a great gulf going down to the foundations of the moral universe? Christian instinct had from the first repudiated personal superiority of nature as the answer. St. Paul had found the solution of the riddle in a Divine predestination, fulfilling itself in the operation of a supernatural Divine grace. The Johannine conception of regeneration combines and transcends both. The efficient source of all faith, righteousness, and love is a new life-principle

which is nothing else than the Life of God begotten in the centre of the human personality. In this alone the children of God differ from others. It is not because they believe, do righteousness, and love their brother, that they are "begotten of God," but because they are begotten of God that they believe, love, and do righteousness. The Life is behind and within all.

Finally, the question remains as to the nature of the change wrought in man by the Divine Begetting. On this point also the Johannine doctrine has been vigorously criticised. Thus Mr. Scott in his Fourth Gospel distinguishes two strains of doctrine in St. John: one which is purely ethical and religious and in the line of Synoptic teaching, according to which "the power of Christ when it takes hold of a human life effects a renewal of the whole moral nature," so that he "enters on a new life under the influence of new motives and thoughts and desires" (p. 280); another which is mystical and philosophical, according to which "not so much his mind and will as the very substance of which his being is formed must be changed" (p. 281). In the one view the birth from above is regarded as "a, moral regeneration answering to the **metanoia** of the Synoptic teaching," in the other, as "a transmutation of nature," "a magical and semi-physical change."<sup>1</sup> Without discussing the alleged two-

<sup>1</sup> On this topic Mr. Scott writes with less than his usual lucidity. Some definition of terms would be desirable. He describes the doctrine which he approves as a "renewal of the whole moral nature," which is otherwise expressed as renewal of the "moral, temper," as a "radical change of mind," more definitely as "entering on a new life under the influence of new motives and thoughts and desires." But this is not to use the term "moral nature" in its commonly accepted sense. In that sense a man's "moral nature" does not consist in the influence which particular thoughts and motives have over him; it is what makes him susceptible, in this or that way, to their influence. According as his moral nature is good or bad, good or bad motives, thoughts, and desires find a response within him. The thoughts, motives, and desires that appeal to a man do not, in the first instance, determine his moral nature they only reveal what it is, and call it into action.

fold strain of doctrine, but accepting what Mr. Scott calls the mystical and philosophical as being the peculiarly and genuinely Johannine, we take so different a view of it as to maintain that the renewal of the whole *moral nature* (due weight being given to both words) is the very truth it teaches with singular emphasis and precision.

It implies a renewal of *nature*. Mr. Scott is right in asserting that according to this doctrine more is required for man's moral renewal than the presentation of new truths and motives. The very capacity of response to these is required; and the only possible alternative to the Johannine doctrine is the familiar one, that this capacity is inherent in the constitution of human nature itself (although this only leads back to the *impasse*--how it comes that the possession of a common capacity displays such diversity of result). But this alternative St. John emphatically rejects, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." The chord in man's moral nature that responds to Christ and to the truths and motives of His gospel is silent, is broken. It must be restrung; and it is restrung in those who are "begotten of the Spirit." Only by this direct Divine agency is a renewal of the "moral temper," a "radical change of mind," effected. This for St. John, as for the profoundest Christian thought of subsequent times, is the unique feature of the moral regeneration of which Christ is the author. Character is renewed, not as in other religions and ethical systems, by the sole influence of new truths and motives, but by the renewal of the soul, the moral nature itself. All presentation of truth is unavailing without this concurrent Divine operation from within. Admittedly, there is no prominent development of this view in the Synoptics. The Synoptic attitude is that of the evangelist who delivers his message to men, trusting that it may awaken a responsive chord in

their hearts, and who presses it home in urgent endeavour to touch that chord. St. John's attitude is that of the theologian. His doctrine is the result of reflection upon the diverse and opposite issues of evangelism--that result being that man's response to the Truth and Grace of Christ is due, in every instance, to a higher will than his own, is, indeed, the sign and proof that he is "begotten of God."

But the Divine Begetting is the renewal of the moral nature. It can by no means be conceded that it implies a change in the very substance of which man's being is formed;<sup>1</sup> not, at least, if by this is meant an organic change in the constitution of human nature, or that the regenerate man is something more or other than man. The children of God are distinguished by no superhuman deeds or capacities. Instead of walking in darkness they walk in the Light; instead of doing sin they do righteousness; instead of hating they love; instead of denying, they confess Jesus as the Divine, and seek to walk even as He walked, and to purify themselves as He is pure. But these things they do because their moral nature has been renewed. The wineskin, so to say, remains the same, but is filled with new wine. No new faculty is created, but every faculty becomes the organ of a new moral life; faith, hope, and love rest upon new objects; conscience receives new light, and the will a new direction and force. And what St. John really teaches is that this transformation of moral character is explicable only by a renewal of the *moral nature*—is due to a change in the sub-conscious region of personal being, which is wrought directly by Divine

<sup>1</sup> This view of regeneration as consisting in a change in the substance of the soul has never been accepted by any Christian Church. It was advocated by Flacius Illyricus, one of the most prominent theologians of what is called the Second Reformation in Germany; but it was universally rejected, and was definitely condemned in the Form of Concord as virtually a revival of the Manichaeian heresy.

influence, and which can be conceived only as the communication of a new life-principle. The point at issue is clearly brought out by the criticism which Mr. Scott brings against the Johannine view of regeneration as implying a change which is "semi-physical." The epithet does not seem happily chosen. If by "physical" is meant what is of the material or corporeal order, the statement cannot be admitted (cf. John 3<sup>6</sup> 4<sup>24</sup>). But if it is intended to signify that which constitutes and conveys the **f usij**, the nature or life-principle of the subject, the modification, of the adjective is uncalled for. St. John's conception of life is not semi-, but wholly "physical." It is the conception of a vital essence in which inhere all the energies that form right moral character, just as there is a corporeal life-principle by which the development of the body, with all its characteristics and functions, is determined. It may be said, indeed, that the crucial truth of the Johannine conception of Life and Regeneration is, that it is at once spiritual or ethical, and, *in the sense which has just been defined*, physical.<sup>1</sup> The life communicated is a new moral life; a life which is manifested in a new view of sin and righteousness; in a new view of Christ and of God; in new desire and power to do the Will of God, to love one another and to conquer the world. And the doctrine of St. John is the fullest recognition in the New Testament that the conscious

<sup>1</sup> The use of the word "physical" lies open to the objection that, in modern use, it has become exclusively associated with the non-spiritual. But it has been the word chosen by theologians of repute to express the direct action of the Divine Spirit upon human nature. Thus Owen in his *Pneumatologia* says, "There is a real *physical* work whereby He infuseth a gracious principle of spiritual life into all that are really regenerated"; and, again, in speaking of the work of the Spirit in and through the word, "God works immediately by His Spirit on the wills of His Saints—that is, He puts forth a real *physical* power that is not contained in those exhortations, though He doeth it with them and by them." So Turretin also, "Ad modum physicum pertinet quod Deus Spiritu suo nos creat, regenerat, cor carnetnn dat et effcienter habitats supernaturales fidei et charitatis nobis infundit."

experiences and activities of the Christian life are ultimately rooted in that deeper region of human personality where God works His own mysterious and inscrutable work of begetting in human nature, and of renewing and replenishing in it, the energies of the Divine Life.



## CHAPTER XI.

### THE TEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

ONE peculiarity of the Epistle among the writings of the New Testament is that the practical purpose for which it is avowedly written is a purpose of testing. To exhibit those characteristics of the Christian life, each of which is an indispensable criterion, and all of which conjointly form the incontestable evidence of its genuineness, is the aim that determines the whole plan of the Epistle, and dictates almost every sentence: " These things I write unto you, that ye may know that ye have Eternal Life" (5<sup>13</sup>)

As we have seen, Life, according to the Johannine conception, is the essence or animating principle that underlies the whole phenomena of conscious Christian experience, and cannot itself be the object of direct consciousness. Its possession is a matter of inference, its presence certified only by its appropriate effects. It may be tested simply as life, by the evidence of those functions—growth, assimilation, and reproduction--which are characteristic of every kind of vital energy.

Or it may be tested generically, by its properties, as the kind of tree is known by the kind of its fruit. The Epistle adopts exclusively the latter method. It bids its readers try themselves, not as to the fulness and fruitfulness of their spiritual life, but as to their exhibiting those qualities which belong essentially to the Life of God. God is righteous, therefore whosoever has the Divine Life in him doeth righteousness. God is Love, therefore His life in men

exhibits itself in love. God is conscious of Himself in His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, therefore His life is manifested in men by their Belief,—their perception of the Divine in Jesus.

But God is not only Life, He is Light; and fellowship with Him is not only essential participation in the Divine Life; it is also conscious and ethical—"walking in the Light, as He is in the Light" (1<sup>7</sup>). It is this thought of "walking in the Light" that governs the first Cycle of the Epistle as a whole;<sup>1</sup> and it is from this point of view that the three cardinal tests—Righteousness, Love, Belief—are applied in it.

*Righteousness the Test of Walking in the Light.*

2<sup>3-6</sup>

This paragraph stands in intimate relation to that which immediately precedes (1<sup>7-22</sup>).<sup>2</sup> There the same test has been applied *negatively*. We have been brought under the searchlight of God's righteousness, and it has been seen that the first effect of honest submission to this self-revelation is the confession of sin. Now follows, the *positive* application. Though the immediate effect, of the light is to expose sin, its primary purpose is to reveal duty. The confession of sin must not be regarded as an equivalent for actual well-doing (Ps. 119<sup>4</sup>, Matt. 7<sup>21, 24</sup>). To have

<sup>1</sup> We must acknowledge and obey the light that God's self-revelation sheds upon every object within our moral horizon; ourselves and our sins (1<sup>7-10</sup>); our duty our relation to our brother (2<sup>7-11</sup>) and to the world (2<sup>15-17</sup>); the Person of Christ (2<sup>18-28</sup>). v. *supra*, pp. 7-11.

<sup>2</sup> The progression of thought is clearly marked by the recurring phrase, "if we say" or "he that saith," both marking the possibility of a spurious profession

1<sup>6</sup> "If we say that we have fellowship with Him."

1<sup>8</sup> "If we say that we have no sin."

1<sup>10</sup> "If we say that we have not sinned."

2<sup>4</sup> "He that saith, I know Him."

2<sup>6</sup> "He that saith that he abideth in Him."

2<sup>8</sup> "He that saith he is in the Light."

fellowship with God, we must not only acknowledge what the light reveals as true; we must realise in action what it reveals as right.

"And hereby we perceive that we know<sup>1</sup> Him (God),<sup>2</sup> if we keep His commandments.

"He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected."

"Hereby perceive we that we are in Him. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."<sup>3</sup>

The paragraph contains a threefold statement both of the matter to be tested and of the test appropriate to it, and of both on an ascending scale.

WALKING IN THE LIGHT.	THE TEST.
2 <sup>3.4</sup> We know God.	That we keep His Commandments.
2 <sup>5a</sup> The love of God is perfected in us.	That we keep His word.
2 <sup>5b.6</sup> We abide in Him.	That we walk even as Christ walked.

The first expression of the fact to be ascertained is the knowledge of God; and, as has been pointed out in an earlier chapter, it is used here with evident reference to the pretensions of Gnosticism.<sup>4</sup> "He that saith, I know Him," is not an arrow shot at a venture, but has a definite mark in the Antinomian intellectualist for whom his self-assured knowledge of Divine things superseded all requirements of commonplace morality. Yet, with St. John himself, there is no more distinctive expression than "knowing God," for all that constitutes the essence of true religion—the soul's sincere response to God's revelation of His character and will (cf. 2<sup>13.14</sup> 4<sup>6.7.8</sup> 5<sup>20</sup>, John 18<sup>3.4</sup>). In this he allies

<sup>1</sup> See special note on **ginwskein**.

<sup>2</sup> See Notes, *in loc*.

<sup>3</sup> The logical structure of the paragraph is somewhat obscured by the verse-division. It consists of a thesis (2<sup>3</sup>), an antithesis (2<sup>4.5a</sup>), and a restatement of the thesis (2<sup>5b.6</sup>).

<sup>4</sup> v. pp. 28 sqq.

himself with Old Testament thought (cf. Jer. 31<sup>34</sup>, Isa. 11<sup>9</sup> 54<sup>13</sup>, Hos. 4<sup>1</sup> 6<sup>6</sup>); and though contact with the influences of Hellenic speculation and Gnostic theosophy did, no doubt, contribute to give to the idea of knowledge that prominence which it has in his conception of religion, this was by way of recoil as much as of assimilation. To "know" God is not to have a speculative notion of the Being and Attributes of God; it is to have a spiritual perception of the Divine Father (2<sup>13</sup>), whose moral personality is revealed in His Son (5<sup>20</sup>); it is to have this perception as an abiding possession (**egnwkenai**) that is part of oneself, and is made the actual basis of life. The proof of this "knowing" God is active sympathy with His will,—keeping His commandments.

The word translated "keep" (**threîn**) expresses the idea of watchful, observant obedience. It is habitually used, for example, of seamen who carefully observe the direction of the winds or ocean-currents and shape their course accordingly. So ought we to keep a heedful eye on God's commandments. The word "commandments" (**epitolaï**), again, emphasises the idea of surrender to moral authority. The "commandments" are the clear, precise orders that God has laid down, dealing with conduct in detail, peremptory as military instructions. And although much more than this is included in the Christian idea of righteousness, yet with profound wisdom is this made the first test--that we make conscience of keeping God's commandments. Other services and tributes may express more vividly the spontaneous impulses of the soul; but with these it is always possible that something of self-pleasing and self-display may mingle. In vain do we break the alabaster box, if we do not obey. Zeal that is not zeal for keeping God's commandments is but egotism subtly disguised. On the other hand, "To know that I know God, I need not aspire to mystic insight, or

visionary rapture, or sublime ecstasy. A lowlier path by far is mine" (Candlish).

For "Whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." Here the unity of the "word" is substituted for the multiplicity of the "commandments." The Christian commandments are not a miscellany of arbitrary requirements or by-laws; they are practical applications of the one Divine Law to the outstanding facts and situations of human life. Though many, they are one in principle and authority--outgrowths from one root; so Christian Righteousness also, though manifested in numberless details, is a moral unity. It is to do the will of God--the revelation of which is His "word" (cf. Jas. 2<sup>10</sup>).

The apodosis of the sentence, instead of taking the anticipated form, "This man verily knoweth God," introduces a characteristic variation and enrichment of thought, "In him verily is the love<sup>1</sup> of God perfected." Here the "love of God" is usually understood as our love to God, not God's love to us. And plainly it must be taken in such a sense as to indicate a right moral state in us. But, interpreted in the light of the parallel passage 4<sup>17</sup> (where we find simply **hlagaph**, "the Love"), the "Love of God" is neither God's love to us nor ours to Him, separately considered, but that which unites both in one common conception,--the Love which is the nature of God (4<sup>8</sup>), and which is the nature also of those who are "begotten of Him" (4<sup>7</sup>). That this Divine Love dwells in any man is witnessed by the fact that he keeps God's "word." For God's "word" is nothing else than the revelation in Christ of the Divine character and will as Love, and to keep that "word" is nothing else than to embody that Divine character and will in human deed. And in this it is "perfected." "Perfected" love, in the phraseology of the Epistle, signifies, not

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 4<sup>12,17,18</sup>. See, further, Chapter XIV.

love in a superlative degree, but love that is consummated in action. Bearing fruit in actual obedience, Love has been perfected: it has fulfilled its mission, has reached its goal. "Hereby perceive we that we are in Him. He that saith that he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He<sup>1</sup> walked."

Here, again, the thought is restated in varied form. Instead of "knowing God," we have "being in Him" (2<sup>5b</sup>) and "abiding in Him" (2<sup>6</sup>) as expressing the fact of fellowship with God. These expressions are synonymous, denoting from the human side the reciprocal indwelling of God and man, which is for St. John the deepest underlying fact of the Christian life. The fact is indicated more generally by the phrase "to be in Him" (cf. 5<sup>20</sup>); while the "abiding" in Him may emphasise the element of persistent purpose that is necessary on man's part to continuance in union with<sup>2</sup> God. From the union of nature there springs an ethical union of will; and of this the test is that we "walk even as Christ walked,"<sup>3</sup> We cannot observe without admiration the exquisite out-blossoming of the thought. As the "commandments" find their ideal unity in the "word," the "word" finds its actual embodiment in Him who wrought

"With human hands, the creed of creeds,  
In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
More strong than all poetic thought."

The ideal, and the power no less than the ideal, of all holy obedience are contained in His word, "Follow Me." And as His "walk" was the proof of His union with God (John 6<sup>38</sup> 17<sup>4</sup>), so to "walk even as He walked" is the inevitable test of ours. For it is to be observed that the idea of

<sup>1</sup> **ekeiñoj**=Christ. v. *supra*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> v. *supra*, pp. 199, 200.

<sup>3</sup> "Even as He walked." For St. John the words could not but be tinged with tender personal reminiscences (John 7<sup>1</sup> 10<sup>23</sup>). He had seen with his eyes the "walk" of his Master in love and holiness and it had been the purpose of his Gospel that his readers might as with his eyes behold it (1<sup>3</sup>).

the *test* is still dominant. The clause, "He that saith that he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk even as He walked," is not hortatory but predicative. It is strictly correlative to the "Hereby we perceive" of the preceding clause. The whole antithesis between truth and falsehood is compressed into the ominous "He that saith" and the incisive "ought" (**of eīēi**, more stringent than **dei**). The assertion is not only that he who makes this profession incurs this obligation, but that the obligation is of such a nature that its fulfilment or non-fulfilment is decisive of the truth or the falsehood of the profession.

This paragraph as a whole, if the structure of the Epistle has been rightly apprehended, is governed by the thought of "walking in the Light." If we keep not God's commandments, if we keep not His word, if we do not walk as Christ walked, we forsake the path of Light and enter the region of darkness. The necessity of Righteousness is grounded on the requirements of fellowship with God, "Who is Light, and in Whom there is no darkness at all."

In the second Cycle of the Epistle the test of Righteousness is differently presented. It assumes more distinctly the character of a direct polemic against Gnostic Antinomianism; and its necessity is found not in the revelation of God's Will, but in the Divine nature itself. Through the whole paragraph devoted to the subject there runs the idea, not of Light, but of Life. It is an exposition not of the conditions of ethical fellowship with God, but of the evidence of the Divine Begetting.

*Divine Sonship tested by Righteousness.*  
2<sup>29</sup>-3<sup>10a</sup>

"If ye know (as absolute truth) that He (God) is righteous, know (take note) that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him" (2<sup>29</sup>).

This, the opening sentence of the paragraph, announces the purport of the whole. It introduces (for the first time in the Epistle) the subject of the Divine Begetting, and indicates that this is to be expounded in all the rigour of its ethical demands. The Divine nature, to whomsoever it is imparted, is Righteousness; therefore the test of possessing it is *doing*<sup>1</sup> Righteousness.

Having thus stated his thesis, the Apostle is immediately swept away into rapturous digression. The full magnificence of the thought that sinful men should be brought into such a relation to God smites his soul with amazement: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" (3<sup>1.2</sup>).<sup>2</sup> But though these verses to a certain extent interrupt the sequence of thought, they lead off into no side-issue. Like the eagle, the Apostle has soared to the heights, only that he may with mightier impetus swoop down upon his quarry. We have been led to contemplate the Christian life in the glory of its future consummation, only to be brought back once more to the test: "Every one that hath this hope in Him purifieth<sup>3</sup> himself, even as He is pure" (3<sup>3</sup>). This sentence, again, is not hortatory but predicative. It is the statement not of a duty, but, of a fact. The hope of perfect likeness to Christ's glory hereafter is not held out as a motive to strive after present likeness to His purity; but, conversely, to strive after His purity is the inexorable test of having the hope of His glory. Thus "hope" must be taken here in an objective, not a subjective, sense. Not every one who cherishes the hope of glory, seeks the life of purity; but he alone<sup>4</sup> who aims at the absolute purity of Christ (**kaqwj ekeiñoj**)

<sup>1</sup> v. *infra*, p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> v. Chapter XVI.

<sup>3</sup> On **agnoj, agnizej, ekeiñoj**, supra, pp. 89, 90.

<sup>4</sup> "Every one that hath this hope." **paj oleown** is more stringent than the simply descriptive **oleown**. It hints at the "exceptional presumption of men who regarded themselves as above the common law" (Westcott). In most instances of its use (cf. 2<sup>23</sup> 3<sup>4.6.9.10</sup>) the phrase **paj ol** . . . has a distinctly polemical suggestion.



and can be satisfied with no lower aim, possesses it in fact. He alone has in him that Life which will blossom out in immortal perfection when it is brought into the full sunshine of Christ's manifested presence. This is involved in the unity of the Eternal Life here and hereafter. And were one to argue<sup>1</sup> that it is idle (so different are the conditions of the future from those of the present) to aim at the purity of Heaven while here one earth, the answer is that the Life which is begotten of God is by innate necessity, and in whatever environment, a life of truceless antagonism to sin. This the writer proceeds to maintain: (1) in the light of what Sin is; (2) in the light of Christ's character and mission; (3) in the light of the Divine origin of the Christian Life; (4), in the light of the fact that all that is of the nature of sin is of diabolic origin.

3<sup>4</sup>.

"Every one that doeth<sup>2</sup> sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness."<sup>3</sup> It is noticeable that this verse exactly corresponds in thought as well as in position to 2<sup>3,4</sup>. As there Righteousness was exhibited first of all as the "keeping of God's commandments," so here Sin is, first of all, repudiation of the whole authority and aim of

<sup>1</sup> As Bishop Blougram does in his cynical vision:

"Of man's poor spirit in its progress, still  
Losing true life for ever and a day  
Through ever trying to be and ever being  
In the evolution of successive spheres  
Afore its actual sphere and place of life,  
Half-way into the next, which having reached.  
It shoots with corresponding foolery  
Half-way into the nest still . . .  
. . . Worldly in this world  
I take and like its way of life."

<sup>2</sup> "Every one that doeth sin." The direct antithesis to the "purifieth himself" of 3<sup>3</sup>. Instead of refraining himself (**agnizei eputon**) from sin, he does it.

<sup>3</sup> For fuller discussion of "sin" and "lawlessness," v. *supra*, p. 133.











































































































































































































































































































































































































































































