

THE
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

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I. JOHN.

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NEW EDITION.

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LONDON AND NEW YORK

1907

THE EPISTLES OF ST. JOHN.

INTRODUCTION.

I. THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE EPISTLES.

ONE of the first questions which meets the student of these Epistles is—Who wrote them? None of them bears any name, or any definite and indisputable indication of the writer. Nevertheless, the authorship is not really doubtful. The four writings, the Fourth Gospel and these three Epistles, are too closely linked together to be separated, and assigned, some to one author and some to another. And if they are all by one writer, that writer, beyond all reasonable doubt, is St. John the apostle. No other person has been suggested who fits into the very complex position with even tolerable exactness. If the Gospel were wanting, we might be in doubt as to who wrote the Epistles. If the First Epistle were wanting, we might be in doubt as to who wrote the two short Epistles. If the Second Epistle were wanting, we should certainly be in serious doubt as to who wrote the third. But as it is, there is no room for reasonable doubt; that is, a doubt that will stand the impartial investigation of all the evidence. Nearly every one admits that the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle cannot be severed; both external and internal evidence conclusively show that they are by the same hand. The same may be said of the Second and Third Epistles. And a patient examination of the evidence respecting the First and Second Epistles will lead most people to the conclusion that they also are by the same hand; and thus the two ends of the chain are united. The key of the position, therefore, is the Fourth Gospel. And with regard to that the reader is referred to the Introduction to St. John's Gospel in the 'Cambridge Greek Testament,' or in the 'Cambridge Bible for Schools,' or in the 'Pulpit Commentary.' By the side of which the following sober and eminently just statement of the problem will repay consideration: "The Gospel of St. John presents a unique phenomenon. It contains two distinct strata of thought, both quite unmistakable to the critical eye; and in each of these strata, again, there are local peculiarities which complicate the problem. When it comes to be closely investigated, the complexities of

the problem are such that the whole of literature probably does not furnish a parallel. The hypothesis of authorship that shall satisfy them thus becomes in its turn equally complicated. It is necessary to find one who shall be at once Jew and Christian, intensely Jewish, and yet comprehensively Christian; brought up on the Old Testament, and yet with a strong tincture of Alexandrian philosophy; using a language in which the Hebrew structure and the Greek superstructure are equally conspicuous; one who had mixed personally in the events, and yet at the time of writing stood at a distance from them; an immediate disciple of Jesus, and yet possessed of so powerful an individuality as to impress the mark of himself upon his recollections; a nature capable of the most ardent and clinging affection, and yet an unsparing denouncer of hostile agencies of any kind which lay outside his own charmed circle. There is one historical figure which seems to fit like a key into all these intricate wards—the figure of St. John as it has been handed down to us by a well-authenticated tradition. I can conceive no second. If the St. John of history did not exist, he would have to be invented to account for his Gospel” (Dr. Sanday’s ‘Inaugural Lecture’ as Ireland Professor of Exegesis: Parker, Oxford, 1883). In short, the problem with regard to the Epistles of St. John is very similar to that respecting the Pastoral Epistles. There are portions of the latter which are unquestionably Pauline; and these carry with them the authorship of those portions the Pauline origin of which might be questioned. Similarly, the apostolic origin of the Fourth Gospel carries with it the apostolic authorship of the First Epistle, and this that of the Second Epistle, and this again that of the third.

The First Epistle was known to *St. Polycarp*, the disciple of St. John, and is quoted as his by *St. Irenæus*, the pupil of St. Polycarp. *Papias*, the contemporary of Polycarp, made use of it. It is repeatedly quoted as St. John’s by *Clement of Alexandria*, and still more frequently by *Tertullian*, who seems to have been specially fond of the Epistle. So that the century immediately following St. John’s death is well filled with witnesses. *Origen* and his pupil, *Dionysius of Alexandria*, *St. Cyprian*, and in short all the Fathers, Greek and Latin, accept the Epistle as St. John’s. The *Muratorian Fragment* quotes the opening words of it, and it is contained in the *Old Syriac Version*. The evidence, therefore, both external and internal, fully justifies the classification of *Eusebius*, who places the First Epistle of St. John among the universally received (ἐν ὁμολογουμένοις) or catholic books of the New Testament.

The evidence for the Second Epistle, though less ample, is sufficient. That for the Third Epistle, if it stood alone, would seem insufficient for any certain conclusion. But both on external and internal grounds it is impossible to disconnect these twin Epistles and give them a different parentage. And therefore the Third Epistle is covered by the evidence for the second, as that again by the evidence for the first.

Irenæus, a pupil of St. John’s pupil, Polycarp, twice quotes the Second

Epistle as St. John's. *Olement of Alexandria* speaks of it as St. John's, and apparently commented on both it and the Third Epistle (Eusebius, 'Hist. Eccl.,' VI. xiv. 1). *Dionysius of Alexandria* thinks that his not naming himself in these Epistles is in accordance with St. John's common practice. A passage in *St. Cyprian's* works seems to show that the Second Epistle was accepted as St. John's by the African Church in the third century. Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome all speak with caution about the two shorter Epistles. They know of their existence, but also know that some are inclined to attribute them to another author. Eusebius, however ('Dem. Evan.,' III. iii. p. 120), seems himself to have believed that they were by the apostle. But they are absent from the Old Syriac Version, and appear to have been rejected as not apostolic by the theologians of Antioch.

Thus it is precisely the earliest witnesses who are favourable to the apostolic authorship; and at no time do the doubts as to their apostolicity appear to have been general. And if the evidence as a whole appears to be meagre, we must remember these facts. (1) These Epistles were probably written *the very last* of all the books in the New Testament. Many of the other books had acquired a considerable circulation before these were in existence. (2) They are *private* letters, addressed, not to Churches, but to individuals, and therefore were likely to remain in obscurity for a considerable time. We may compare the public and official letters of a bishop now with his private letters. The one kind are published and generally circulated at once; the others, if published at all, not until long after his death. (3) The comparative *insignificance* of these letters would lead to their remaining generally unknown for some time. They are very short, and not of very general interest. (4) An immense amount of early Christian literature has perished, and with it, no doubt, much evidence respecting these Epistles (see Salmon, 'Introduction to New Testament,' pp. 282-287, 3rd edit.).

But the somewhat meagre external evidence is strengthened by the internal. Here the insignificant character of the Epistles is a strong point in their favour. Who would care to forge such slight productions? And would a forger have been content with calling himself 'the elder'? Would he not have said 'the apostle' or 'John the apostle'? And if they are the *bona fide* writings of some other person, whether another John or not, why has the author taken such minute pains, especially in the Second Epistle, to write like St. John? The style of his Gospel and First Epistle is imitated with the greatest care and skill throughout. The student has only to take a good reference Bible, and place the passages side by side in parallel columns, to see whether far the most satisfactory hypothesis is not that of the common tradition, that Gospel and Epistles all come from one and the same author, and that author the Apostle St. John.

II. THE OCCASION OF THE EPISTLES.

Like most of the Epistles in the New Testament, all these three letters are special and occasional. They are not written, as books commonly are at

the present time, to elucidate some subject in which the writer is specially interested, without much reference to current events. They are produced for a special occasion, to meet an existing difficulty and danger. The First Epistle is written to grapple with the insidious seductions of antinomian Gnosticism, as they threatened the Church at large. The Second Epistle deals with the same danger as it affected a particular family. The third treats of a corresponding danger arising from lawlessness of another kind—high-handed rebellion against apostolic authority. Thus, while the First Epistle in certain aspects forms a contrast to the other two, in other aspects the first two Epistles form a contrast to the third. The First Epistle is catholic, or general,—it is addressed to the Church at large; the other two are not. The First Epistle is a companion to the Gospel, and lays the foundations of Christian conduct as a whole. The other two have no special relation to the Gospel, and deal with only one or two points of conduct, viz. the duty of hospitality, and its limits; and the treatment of those who promote heresy and schism. But, on the other hand, the first two letters contrast with the third, in that they treat of a specious and subtle evil which was poisoning the Church from without; while the other treats of open and violent anarchy which was troubling the Church from within. Humanly speaking, we may say that, but for the pressure of Gnosticism upon the Church, the First and Second Epistles, and perhaps also the Gospel of St. John, would never have been written; and again that, but for the turbulence of Diotrephes, the Third Epistle would never have been written.

The turbulence of Diotrephes speaks for itself. It is amazing as being directed against a person like St. John, the last remaining representative of the apostolic body; but otherwise it is simply a typical instance of the self-willed and domineering ecclesiastic, of which the history of the Church can show so many examples. But the Gnosticism which called forth the first two Epistles requires a few words of explanation.

Gnosticism, although it often had much in common with Ebionitism and Judaism, was not, like these, the open enemy of Christianity. It professed to give its approval and patronage to the gospel. The gospel was very good as far as it went; but the Gnostics had "a more excellent way." They understood the gospel better than the apostles themselves. It was a mistake to suppose that the historical facts and moral precepts of the Scriptures were to be taken literally. It was a still greater mistake to suppose that the Scriptures contained all that was necessary for man's spiritual well-being. There was a higher knowledge, a more profound gnosis; and this the Gnostic could attain to and impart. Illumined by this, men would see that everything else was comparatively of unimportance. The philosopher whose mind was enlightened by this esoteric knowledge need not trouble himself much about his conduct. His soul was steeped in light. Good actions could not greatly increase his enlightenment; bad actions could not seriously detract from it. Indeed, there were many things

commonly regarded as bad, which the true Gnostic would not shun, but seek, as a means of enlarging his experience.

It will be seen at once how such teaching cut at the root of all Christian truth and morality. (1) Righteousness was made of no account in comparison with intellectual illumination. (2) Scripture was made of no account in comparison with a knowledge which partly transmuted and partly superseded it. (3) The work of Christ was made of no account; for there could be no need of an atonement if there was no real evil in sin.

Besides this Greek doctrine of the supremacy of intellect and the all-importance of intellectual enlightenment, most Gnostics also taught the Oriental doctrine that matter, with everything material, is evil. This principle also entailed a complete subversion of Christian doctrine and Christian ethics. (1) If the material universe is utterly evil, it cannot have been created by the supremely good God, but by some evil, or at least some inferior, power. (2) The supremely good God must be utterly removed from such a universe. (3) The Incarnation is impossible; for the Deity could never consent to be united to a material body, innately and incorrigibly impure.

In morals opposite conclusions were drawn from this Gnostic premiss of the inherently impure character of everything material. (1) If the human body is utterly evil, it must be subdued and chastised to the utmost, that the enlightened spirit may be freed from the burden of so vile an instrument. (2) If the human body is utterly evil, it is a matter of indifference what it does; and so worthless an instrument may be made to commit any act from which the spirit can derive additional knowledge.

Thus the "more excellent way" of these advanced thinkers "turned the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4). Can we wonder at the stern, unyielding attitude which St. John adopted in confronting it? "Liars," "seducers," "false prophets," "deceivers," "antichrists," seem not too strong appellations to give to the promoters of teaching such as this. The apostle's reiterations of the impossibility of light without holiness and without love, of the impossibility of love without obedience, of the impossibility of combining birth from God with love of the world and its lusts, or with hatred of one's brethren,—become doubly intelligible when we remember the specious doctrines at which these repeated assurances are aimed. Over and over again, first from this point of view and then from that, St. John solemnly asserts our need of the atoning work of Christ, the necessity of believing in it, and the obligation to act as those who have abjured all sin and are daily cleansing themselves from its pollution and power in the blood of Jesus. To deny or trifle with these great truths is to leave the family of God for the dominion of the evil one. Gnostics may boast of their knowledge; but believers in the Incarnation have their knowledge too. They *know* that they have passed over out of death into life (1 Epist. iii. 14). They *know* that they are children of God, and as such are

freed from sin by his Son (1 Epist. v. 18, 19). They *know* that the Son of God has come in the flesh, and has given them a mind wherewith to know, not the remote abstraction which the Gnostic calls God, but the loving Father in whom they can abide through his Son Jesus Christ (1 Epist. v. 20). "St. John has been called the apostle of the absolute. Those who would concede to Christianity no higher dignity than that of relative and provisional truth, will fail to find any countenance for their doctrine in the New Testament. But nowhere will they encounter more earnest opposition to it than in the pages of the writer who is pre-eminently the apostle of charity. St. John preaches the Christian creed as the one absolute certainty" (Liddon, 'Bampton Lectures,' lect. v.).

III. THE DESTINATION OF THE EPISTLES.

To whom were these Epistles written? Beyond question, the first is rightly called "catholic," or "general." It has no special superscription. It is not addressed to the Church of Ephesus, nor to the Church of Pergamos, nor to the Churches of Asia collectively, but to the Church at large. No doubt it circulated first among the Churches of Asia, and St. John probably had their needs and dangers in his mind as he wrote it. But its teaching and exhortation is not confined to them, nor to the Church of that time. The doctrines and warnings which it contains are as suitable to the Church of England or of Rome at the present time as to the Church of Ephesus in St. John's day. The "little children" addressed in it, although primarily those whom the apostle shepherded while still on earth, are not confined to that small band of Christians. All those who in any age, past, present, or future, listen to the words of this Epistle with willing ears, are among the "little children" of St. John.

The destination of the Second Epistle is more open to doubt. From very early times some have supposed that the "elect lady" is an allegorical expression to signify a Church. Jerome even supposes her to represent the Church universal. But this is quite incredible. "The children of thine elect sister salute thee" may possibly mean that the members of one local Church salute another local Church; but what meaning can we give to the elect sister of the Church universal? The Church universal includes all the elect.

This seems to be a case in which the literal interpretation is the right one, because the literal interpretation makes excellent sense. No difficulty confronts us if we assume the elect lady to be an individual. Whereas so slight a letter seems hardly an appropriate occasion for the employment of an allegory. In the First Epistle a symbolical designation of the Church would have been much more in place. The letter to Gaius is certainly addressed to an individual. Does not this in itself create a presumption that the sister-letter to the elect lady is addressed to an individual also?

Of the elect lady and of Gaius we know no more than the Epistles tell us. The lady has children, some of whom are away from her roof, and are living loyal Christian lives. Others are with her; and the elder fears that

they have been led astray, or are in danger of being led astray, by false teachers to whom the lady, with mistaken generosity, has given a welcome. Some commentators infer that the lady herself has been seduced into extreme asceticism through the Gnostic doctrine of the vileness of the flesh; that it was a case in which "a noble woman, bent on maintaining purity of spirit and freedom from the baser cares and pleasures of life, has thought to gain her end by mortification of the body, by renunciation of the world, by sacrificing natural affection and forsaking domestic duties." It may have been so; but it is difficult to find any evidence of this in the Epistle itself. All that is told us there is that she needed to be on her guard, lest, by welcoming those who denied the Incarnation, she and her children should suffer serious harm themselves, and also incur grave responsibility for the effects of such disastrous teaching upon others. Her sister's children, who are with the apostle, send a salutation in his letter, perhaps to indicate that they sympathize with its contents.

Of the three people mentioned in the Third Epistle we know nothing from external sources. Gaius is certainly a hospitable and godly man, probably well-to-do and a layman. Diotrephes is apparently an ecclesiastic; but if he does not possess ecclesiastical authority himself, he is influential enough to get it exercised according to his wishes. Demetrius is one whose well-known goodness is a pleasing contrast to the wicked folly of Diotrephes. Whether either Gaius or Demetrius belongs to the same community as Diotrephes, and there opposes him in his tyrannical action, it is not easy to determine. Apparently, Gaius has not known much of Demetrius previously, and therefore they are not likely both of them to have been members of the Church in which Diotrephes prelates and persecutes.

IV. THE PLACE AND DATE OF THE EPISTLES.

Nothing is known on either point with regard to any one of the Epistles. But as Ephesus was the apostle's chief abode during the later years of his life, we may assume that they were written there. Certainly they were written late in St. John's life. The tone of them is that of an old man writing to a younger generation. Moreover, the First Epistle was almost certainly written about the same time as the Gospel, and probably after it. The internal relation of the two writings is strongly in favour of this view. And the Gospel was probably written in the apostle's later years. The Second Epistle implies the existence of the first, and therefore was written after it. The third, from its similarity to the second, appears to have been written about the same time. We shall probably not be far wrong if we suppose that the Gospel and all three Epistles were written between A.D. 80 and A.D. 95.

V. THE PLAN OF THE EPISTLES.

Each Epistle has an introduction and a conclusion, between which the main portion of the letter lies. In all three Epistles the introduction

occupies four verses. In the First Epistle the conclusion occupies four or eight verses; in the second, two; and in the third, three. It is the central portion of the First Epistle that is so difficult to analyse satisfactorily. But the difficulty of framing a satisfactory analysis must not lead us to acquiesce in the indolent and impotent conclusion that the Epistle has *no* plan. Some would have it that in this letter the apostle gives us nothing more consecutive or organic than a string of disconnected, or very slightly connected, aphorisms. The running analysis which is given side by side with the notes on the Epistle will, it is hoped, convince any thoughtful reader that the aphoristic view is untenable. The analysis here suggested is probably incorrect in some places and inadequate in a great many more; but the mere fact that any such scheme can be brought into any harmony with the words of the Epistle is strong evidence that the Epistle is not a fortuitous concourse of aphorisms. A comparison of the various analyses which have been put forth by commentators will show that there is something like general agreement as to three divisions in the letter. Almost all make a break at or near ch. i. 4; ii. 29; and v. 13 or 17. Omitting the introduction and conclusion, we may take ch. ii. 29 as the centre of the Epistle, considering what precedes as the first half, and what follows as the second half. For convenience we need a name for each half; and perhaps no better can be found than the great statement which each contains respecting the Divine nature. The first half, therefore, is entitled "God is Light," and the second, "God is Love." The following table will show the remaining divisions which have been adopted. But it must be borne in mind that these divisions are by no means to be insisted upon as present to the apostle's mind while he was writing,—they are put forth merely as a guide in catching the sequence of his thoughts. There are three facts which render a successful analysis of the Epistle almost an impossibility: (1) the divisions melt into one another; (2) the sections often contain a plurality of subjects, from which it is difficult to select any one as dominating the rest; (3) subjects touched on in earlier sections are constantly reappearing, recut and reset, in later sections. From this it follows that, to mark the divisions between the sections, and also to name the sections when their limits have been more or less arbitrarily determined, are no easy undertakings. Probably no student of the Epistle will be satisfied with his own results in either of these undertakings. As to the present attempt, *Valeat quantum valeat*.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE.

1. Ch. i. 1—4. INTRODUCTION. Subject-matter and purpose.
2. Ch. i. 5—ii. 28. FIRST MAIN DIVISION. *God is Light.*
 - (1) Ch. i. 5—ii. 6. *Positive side.* What walking in the light involves.
 - Ch. i. 5—7. Fellowship with God and with the brethren.
 - Ch. i. 8—10. Conscience and confession of sin.
 - Ch. ii. 1—6. Obedience by imitation of Christ.

- (2) Ch. ii. 7—28. *Negative side.* What walking in the light excludes.
 Ch. ii. 7—11. Hatred of the brethren.
 Ch. ii. 12—17. The world and its ways.
 Ch. ii. 18—28. Antichrists.
3. Ch. iii. 1—v. 12. SECOND MAIN DIVISION. *God is Love.*
 (1) Ch. iii. 1—v. 24. *The evidence of sonship:* Righteousness.
 Ch. iii. 1—12. The children of God and the children of the devil.
 Ch. iii. 13—24. Love and hate; life and death.
 (2) Ch. iv. 1—v. 12. *The source of sonship:* Possession of the Spirit.
 Ch. iv. 1—6. The spirit of truth and the spirit of error.
 Ch. iv. 7—v. 12. Love and faith.
4. Ch. v. 13—21. CONCLUSION.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND EPISTLE.

1. Vers. 1—4. INTRODUCTION. *Address and occasion.*
 2. Vers. 5—11. MAIN DIVISION. *Exhortation.*
 Vers. 5, 6. To love and obedience.
 Vers. 7—9. Against false doctrine.
 Vers. 10, 11. Against false charity.
 3. Vers. 12, 13. CONCLUSION.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE THIRD EPISTLE.

1. Vers. 1—4. INTRODUCTION. *Address and occasion.*
 2. Vers. 5—12. MAIN DIVISION. *Exhortation.*
 Vers. 5—8. The hospitality of Gaius.
 Vers. 9, 10. The arrogance of Diotrephes.
 Vers. 11, 12. The moral.
 3. Vers. 13, 14. CONCLUSION.

VI. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPISTLES.

The style of St. John, most strongly marked in his Gospel and First Epistle, conspicuous in the Second Epistle, and not wanting, though less conspicuous, in the third, is, in one respect, very similar to the subject-matter of the First Epistle; it is very difficult to analyse. Like a subtle strain of music or an exquisite effect in colouring, it can be felt and appreciated, but not easily described.

Two characteristics of this magic style may be mentioned together: *profundity of thought* and *simplicity of language*. This marvellous combination to a large extent accounts for the power which St. John's writings exercise over those who listen to them. We seem to be within a charmed circle, and to be listening to one who will not let us go until he has had his say; until he has placed before us, in words which the most simple-minded can comprehend, truths which are not of this world, nor are to be measured by those of this world. Of the profundity of his thoughts there can be no question. The ideas which he places before us are among the deepest mysteries of revelation: man's relation to God, to the evil one, and to the world; the

Incarnation ; the Atonement ; the judgment to come ; the Son's relation to the Father and to the Spirit ; the essential characteristics of the Godhead. And all this is stated in propositions, which commonly contain simple words in a very simple construction. "Now are we children of God." "He that doeth sin is of the devil." "The world is passing away, and the lust thereof : but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." "The Father hath sent the Son, the Saviour of the world." "The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "God is Light, and in him is no darkness at all." "God is Love." What form of expression could be more simple? There is not a dependent sentence or a relative clause in any of these statements, much less an involved construction. And the words used are of the simplest. Yet who can fathom the depth of such statements?

This simplicity of construction and avoidance of dependent and relative clauses involves a good deal of *repetition*—a substantive or a clause is repeated where a relative might have taken its place. But even where repetition is not occasioned in this way we find it employed for the sake of emphasis. St. John is not afraid of wearying us by reiteration, if by reiteration he can make the impression required. And, as a matter of fact, his repetitions do not weary us, and they do leave their impression. The rhythm of his simple sentences charms the ear, fixes itself in the memory, and sooner or later finds its way home to the heart. Note the effect produced by the repetition of "love" and "world" in such sentences as these—

"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."

Or, again, the repetition of "last hour" and "antichrist" in inverse order in the following :—

"Little children, it is the last hour:
And as ye heard that antichrist cometh,
Even now have there arisen many antichrists;
Whereby we know that it is the last hour."

There would be nothing but loss in writing, "He that doeth sin is of the devil, who sinneth from the beginning ; to destroy whose works the Son of God was manifested," instead of—

"He that doeth sin is of the devil ;
For the devil sinneth from the beginning.
To this end was the Son of God manifested,
That he might destroy the works of the devil."

Comp. also ch. ii. 24, where the solemn effect produced by the repetition of the word "abide" is lost in the Authorized Version by substituting "abide," "remain," "continue," for the threefold "abide."

The repetition and rhythm just pointed out is closely connected with that

love of *parallelism* which is so conspicuous in Hebrew poetry. St. John, full of the spirit of the old psalmists and prophets, constantly employs this form of expression—

“We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;
And He is the propitiation for our sins.”

“He that hateth his brother is in darkness,
And walketh in darkness,
And knoweth not whither he goeth.”

“For this cause the world knoweth us not,
Because it knew him not.”

“Receive him not into your house,
And give him no greeting.”

Sometimes the parallelism is antithetic, and the second clause denies the opposite of the first.

“God is Light,
And in him is no darkness at all.”

“Abideth in the light,
And there is none occasion of stumbling in him.”

“He that hath the Son hath the life;
He that hath not the Son of God, hath not the life.”

“He that doeth good is of God;
He that doeth evil hath not seen God.”

And this leads us to yet another characteristic—the love of *antithesis*. Throughout the Epistles, and especially in the first, there is a constant movement from one position to its opposite; and the opposite is commonly not the exact converse of the original position, but an advance beyond it; and thus progress is made.

“They are of the world;
Therefore speak they of the world,
And the world heareth them.
We are of God:
He that knoweth God heareth us;
He who is not of God heareth us not.
By this we know the spirit of truth,
And the spirit of error.”

“The world is passing away, and the lust thereof;
But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Lastly, we may notice the calm tone of *conscious authority* which pervades all these Epistles, and which, as it is seldom put prominently forward, and is felt rather than heard, would be very difficult to assume if it were not possessed. This is one of the many arguments which converge to point out an apostle, and that apostle St. John, as the writer of these letters. A teacher who can write like this has already done much to vindicate his claim to be

heard and obeyed. "Thou knowest that our witness is true," is the conviction which comes home to the mind of every patient and earnest student of these writings. "That *our* witness is true." He has the whole "glorious company of the apostles" at his back. He has "the holy Church throughout all the world" on his side. "He knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe."

In these Epistles we have two infinitely necessary things which can never be separated without serious injury to both—principles of conduct and principles of faith. They contain a summary of Christian ethics and a summary of Christian belief. They teach us, on the one hand, the Way, on the other, the Truth; and these two combined are the Life. "This is the true God, and eternal life."

Who does not feel that for the study of such writings something more is needed than the student's thirst for knowledge, and the scholar's keenness of perception? There is need of the believer's understanding to "know him that is true," and of the Christian's purity of heart to welcome him. That collect, the language of which is so largely drawn from the First Epistle, will help us to enter upon the study of it in the right spirit, the Collect for the Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany—

"O God, whose blessed *Son* was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil (ch. iii. 8), and make us the sons of God (ch. iii. 1), and heirs of eternal life (ch. v. 20); Grant us, we beseech thee, that, *having this hope, we may purify ourselves even as he is pure* (ch. iii. 3); that, *when he shall appear* (ch. iii. 2) again with power and great glory, *we may be made like unto him* (ch. iii. 2) in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where *with thee, O Father,* (ch. i. 2), and thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end (comp. ch. v. 20). Amen."

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

Vers. 1—4.—1. THE INTRODUCTION. It declares the writer's authority, based on personal experience; announces the subject-matter of his Gospel, to which this Epistle forms a companion; and states his object in writing the Epistle.

These opening verses help to raise the reader to the high frame of mind in which the apostle writes. Emotion, suppressed under a sense of awe and solemnity, is shown by the involved construction through which his thoughts struggle for utterance. We are reminded of the introduction to the Gospel, especially in the first clause. Both announce to us the subject of the writing which follows—the Word who is the Life. Both set before us, in the simplest language, truths of profoundest meaning. But while in the Gospel he seems to lose sight of his readers in the magnitude of his subject, here the thought of his "little children" is uppermost.

The construction of the first three verses may be taken in more ways than one; but almost certainly the main verb is ἀπαγγέλλομεν, and the clauses introduced by ὃ give the substance of the ἀπαγγελία. The sentence is broken by the parenthetical ver. 2, after which the main part of ver. 1 is repeated for clearness. Reduced to a simple form, the whole runs thus: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon, and our hands handled, concerning

the Word of life, we declare to you also, that ye also may have communion with us."

Ver. 1.—The first clause states what or how the object is in itself; the next three state St. John's relation to it; "which," in the first clause nominative, in the others is accusative. The neuter (ὃ) expresses a collective and comprehensive whole (John iv. 22; vi. 37; xvii. 2; Acts xvii. 23, etc.); the attributes of the Λόγος rather than the Λόγος himself are indicated. Or, as Jelf expresses it, "the neuter gender denotes immaterial personality, the masculine or feminine material personality." In the beginning is not quite the same as in John i. 1; there St. John tells us that the Word was in existence before the world was created; here that he was in existence before he was manifested. Thus far all is indefinite; the philosopher, about to expound a law of nature, might begin, "That which was from the beginning declare we unto you." What follows is in a climax, making the meaning clearer at each step: seeing is more than hearing, and handling than seeing. The climax is in two pairs, of perfects and of aorists; the aorists giving the past acts, the perfects the permanent results. Together they sum up the apostolic experience of that boundless activity of Christ, of which the world could not contain the full account (John xxi. 25). Beheld (ἑώρακόμεθα) is more than have seen (ἐώρακαμεν). Seeing might be momentary; beholding implies that steady contemplation, for which the beloved disciple had large and abundantly used opportunities. In our hands handled we may see a reference to Luke xxiv. 39, where the same verb is used (ψηλαφήσατε); and still more to John xx. 27, where the demanded test of handling is offered to St. Thomas, provoking the confession of faith to which

the whole Gospel leads up, "My Lord and my God!" Had St. John merely said "heard," we might have thought that he meant a doctrine. Had he merely said "heard and seen," we might have understood it of the effects of Christ's doctrine. But "our hands handled" shows clearly that *the attributes of the Word become flesh* as what St. John insists on, and probably as a contradiction of Docetism. "Those who read his letter could have no doubt that he was referring to the time when he saw the face of Jesus Christ, when he heard his discourses, when he grasped his hand, when he leaned upon his breast" (Maurice). Between the first clause and what follows lies the tremendous fact of the Incarnation; and St. John piles verb on verb, and clause on clause, to show that he speaks with the authority of full knowledge, and that there is no possible room for Ebionite or Cerinthian error. The first clause assures us that Jesus was no mere man; the others assure us that he was really man. Precisely that Being who was in existence from the beginning is that of whom St. John and others have had, and still possess, knowledge by all the means through which knowledge can have access to the mind of man. (For "seeing with the eyes," cf. Luke ii. 30; for *θεάσθαι* of contemplating with delight [Mark vi. 11, 14], John i. 14, 34; Acts i. 11.) Concerning the Word of life. "Concerning" (*περί*) may depend on "have heard," and, by a kind of *zeugma*, on the other three verbs also; or on the main verb, "we declare." "The Word of life" means "the Word who is the Life," like "the city of Rome," "the Book of Genesis;" the genitive case is "the characterizing or identifying genitive." The *περί* is strongly against the interpretation, "the word of life," i.e. the life-giving gospel. Had St. John meant this, he would probably have written *ὃν ἀκηκόαμεν . . . τὸν λόγον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπαγγέλλομεν* (John v. 24, 37; viii. 43; xiv. 24); *περί* is very frequent of persons (John i. 7, 8, 15, 22, 30, 48, etc.). Moreover, the evident connexion between the introductions to his Gospel and Epistle compels us to understand *ὁ Λόγος* in the same sense in both (see on John i. 1, in this Commentary, and in the 'Cambridge Greek Testament' or 'Bible for Schools'). What St. John has to announce is his own experience of the Eternal Word incarnate, the Eternal Life made manifest (John xiv. 6); his hearing of his words, his seeing with his own eyes his Messianic works, his contemplation of the Divinity which shone through both; his handling of the body of the risen Redeemer.

Ver. 2.—Parenthetical. The main thought of vers. 1 and 3 is, "We declare to you a Being both eternal and yet seen and known by us." That of ver. 2 is, "This Being, in

his character of the Life, became visible, and in him are centred all the relations between God and man." Quite in St. John's style, ver. 2 takes up and develops a portion of ver. 1, using its last word as the basis of a new departure (comp. John i. 14; *ἐφανερώθη* gives the same fact as *σάρξ ἐγένετο* from another point of view). *Became flesh* is the fact in itself; the incarnation of the *Λόγος*. "Was manifested" is the fact in reference to mankind; their admission to the knowledge of it. The union of "see" with "bear witness" recalls John xix. 35; and here, again, ver. 2 resumes and develops part of ver. 1. *Have seen* sums up the four verbs in ver. 1; for in all languages sight is used of experience generally. *Bear witness and declare* carries us a stage further—the *communication* of the experience. It is doubtful whether *τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον* is the object of all four verbs or of *ἀπαγγέλλομεν* only. Note the double article: *the life, the eternal life*. The Epistle begins and ends with this theme (ch. v. 20). (For *ἦν* and *πρὸς*, cf. John viii. 53; i. 1.) Which indeed (as all must know) was with the Father. The verse ends as it began, but not with a mere repetition; the Life was manifested, and in particular to us.

Ver. 3.—The main sentence is resumed from ver. 1, only the chief points being retouched. We declare to you also (*καί* must be read before *ὑμῖν*, on overwhelming authority); i.e. "you as well as we must share in it," rather than "you as well as others to whom we have declared it." Of course, *ἀπαγγέλλομεν* must be rendered alike in both verses "we declare." To what does it refer? Not to this Epistle, which does not contain the writer's experience of the Word of life manifested to mankind, but to his Gospel, which the Epistle is to accompany. The parallel between the two writings must often be noted, especially between the Epistle and John xvii. Compare this verse with John xvii. 21. St. John's aim in writing his Gospel is that the great High Priest's prayer may be fulfilled—that believers may be one in that communion of which the unity between the Father and the Son is the pattern and the basis; may "be joined together in the same body, the same belief, the same knowledge, the same aims, the same hopes, the same destinies" (Jelf). Communion with Christians is shown to mean a great deal—no less than communion with the Father and with the Son. Note the double *μετὰ*. St. John's writings teem with indications of the unity and yet distinctness between the Father and the Son. Communion with the one, so far from absorbing and cancelling communion with the other, implies it as a separate bliss. The clause, *καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ, κ.τ.λ.*, does not depend on *ἴνα*, as the *δὲ* shows; we

must supply ἔστι, not ᾖ. (For καὶ . . . δὲ, cf. John vi. 51, where, as here, καὶ is the leading conjunction; in John viii. 16, 17 and xv. 27, δὲ leads.) "Blessed are they that see not and yet believe. It is we who are here described, we who are designated. Then let the blessedness take place in us, of which the Lord predicted that it should take place. Let us firmly hold that which we see not, because those tell us who have seen" (St. Augustine, *in loc.*).

Ver. 4.—While vers. 1—3 refer to the Gospel, this refers to the Epistle; but, although ταῦτα in ch. ii. 26 and v. 13 refer to what precedes, there is no need to limit ταῦτα here to these opening verses; it covers the whole Epistle. The reading ἡμεῖς seems preferable to ὑμῖν, and ἡμῶν to ὑμῶν. But ἡμεῖς and ἡμῶν are not co-ordinate: ἡμεῖς is the apostolic "we;" ἡμῶν means "your joy as well as mine." This verse takes the place of the usual "grace and peace" in the opening of other Epistles; and as ver. 3 recalls John xvii. 21, so this recalls John xvii. 13. The joy is that of knowing that, though in the world, they are not of it, but are one with one another, and with the Father and with the Son. The gospel is always joy: "Rejoice always" (1 Thess. v. 16); "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. iv. 4). To know that the Eternal Life has been manifested, that we have communion with him, and through him with the Father, must be joy. Whereas Gnosticism, by denying the atonement, and "the personal office of God in the salvation of the world," cuts off one great sphere of God's love, and consequently one great cause of the believer's joy. To sum up this introduction: St. John gives his Gospel to the Church (ἀπαγγέλλομεν) in order that all may share in the union for which Christ prayed; and to the Gospel he adds this Epistle (καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν), that all may realize the joy resulting from this union—that our joy may be fulfilled.

In this introduction we find the following expressions which are characteristic of St. John, serving to show the common authorship of the Gospel and Epistle, and in some cases of the Revelation also: δ Λόγος, ἡ ζωή, φανερώω, μαρτυρέω, ζωὴ αἰώνιος, ἦν πρὸς, ἡ χαρὰ ᾗ πεπληρωμένη. It is among the many excellences of the Revised Version that characteristic expressions are marked by a uniform translation; whereas in the Authorized Version they are obscured by capriciously varying the translation: e.g. μαρτυρέω is rendered in four different ways—"bear witness," "bear record," "give record," "testify" (of. p. x.).

Ver. 5—ch. ii. 28.—2. FIRST MAIN DIVISION. *God is Light.*

Ver. 5—ch. ii. 6.—(1) *Positive side.* What walking in the light involves; the condition and conduct of the believer. (2) Ch. ii. 7—28. *Negative side.* What walking in the light excludes; the things and persons to be avoided.

Ver. 5.—This verse constitutes the text and basis of this division of the Epistle, especially on its positive side. And the message which we have heard . . . is this. Again we have a remarkable parallel between Gospel and Epistle; both begin with a καὶ (which connects the opening with the introduction in a simple and artless manner), and with the same kind of sentence: "And the witness of John is this." The reading ἐπαγγελία (ch. ii. 25, and frequent in the New Testament) must be rejected here and in ch. iii. 11 in favour of ἀγγελία (which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, on overwhelming evidence. Ἐπαγγελία in the New Testament means "promise," which would be almost meaningless here. The change from ἐπαγγέλλομεν (vers. 2, 3) to ἀπαγγέλλομεν is noteworthy: the one is "declare," the other "announce." The message received from Christ, the apostle announces or reports (*renunciat*) to his readers. He does not name Christ (ἀπ' αὐτοῦ); he is so full of the thought of Christ that he omits to name him (cf. John xx. 7, 9, 15). Ἀναγγέλλω is used of *authoritative* announcements; of priests and Levites in the LXX.; of the Messiah (John iv. 25); of the Spirit (John xvi. 13, 14, 15); of the apostles (Acts xx. 20, 27; 1 Pet. i. 12). St. John speaks with authority. God is light; not the Light, nor a light, but light; that is his nature. This sums up the Divine essence on its intellectual side, as "God is love" on its moral side. In neither case has the predicate the article: δ Θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν; δ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν. Light and love are not attributes of God, but himself. The connexion between this message and the introduction is not at first obvious. But St. John writes with his Gospel before him, and the prologue to that supplies the link. There, as here, three ideas follow in order: λόγος, ζωή, φῶς. There, as here, φῶς immediately suggests its opposite, σκοτία. It is on the revelation of the Λόγος as φῶς, and the consequent struggle between φῶς and σκοτία, that the Gospel is based. And this revelation is the highest: men alone are competent to receive or reject it. Other organisms exhibit the creative power as life: none but men can recognize it as light. And to know the Λόγος as light is to know the Father as

light; for the *Λόγος* is the Revelation of the Father's nature. That God is, in his very nature, light, is an announcement peculiar to St. John. Others tell us that he is the Father of lights (Jas. i. 17), the Possessor of light (1 Pet. ii. 9), dwelling in light (1 Tim. vi. 16); but not that he *is* light. To the heathen God is a God of darkness, an unknown Being; a Power to be blindly propitiated, not a Person to be known and loved. To the philosopher he is an abstraction, an idea, not directly cognizable by man. To the Jews he is a God who hideth himself; not light, but a consuming fire. To the Christian alone he is revealed as light, absolutely free from everything impure, material, obscure, and gloomy. Light was the first product of the Divine creative energy, the earnest and condition of order, beauty, life, growth, and joy. Of all phenomena it best represents the elements of all perfection. "This word 'light' is at once the simplest and the fullest and the deepest which can be used in human discourse. It is addressed to every man who has eyes and who has ever looked on the sun." It tells not only "of a Goodness and Truth without flaw; it tells of a Goodness and Truth that are always seeking to spread themselves, to send forth rays that shall penetrate everywhere, and scatter the darkness which opposes them" (Maurice). In like manner, darkness sums up the elements of evil—foulness, secrecy, repulsiveness, and gloom. In all but the lowest forms of existence it inevitably produces decay and death. Everything of the kind is excluded from the nature of God. And hence St. John, in his characteristic manner, immediately emphasizes the great announcement with an equivalent negative statement: **Darkness in him there is not any at all** (comp. ver. 8; ch. ii. 4, 23, 27; iii. 6; iv. 2, 3, 6—8; v. 12). He does not say, "in his presence," but "in him." Darkness exists, physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual; there is abundance of obscurity, error, depravity, sin, and its consequence, death. But not a shade of these is "in him." The Divine Light is subject to no spots, no eclipse, no twilight, no night; as a Source of light it cannot in any degree fail.

Ver. 6.—A corollary from ver. 5. If God is Light to the exclusion of all darkness, then fellowship with darkness excludes fellowship with him. **If we say** (*ἐὰν εἰπωμεν*); "if any of us, no matter who he be, at any time say." The construction marks the supposed action as one likely to occur. The apostle includes himself in the possibility, and of course he and his readers did say that they had communion with God. By "walking" (*περπατεῖν, versari*) is meant our daily life, our movement and activity in the world

(John viii. 12; xi. 9, 10; xii. 35; xxi. 18; Rev. xxi. 24); this activity will inevitably express the *κοινωνία* in which we live. To have communion with him who is Light, and be continually exhibiting a life of darkness, is impossible. The Corporatians and other Gnostics, who taught that to the enlightened all action is indifferent, because neither purity nor filth can change the nature of pure gold, are perhaps here aimed at (Mansel, 'Gnostic Heresies,' pp. 117—121). **We lie, and do not the truth.** As in ver. 5, St. John enforces a statement by denying the opposite. But the negative is not a mere equivalent of the positive: the two together mean, "we are false both in word and deed." Truth with St. John is not confined to language; it is exhibited in conduct also (cf. *ποιεῖν ψεῦδος*, Rev. xxi. 27; xxii. 15).

Ver. 7.—The contrary hypothesis is now stated, and the thought is carried a stage further (cf. ver. 9). He again speaks conditionally (*ἐάν*), and does so until ch. ii. 3; after which the participial substantive (*ὁ λέγων, ὁ ἀγαπῶν, ὁ μισῶν*) represents the conditional clause. The change of verbs is significant: we *walk*, God *is*, in the light. We move through time; he is in eternity. Our activity involves change; his does not. Like the sun, he both is Light and dwells in the light; and if we *walk in the light*, which is his atmosphere, we have fellowship one with another. Darkness is an *unsocial* condition, and this the light expels. From ver. 6 we might have expected, "we have fellowship *with him*;" and some inferior authorities read *μετ' αὐτοῦ*. But St. John's repetitions are not mere repetitions: the thought is always recut or reset to carry us a step further (cf. vers. 3, 4). Having fellowship with one another is a sure result of that fellowship with God which is involved in walking in the light. "Here is a reply to those who would restrain Catholic communion to their own sect" (Wordsworth). Another result of walking in the light is that the blood of Jesus (his sacrificial death) cleanses us day by day continually (present tense) from our frequent sins of frailty. This cleansing is not the same as forgiveness of sins (ver. 9). The latter is the case of *ὁ λουόμενος*, the man that is bathed (John xiii. 10); the former is the frequent washing of the feet (cf. Rev. vii. 14; xxii. 14). The expression, the blood of Jesus, in Christian theology, "is dogma with pathos. . . . It implies, as no other word could do, the reality (1) of the human body of Jesus, (2) of his sufferings, (3) of his sacrifice." By his blood new life-blood is infused into human nature.

Ver. 8.—After the great message, "God is Light" (ver. 5) and its application to ourselves (vers. 6, 7), we are now told what

walking in the light involves: (1) consciousness of sin and confession of sin (vers. 8—10); (2) accepting the propitiation of Jesus Christ the Righteous (ch. ii. 1—2); (3) obedience (ch. ii. 3—6). If we say that we have not sin. The present (*ἔχουσιν*) again shows that the daily falls of those who are walking in the light are meant, not the sins committed in the days of darkness before conversion. The Lord's Prayer implies that we must daily ask forgiveness. We lead ourselves astray from the truth, and have no right estimate of the gulf between our impurity and God's holiness, if we deny this habitual frailty. In the sunlight even flame throws a shadow; and that man is in darkness who denies his sin. The truth may be near him; but it has not found a home with him—it is not *in* him. Πλανάν is specially frequent in the Revelation, and always of arch-deceivers—Satan, the beast, antichrist, false teachers; it seems to imply fundamental error (comp. ch. ii. 26).

Ver. 9.—As in ver. 7, we have the opposite hypothesis stated, and the thought advanced a stage. Not the exact opposite, "if we confess that we have sin;" but "if we confess our sins." It is easy to say, "I am a sinner;" but if confession is to have value it must state the definite acts of sin. The context ("deceive ourselves . . . he is faithful") shows that confession at the bar of the conscience and of God is meant. Circumstances must decide whether confession to man is required also, and this St. John neither forbids nor enjoins. Note the asyndeton; there is no *δέ*, as in ver. 7. He is faithful and righteous. Δίκαιος must be rendered "righteous" rather than "just," to mark the contrast with unrighteousness (*ἀδικία*), and the connexion with "Jesus Christ the Righteous" (ch. ii. 1). To forgive . . . to cleanse. As explained in ver. 7, the one refers to freeing us from the penalties of sin, justification; the other to freeing us from its contamination, sanctification. The sense of *purpose* is not wholly to

be surrendered. No doubt *ἵνα*, like other particles, becomes weakened in later Greek; but even in later classical Greek the notion of purpose is mixed up with that of consequence. Much more is this the case in the New Testament, and especially in St. John, where what seems to us to be mere result is really design; and this higher aspect of the sequence of facts is indicated by *ἵνα*. It is God's nature to be faithful and righteous; but it is also his *purpose* to exhibit these attributes towards us; and this purpose is expressed in *ἵνα ἀφ᾽ ἡμῶν*.

Ver. 10.—Once more we have no mere repetition, but a fresh thought. "We have not sin" (ver. 8) refers to our natural condition; "we have not sinned" (ver. 10) refers to definite acts. Note the climax: we lie (ver. 6); we lead ourselves utterly astray (ver. 8); we make God a liar (ver. 10). The whole of God's dealing with man since the Fall, especially in the Incarnation, is based on the fact of man's innate sinfulness. To deny this fact, therefore, is to charge the God of light and truth with acting and maintaining a vast and persistent lie. It is difficult to see how this strong language can be reconciled with the Roman dogma of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary: why does not her "son" (John xix. 26, 27) except her from its sweep? His word is not in us; i.e. we are cut off from all communication with him (John v. 38; viii. 31). "His Word" is the sum total of the Divine revelation. That which in itself is "the truth" (ver. 8), when communicated to us is "his Word." How thoroughly the Church of England enters into the spirit of these verses (8—10) is shown by the fact that it appoints confession and absolution as part of public service *every morning and evening throughout the year*, as well as of every celebration of the Eucharist. As Bede points out, the Lord's Prayer itself, with the petition, "Forgive us our trespasses," is a conclusive answer to Pelagian opponents of St. John's doctrine.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*The Life*. Dr. Edersheim¹ makes the remark that there are two great stages in the history of the Church's learning of Christ: the first, to come to the knowledge of what he was by experience of what he did; the second, to come to experience of what he did and does by knowledge of what he is. The former, he says, is that of the period when Jesus was on earth; the second is that of the period after his ascension into heaven and the descent of the Holy Ghost. This is true. And there is also an intermediate truth with which we are closely concerned. It is the truth of which we are reminded at the opening of this Epistle, viz. that the instrumentality by means of which we now pass on to the second stage is the writings of those who passed through the first. This is evidently intended to be the effect of this inspired letter;

¹ 'Life and Times of the Messiah,' vol. i. p. 601.

written, it can scarcely be questioned, by the author of the Fourth Gospel; written upon a specific theme, on a distinct method, with an avowed aim. Two preliminary statements hereupon require distinct and emphatic notice here. 1. There is a declaration that the writer was one who had been brought into close contact with the Person of the Lord Jesus, who had himself intimately known him, and who had associates in knowledge of and fellowship with him. 2. The internal evidence that the author of this Epistle is the same who wrote the Fourth Gospel is unusually clear. If any man could be known by his style of writing, surely the Apostle John can be by the way he plays upon the words "life," "light," "love." Note: Each apostle has his own key-words. Those of John are the ones just specified. That of James is "works." That of Paul is "faith." That of Peter is "hope." The main key-word of John here is "life." In these introductory verses the apostle opens up his theme. The purport of his Epistle, yea, not only of his Epistle, but of his entire apostolic and ministerial life, is indicated here; it has to do with "the Word of life," *i.e.* (cf. Westcott, *in loc.*) with the revelation of life; may we not rather say with *the Life and its self-revelation*?¹ In opening up this introductory paragraph we may trace *the Life* in five stages.

I. THE LIFE ETERNALLY EXISTENT. "That which was from the beginning." With God there is no beginning. With him there shall be no end. But Divine revelation is worded to suit the exigencies of our limited apprehension. Finite minds make their own horizon of thought. Both back and front there are limits beyond which thought cannot go.² Hence we are mercifully allowed to think as of a beginning and as of an end. Not as if either were a "definite concrete fact."³ Let us, then, go back to this "beginning." It is not said, either here or in John i., that the Life then (*ἐγένετο*) came to be, but (*ἦν*) was (cf. Prov. viii. 22—31; also Phil. ii. 6, *ὑπάρχων*). There is here no thought of life apart from a Living One—a personal Being. There can be none. That Living One was before all creation—its ground, its medium, its reason, its centre of support. In him all things hold together. This Life was "from the beginning." But note—

II. THE LIFE WAS MANIFESTED IN TIME. "The Life was manifested" (ver. 2). From what afterwards follows, there can be no question that the apostle here refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. And in thus declaring that he passed out of eternity into the limits of time, out of the invisible to the visible realm, he thus avows the mystery of the Incarnation. A mystery, without the assumption of which the words and life of the Christ can no more be accounted for than the stability of the framework of nature can be accounted for without the law of gravitation. The difficulties that gather round the doctrine would be insuperable if it were a mere marvel, leading nowhere and effecting nothing. But since it is the centre of a framework of doctrine around which the noblest hopes do gather, and the substratum of the renewed life of an entire living Church, the difficulties gather rather round its denial than around its assertion. *The Life was manifested*. The Divine Life can only be manifested to man by taking the form of man.

III. THE LIFE PERSONALLY VERIFIED. "We have 'seen,' 'tasted,' handled," etc. This should be compared with John i. 14, "We beheld his glory." The seeing of the glory was by no means coextensive with beholding the bodily form. "The eye only sees that which it brings with it the power of seeing." Some saw Christ to vilify; others to adore him. "The pure in heart will see God." The Nathanaels will see heaven opened, but the "wise and prudent" will miss the sight.

IV. THE LIFE THUS VERIFIED IS AUTHORITATIVELY DECLARED. "That which we have seen . . . declare we unto you." Here are, as Westcott admirably remarks, "in due sequence the ideas of personal experience, responsible affirmation, authoritative announcement." This latter is involved in the words, "we declare." Some object to authority in matters of religion. But why? Only ignorance can demur to it, so long as the authority is a lawful one. And since the authority here implied is that which comes from adequate knowledge on the matter in hand, none ought to demur to it for a moment.

¹ See Dr. Kennedy's admirable work, 'The Self-Revelation of Jesus Christ' (Isbister).

² See Clemence's 'Theories of Future Punishment,' ch. vi.

³ Westcott on 'The Epistles of St John,' p. 3, col. i.

V. THE LIFE AUTHORITATIVELY DECLARED WITH A DEFINITE AIM. The aim is twofold: 1. That of a kindred fellowship of souls who are in communion with *the Life*! No other fellowship to compare with this. It is (1) pure, (2) undying. 2. That out of the closeness of fellowship there might come a fullness of joy. Life is the root of joy. Joy is the fruit of life. A plant is not in perfection till it blooms. The Christian life is not perfected till it smiles and sings.

In conclusion, note: 1. The real and only valid succession in the Church is that of life. 2. There can be no value in forms, except as they express life. 3. Through the Divine Life men are reborn to the noblest fellowship with God and with one another!

Ver. 5.—*The message. Connecting link*: The Son of God, whom we have seen as manifested Life, has brought us a message from the invisible and everlasting Father. Topic—*The message from heaven brought by the Lord Jesus Christ*. A careful study of the text will suggest several points for consideration and expansion.

I. WHAT THE MESSAGE IS. 1. Whom it concerns. "God." "The announcement as to the nature of God is a personal revelation, and not a discovery" (Westcott, *in loc.*). We know something of God by reasoning upward from the works of nature. Nature speaks (Ps. xix. 1—4). Her works are a manifestation of God. But not a full or a clear one. We want a testimony direct from God, as to what he is, as to his thoughts towards us; and here it is. 2. What does it tell us about God? (1) Positively: "God is Light." Physically, light is the *splendour* in which all else is revealed. Intellectually, light is *knowledge*. Morally, light is *purity*. God is the One Being in and by whose existence all else receives an adequate interpretation of its coming into being. He hath knowledge without limit. He hath purity without stain. Hence the text speaks: (2) Negatively: "No darkness at all." Not the least speck. He is absolutely pure. Infinitely wise. How much is summed up in the three sentences which John has recorded: "God is Spirit;" "God is Light;" "God is Love"! Not all the collective wisdom of man could have taught us so much as this.

II. WHENCE THE MESSAGE CAME. "We have heard from him," *i.e.* from the Lord Jesus Christ, as the incarnate Manifestation of the Invisible. Obviously, the value of such a message depends on the Person who brings it. If, then, we ask the all-important question—*Who* brought this message down to earth? apostles, one and all, join with unwavering tongue in declaring that it was brought by the everlasting Son of the Father, who came from him. This is the distinctive assertion of Christianity. It is made, not doubtfully, not apologetically, but categorically and positively, for the acceptance and salvation of man. This message was brought to man directly by the greatest Messenger from the eternal throne that even heaven itself could send!

III. HOW THE MESSAGE REACHES US. "We announce unto you." The Lord Jesus Christ asserted his claims and proved them. He sealed them by his death, confirmed them by his resurrection, and gave to apostles the unwavering certitude of their validity by the gift of the Holy Ghost. They, thus sure of and confirmed in the message, living on it themselves as their own life and joy, preached and taught it, and also put it down in writing, that it might be spread over the world through the after-ages. They gave it forth authoritatively, with the authority which comes (1) of a Divine commission to declare it, and (2) of adequate knowledge of that which they declare. Thus the message reaches us. In the Epistles we have the sum and substance of that which in the first century was orally received. It is utterly useless for the adherents of the mythical school to urge the later authorship and miracle-embellishments of the Gospels with the view of weakening this position; since, *whatever be the age of the Gospels*, there are known letters of the apostolic age, by Paul, Peter, James, and John, from which alone the ground-plan of the Redeemer's life and the gist of his message could be reproduced, even if the misfortune of the loss of the Gospels could be supposed possible. The historic position is one which never has been and never can be shaken; that in the Epistles we have the sum of that which apostles gave forth orally—the message which has remained unchanged from the beginning of the Christian age. The verse of our text has as much force as if the Apostle John were now living and actually uttering the words in our ears: "This is the message," etc.

IV. HOW DOES THE MESSAGE BEAR UPON US? We can but briefly suggest. 1. The fact of this truth coming as a message from God unto us, shows us that God is concerned

about his intelligent creatures knowing who and what he is. 2. It shows us also that, if we are adequately to know who or what God is, it must be by a message from him to man, and not through man attempting to search out him. 3. We see, further, that by means of such a message, brought by *such* a Messenger, we may come to know the very greatest fact in the very simplest way. 4. This revelation of the nature of God is not for the purpose of satisfying speculative inquiries; it is intended to yield practical results (cf. vers. 6—10). 5. The right use of this message will yield us a knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ, which is in itself "the eternal life" (cf. John xvii. 3).

V. INFERENCES AND APPLICATION. 1. This sublime truth, being presented to us as a message *from God*, indicates to us so far *an* element of truth in agnosticism. "The world through its wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. i. 21, Revised Version). 2. If the gospel be a message from the everlasting God, then the *one* point which has to be verified is, not whether the message be in all respects such a one as we might have expected, but whether the Messenger be at once capable and true. 3. To demand the *same kind* of verification which a man gets of *his own* discoveries in physical science, is absurd. The only possible verification of a testimony lies in the proof of the ability and veracity of the witness. *Each kind of truth has its lines of verification in its own direction, and in no other.* 4. Most jealous care should be taken that we do neither the Messenger nor the message an injustice through allowing any prejudice or any dogmatic assumption to interfere with the consideration of their claims. 5. The substance of the message is in itself a strong argument for the truth of the Messenger. One assumption only is involved therein, viz. that God *can* reveal himself. 6. There is an infinite difference between an agnosticism that is such because it never heard the message, and that which is such because it scornfully ignores it under the pretence that God is unknowable. The one is a grievous misfortune; the other, a more grievous sin. In the one there is a yearning for the light; in the other, a turning from it. "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge."

Vers. 6—10.—"*If . . . if:*" *which shall it be?* *Connecting link:* The purpose of God in revealing himself to us as Light is that we may come into fellowship with him; and that in this fellowship we ourselves may become sons of light, which by nature we are not. *Topic—The only way in which the purpose of this Divine message about God himself can be accomplished in us is by our first recognizing truly and fully what we are, and then acknowledging our state before him.*

I. THE ENDS OF GOD IN THUS DECLARING HIMSELF MAY BE FRUSTRATED IN ONE OR OTHER OF THREE WAYS. 1. If we maintain that our fellowship with God follows as a matter of course, independently of moral considerations; e.g. if we (1) say that we have fellowship with him (ver. 6), and if we (2) walk in darkness. In that case we are (a) *false* in word: "we lie;" (b) *false* in practice: "we do not the truth." The truth is not merely to be objectively perceived by the understanding, but is also to be transmuted into life. Men would soon go on to know more of objective truth if they would but put in practice what they already know. A fellowship in the Light, and a living and walking in the darkness, are far asunder as the east is from the west. 2. If we maintain that there is no wrong in not being in fellowship with God, or if we deny that sin is the great barrier to fellowship, i.e. "if we say that we have no sin"¹ (ver. 8),—in that case (1) we are self-deceived; (2) "the truth is not in us," i.e. as an informing guide, or as a regulating power. *Note:* To take a true view of sin—its evil, its guilt, its subtlety, its destructiveness—is an imperative condition of understanding the value of the gospel message and of the Redeemer's work. 3. If we maintain that sin, albeit it may be located in us, has never broken forth into act; i.e. "if we say that we have not sinned" (ver. 10),—in that case (1) we are putting the lie on what God has said; for certainly God himself and we are in violent moral contrast. But if so, and we say *we* have not sinned, then we charge the sin on God; and since the revelation of God as Light is meant to throw up our sin in its darkness and enormity, if we deny our darkness, we thereby deny God's light. (2) God's Word is not in us, i.e. as the moving power or the enlightening force. It is outside us; but we close the eye, and will not let it shine within. It may be, it is, true that in God we live, and move, and have our being; that we cannot flee from his presence: that he has beset us behind and before, and laid his hand upon us;

¹ See Westcott on the phrase, *ἔχειν ἀμαρτίαν*.

and yet we may, like Cain, "go out from the presence of the Lord," and be cut of fellowship with him; we may, yea, we shall, remain unilluminated by his brightness, and unsaved by his revelation of himself, unless we first learn to own our guilt, to take our right place as sinful men before a holy God. To this the Apostle John urges. Hence observe—

II. THERE IS ANOTHER AND A BETTER COURSE, IN OUR ADOPTION OF WHICH THE ENDS OF GOD IN REVEALING HIMSELF MAY BE ACCOMPLISHED IN US. A double duty and also a double issue are here pointed out. 1. *Confession*. "If we confess our sins" (ver. 9); "not only acknowledge them, but acknowledge them openly in the face of men" (so Westcott). Unquestionably, open confession forms an essential part of our duty (cf. Rom. x. 9). The open confession before men of Jesus as our Saviour from sin, obviously includes as its basis the acknowledgment of the sin from which we are to be saved. Certainly there must be (1) confession before God (Ps. xxxii. 5), and (2) confession and restitution before man where the wrong has been to man (Luke xix. 8; Jas. vi. 16). This first duty will have a twofold issue. Where sin is thus confessed, there will be (1) forgiveness, (2) cleansing; and both these are guaranteed to the penitent by (a) the faithfulness and (b) the justice of God. Faithfulness in the fulfilment of the promise; and justice, in that, when the penitent puts away sin by forsaking it, God puts it away by forgiving it, through his method of mercy in Jesus Christ. 2. *Walking in the light* is the second duty. We walk in the light, and God is in the light. Ours is to be constant advance; God's is permanent being. When once a penitent has by confession avowedly quitted the realm of darkness, he at once begins to move on in light, and towards fuller light. This second duty will also have a twofold issue. (1) Fellowship. Sin is the great separator of man from God, and of men from one another. We "turn every one to his own way." Jesus is the great Reconciler, and thus the Restorer of the ruptured fellowship. (2) The efficacy of the blood of Christ will then be fully realized. Few verses in Scripture have suffered so much as this seventh verse, by being first halved and then isolated. It must be read as a whole, and the full force of "the elongated present" must be given to each verb. "If we are walking in the light, as he is in the light, we are having fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son is CLEANSING us from all sin;" i.e. the redeeming efficacy of the work of the Son of God is disclosing itself as a practical power, by removing the estrangement and the foulness which sin had brought. It can no longer be a question—Is Christ a Redeemer? for there will be the living, the manifest proof that he is so, in our being cleansed through him from guilt and sin, and restored to communion with God and to loving fellowship with our brother. Then, then, he who is the Light will not only have transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, but will actually have transformed us from being darkness to becoming light in the Lord. Then will the light and purity of heaven be reflected in us on earth, and we, while living on earth, shall be steadily moving toward the brighter light above.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1-4.—*The apostle's aim and method*. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard," etc.

I. HERE IS AN OBJECT EMINENTLY WORTHY OF AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST. "That ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." St. John sought to lead his readers into: 1. *Participation in the highest fellowship*. "That ye also may have fellowship with us," etc. (ver. 3). The word "fellowship," or "communion," signifies "the common possession of anything by various persons." By the "with us" we understand the apostles and others, who had been eye-witnesses of Jesus Christ. And St. John's aim was that his readers should participate in the truth and trust, the life and love, which the older generation of Christian disciples already possessed; that they should share in his own highest and holiest experiences. And it was not into an exalted human communion merely that the apostle endeavoured to lead his readers. "And truly," he says, "our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." In infinite condescension, the heavenly Father and the

Divine Son admit Christian believers into vital and intimate communion with themselves. This fellowship is a thing of character and of life. They who share in it are "begotten of God;" they have "become partakers of the Divine nature;" and they realize with joy the Divine presence. The apostle sought to lead his readers into: 2. *Realization of perfect joy.* "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." Hitherto the joy of those to whom St. John wrote had not been full; for their acquaintance with Christian truth had been imperfect and partial. By the fuller disclosures of that truth he hopes that their joy may be fulfilled. How rich and manifold and abundant is the joy of the true Christian! The joy of the forgiveness of sins, of reconciliation with God, of progress in truth and holiness, of hope of future perfection and glory. Our Lord said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." "Rejoice evermore."

II. HERE ARE MEANS EMINENTLY ADAPTED TO ACCOMPLISH THIS OBJECT. St. John endeavoured to attain his aim by declaration of the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice: 1. *The title applied to him.* "The Word of life." Each term of this title demands consideration. (1) The Word—the Logos (cf. John i. 1). "The term Logos," says Canon Liddon, "denotes at the very least something intimately and everlastingly present with God, something as internal to the Being of God as thought is to the soul of man. In truth, the Divine Logos is God reflected in his own eternal thought. In the Logos God is his own object. This infinite thought, the reflection and counterpart of God, subsisting in God as a Being or hypostasis, and having a tendency to self-communication,—such is the Logos. The Logos is the thought of God, not intermittent and precarious like human thought, but subsisting with the intensity of a personal form. The expression suggests the further inference that, since reason is man's noblest faculty, the uncreated Logos must be at least equal with God. . . . The Logos necessarily suggests to our minds the further idea of communicativeness. The Logos is speech as well as thought." (2) The life which is predicated of the Word. "The Word of life." We cannot define this life. Its essential nature is hidden from us. But life in an extraordinary sense and degree is attributed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Twice he himself said, "I am the Life." And St. John says, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." "As the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself." He is the Giver of life to others. "All things were made by him," etc. "I came," said he, "that they might have life, and that they might have it abundantly." "As the Father raiseth the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom he will." He has life in himself, and he is the great Bestower of all life to others. And his life is eternal. It "was from the beginning." He existed before creation, and before time, and his existence is independent of time. "We declare unto you that eternal life." He is ever-living and unchangeable. 2. *His intimate communion with God the Father.* "That eternal life which was with the Father" (cf. John i. 1). "The Word was with God." "He was not merely *παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ*, 'along with God,' but *πρὸς τὸν Θεόν*. This last preposition expresses," says Canon Liddon, "beyond the fact of coexistence or immanence, the more significant fact of perpetuated intercommunion. The face of the everlasting Word, if we may dare so to express ourselves, was ever directed towards the face of the everlasting Father." Or, as Ebrard expresses it, the life "was towards the Father. . . . A life which did indeed flow forth from the bosom of the Father, but which did at once return back into the bosom of the Father in the ceaseless flow of the inmost being of God." 3. *His manifestation to men.* "And the life was manifested, and we have seen," etc. "The Word" also suggests the idea of revelation or communication; for the Logos is not only reason, but discourse; not only thought, but the expression of thought. The life was manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ—in his words and works and life amongst men. It was exhibited gloriously in his splendid triumph over death by his resurrection. "It was not possible that he should be holden of it." "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us," etc. We have said that these means—the declaration of the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ—were eminently adapted to lead men into participation in the highest fellowship and realization of perfect joy. The statement is capable of ample proof. (1) A right relation to God is essential to fellowship with him and to true joy. For us, who have sinned against him, reconciliation to him and trust in him must become facts before we can have any com-

in union with him. (2) A true knowledge of God is essential to right relation to him. If we regard him as a stern Lawgiver, offended, resentful, implacable, we cannot even approach unto him. And the guilty conscience is prone to entertain such views of him. (3) The true knowledge of God is attainable through Jesus Christ. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." In Jesus Christ, God is revealed unto us as "a just God and a Saviour," as mighty and merciful, as faithful and forgiving, as infinitely holy and gracious and full of compassion. Such a revelation of God is attractive; it is fitted to melt the heart into penitence, to awaken its confidence in him, and to draw it to him in the fellowship of life and light.

III. HERE IS AN AGENT EMINENTLY QUALIFIED TO USE THESE MEANS. The apostle was qualified by various and competent knowledge of him concerning whom he wrote. 1. *He had heard his voice.* "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard." St. John and his fellow-apostles had heard his words on very many occasions both in public discourse and in private conversation. 2. *He had seen his human form and his mighty works.* "That which we have seen with our eyes. . . . The Life was manifested, and we have seen it." There is, perhaps, a special reference to his having seen him accomplish his great and beneficent miracles. But the apostles had seen their Master in various circumstances and conditions. They had seen him in his majesty and might quelling the tempest and raising the dead to life; and they had seen him exhausted and weary. They had seen him bleeding and dying on the cross; and they had seen him after he had risen again from the dead. John and two others had seen him bowed in anguish in Gethsemane; and they had seen him radiant in glory on Hermon. 3. *He had intently contemplated him.* "That which we looked upon," or beheld. This looking upon him is more internal and continuous than the having seen him with their eyes. With the most intense and affectionate and reverent interest the apostle contemplated him. 4. *He had handled his sacred body.* The hands of John and the other apostles must frequently have touched the body of their Divine Master. But there is, perhaps, special reference to the touching of him after his resurrection: "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me," etc. (Luke xxiv. 39). "He saith to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands," etc. (John xx. 27). Thus we see how eminently qualified St. John was to testify concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. How conclusive is the testimony which he bears! And how fitted is such an agent with such means to introduce men into the blessed fellowship and the perfect joy! Have we entered into this high fellowship? Do we realize this sacred and perfect joy? Let those who are strangers to these hallowed and blessed experiences seek them through Jesus Christ.—W. J.

Ver. 5.—*The great message.* "This then is the message which we have heard of him," etc. Notice two preliminary points. 1. *That the Christian minister has received a message from the Lord Jesus Christ.* He spoke to his apostles and to many others. He revealed unto them God the Father, and the great truths concerning human redemption. He still speaks to us through the sacred Scriptures. 2. *That the Christian minister should announce this message to others.* It is his duty not to preach the theories of men, but the truth of God, and especially the truth revealed by Jesus Christ. There has been too much preaching of our ecclesiastical and theological -isms instead of the great and gracious truths of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour. In our text St. John briefly announces the great message which he had received from his Divine Master: "that God is Light, and in him is no darkness at all." Light is frequently associated with the Divine Being in the Bible. It is his vesture. "Thou coverest thyself with light as with a garment" (Ps. civ. 2). It abides with him. "The light dwelleth with him" (Dan. ii. 22). He abides in it. "Dwelling in light unapproachable." It accompanies his manifestations. "His brightness was as the light" (Hab. iii. 4). He is the great Source of all illuminations. "The Father of lights" (Jas. i. 17). He calls his people to dwell and to walk in light. "Who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 9); "Ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. v. 8). Our Lord claimed to be "the Light of the world" (John viii. 12). His "life was the light of men" (John i. 4). But in our

text light is said to be the essence of the Divine Being. "God is Light." Of all material things light is most fitted to set forth truth and holy spiritual being. "It unites in itself," as Alford says, "purity, and clearness, and beauty, and glory, as no other material object does." And Milton, "Light ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure." The emblem suggests—

I. THE INFINITE INTELLIGENCE OF GOD. He is the Omniscient. "No intellectual ignorance can darken his all-embracing survey of actual and possible fact." "Unto him all hearts are open, all desires known, and from him no secrets are hid." "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising," etc. (Ps. cxxxix. 1—6); "He telleth the number of the stars," etc. (Ps. cxlvii. 4, 5); "He knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Ps. xlv. 21); "God knoweth all things" (1 John iii. 20); "I know thy works," etc. (Rev. ii. 2, 9, 13, 19; iii. 1, 8, 15). Every sparrow is known unto him (Luke xii. 6, 7). Let us endeavour to personally realize this great and solemn truth: God knows *me* always and thoroughly.

II. THE ENLIGHTENING INFLUENCE OF GOD. He created the light of the material universe. "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." He is the great Fountain of all intellectual and moral light. He inspired Bezaleel to devise and execute skilful handiwork (Exod. xxxi. 1—5). The scientist, the metaphysician, the statesman, the poet, the artist, each and all derive their light from him. He communicates religious truth to man. He inspired, and still inspires, the great religious thinkers, and the far and clear-sighted spiritual seers of our race. By his Son Jesus Christ he "lighteth every man" (John i. 9).

III. THE LIFE-GIVING AND INVIGORATING INFLUENCE WHICH GOD EXERTS. Light cannot create life; but it quickens, develops, and strengthens it. "Physical light," says Ebrard, "appears to be the producing, forming, quickening principle of all organization, in its essence self-communicative, and the stimulating principle of all physical organic functions of life." Light is essential to every kind of life with which we are acquainted. Without it our world would speedily become one vast, dreary, dread abode of the dead. Great forces also of various kinds are produced from light. As George Stephenson pointed out, it is light which propels so swiftly our long and heavy railway trains. "It is light bottled up in the earth for tens of thousands of years, light absorbed by plants and vegetables being necessary for the condensation of carbon during the process of their growth, if it be not carbon in another form; and now, after being buried in the earth for long ages in fields of coal, that latent might is again brought forth and liberated—made to work, as in that locomotive, for great human purposes." God is the great Author of all life and of all force. He created the physical universe, and he sustains it. The forces of nature are expressions of his awful and beautiful might. Evolution is a mode of Divine operation. And the life and strength of souls he inspires and renews. He inspires the soul with life. "You being dead in your sins hath he quickened" (Col. ii. 13). The true Christian "is born of the Spirit" (John iii. 8); he "is born of God" (ch. iii. 9). And God imparts and renews strength to his people. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength," etc. (Isa. xl. 29—31).

IV. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AS A TRINITY IN UNITY. This is at least suggested by speaking of him as Light. In two ways does light suggest the trinity of God. "The researches of Young and Helmholtz," says Mr. Sugden, "have proved beyond the possibility of doubt that the three primary colours are red, green, and violet, and that by various combinations of these three all the colours with which we are acquainted are produced; whilst the combination of all three in equal proportions gives white light, apparently one simple and homogeneous sensation, but in reality a compound of three. Have we not here a most striking illustration, if not more than an illustration, of the Christian truth about the nature of God, which teaches us that he is a Trinity in unity—three Persons, and one God? . . . As Luthardt well says, 'God has, in the history of salvation, revealed himself in a triune manner—as Father, Son, and Spirit; and we, in that work of appropriating salvation, through which we become Christians, have experience of God according to this distinction, viz. as him to whom we are reconciled, and as the Spirit who has inwardly appropriated to us the grace of reconciliation, and made it the power of a new life to us.' Thus do we become certain that there are distinctions in the Godhead, that God is the triune God." Light suggests the same truth in

another way. It is thus stated by Professor Lias: "When we reflect on the threefold nature of light, its enlightening, its warming, its chemical powers, we are reminded of the Holy Trinity—the unapproachable Light himself; his eternal Revealer, bringing light to earth, and quickening by his genial warmth the frozen hearts of men; and the eternal Spirit, dwelling in their hearts, and slowly bringing his healing influences to bear upon their diseased souls."

V. THE PERFECT HOLINESS OF GOD. Light is pure and purifying. It visits scenes of corruption and decay, and exercises a cleansing and healing influence there, and pursues its glorious course without having contracted any taint, still absolutely pure. Fit emblem of the infinite holiness of the great God. "No stain can soil his robe of awful sanctity." He is pre-eminently "the Holy One." "Thou only art holy." The highest intelligences ceaselessly praise him, crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." "His name is holy, and he dwells in the high and holy place." His holiness is the glory of his Being. He is "glorious in holiness." As if to set forth the entire purity and perfection of the Divine nature considered as light, St. John says, "And in him is no darkness at all." No kind of darkness whatsoever has any place in him. "Neither ignorance, nor error, nor sin, nor death" is found in him.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Let us reverence this great and holy Being.* 2. *Let us seek his life-giving, enlightening, and invigorating influences.*—W. J.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The condition and consequences of fellowship with God.* "If we say that we have fellowship with him," etc.

I. THE CONDITION OF FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. St. John states this condition both negatively and positively. 1. *Negatively.* "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. (1) There may be a profession of fellowship with God, while the practice is utterly opposed to his character and will. We have spoken of this fellowship in our treatment of the third verse. To "walk" is an expression frequently used in the sacred Scriptures to indicate the entire life, with special reference to its outward aspects. To "walk in darkness" is to live in the practice of sin. In St. John's time there were persons who claimed to have communion with the Light, but walked in the darkness. The Gnostics professedly devoted their souls to the pursuit of the highest knowledge, and yet were guilty of the vilest sins with their bodies, alleging "that the flesh was so corrupt that no filthiness of life could affect it." (2) That such profession, joined with such practice, is a twofold lie. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness, we lie." Here is the lie of the lip. The profession is untrue. "And do not the truth." Here is the lie of the life. The practice is opposed to truth. Truth is not only to be spoken, but acted. Life should be brought into harmony with the eternal verities. The truth acknowledged in the creed should be expressed in the conduct. But in this case supposed truth is neither spoken nor acted. 2. *Positively.* "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." "This walking in the light, as he is in the light," says Alford, "is no mere imitation of God, but is an identity in the essential element of our daily walk with the essential element of God's eternal Being; not imitation, but coincidence and identity of the very atmosphere of life." "The light" denotes "the sphere of the manifestation of the good and the God-like." The words of St. Paul, in Eph. v. 8, 9, considerably elucidate this verse: "Ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)." As Meyer says, the "whole of Christian morality is here presented under its three great aspects—the good, the right, the true." If we would express the meaning of the apostle's phrase, "walking in the light," in a single word, "holiness" is the word best suited to that purpose. We discover three ideas in this expression of St. John. (1) Life in sympathy with holiness. The heart beating in harmony with the light. (2) Life in the practice of holiness. The inward principle expressed in the outward conduct. The light of the heart shining in the life. (3) Life progressing in holiness. He who walks is not stationary, but advancing. The godly soul "follows on to know the Lord;" "presses on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." This, then, is the condition of fellowship with God—walking in the light; holiness of heart and of life.

II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. 1. *Fellowship with the saints.* "We have fellowship one with another." The reality of our communion with God is attested by our communion of love with those who are his. Walking in the sphere of truth, righteousness, and love, we have fellowship with all those who walk in the same sphere. All who walk in the light are one in their deepest sympathies, in their most steadfast principles, in their most important aims, and in their highest aspirations; they are one in character, in service, and in destiny. Hence their communion with each other is genuine, vital, and blessed. 2. *Sanctification through the Saviour.* "And the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." This implies that even they who walk in the light need cleansing from sin. "The requirement that we walk in the light, is confronted by the fact that in us there still is sin and darkness." Notice: (1) The power by which we are cleansed. "The blood of Jesus his Son." Not the material blood of Jesus, but his blood in its moral significance and strength. "The life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. xvii. 11); "The blood is the life" (Deut. xii. 23). The blood of Jesus denotes the sacrifice of the life of Jesus for us. The power of that sacrifice is chiefly the power of holy and purifying love. It is the fullest and mightiest expression of the infinite love of God the Father toward us, who "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all;" and of the infinite love of Jesus his Son toward us in his voluntary self-sacrifice. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works." Holy love received into the heart, by its own essential nature, is cleansing in its influence. In proportion as the love of God in the death of Jesus Christ is heartily believed, will sin be hated and holiness loved and cultivated. (2) The progressiveness of this cleansing. "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us." The apostle uses the present tense. He does not write "cleansed," or "hath cleansed," but "is cleansing us." The cleansing is not accomplished at once and for ever. It is a continual process. The precious blood of Christ exerts its purifying and sanctifying influence until the heart and the life are thoroughly cleansed from all sin. (3) The thoroughness of this cleansing. "Cleanseth us from all sin." No sin-stains are so deep as to defy its power. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow," etc. (Isa. i. 18; cf. Ezek. xxxvi. 25; Heb. ix. 13, 14).

Let our earnest endeavour be to walk in the light, and to trust in the great and gracious Saviour.—W. J.

Vers. 8—10.—*Man's attitude towards his own sins.* "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," etc. It is implied that man is a sinner, that even Christian men "have sin." The renewed nature is not, in our present condition, an altogether sinless nature. The saintly apostle includes himself in the "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," etc. But this is not the same moral condition as "walking in the darkness" (ver. 6). In that condition the man "is in the darkness;" in this, the sin is in the man. In that, darkness is the moral region in which the sinner lives and moves and has his being; in this, he lives and walks in the light, but is not altogether free from sin. Our text sets before us two contrasted attitudes of men towards their own sins.

I. THE DENIAL OF PERSONAL SIN. "If we say that we have no sin," etc. (ver. 8). "If we say that we have not sinned," etc. (ver. 10). Notice: 1. *This denial itself.* It may be made variously. (1) By affirming that we are free from sin. There may be persons whose view of the exalted claims of God's holy law is so deficient, and whose estimate of their own character and conduct is so exaggerated, that they think and assert that they have no sin. (2) By pleading the merit of certain good actions as a set-off against our sins. In this case certain small and venial sins are acknowledged, but very many virtuous and generous deeds are claimed, and great merit is ascribed to them, and they are held to far more than counterbalance the slight offences. Or, like the Pharisee (Luke xviii. 11, 12), a man may conclude that he has no sin by comparing himself and his good works with others whom he deems very much his inferiors. (3) By extenuating the character of sin. There are not a few who virtually deny the fact of sin altogether. What the Bible calls sin they speak of as misdirection, imperfect development, inherited tendencies to errors of life; and thus they seek to get rid of personal guilt. 2. *The consequences of this denial.* (1) The self-deception

of the denier. "He deceiveth himself." By closing his eyes to the light of truth and holiness, he is wandering into moral error, falsehood, and danger. He sins against his own soul. (2) The manifestation of the solemn fact that the truth of God is not in him. Saying that he has no sin, he testifies that neither the truth of the perfect holiness of God, nor that of the sinfulness of man, is realized by him. (3) The negation of the Divine veracity. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar." God has repeatedly declared that all men are sinners (Rom. iii. 10—18). All the provisions and arrangements for man's redemption imply that he is a sinner and spiritually lost. But if any man has not sinned, these declarations are untrue, and redemption itself is based upon falsehood. How dreadful a thing it is to "make him a liar"! (4) The manifestation of the fact that the Word of God is not in him. By "his Word" (ver. 10) we do not understand the eternal and personal Word (as in ver. 1), but, as Ebrard says, "the collective revelation of God, not merely that which is contained in the written words of the Old and New Testaments, but the entire self-annunciation of the nature of God, who is Light." The whole revelation of the mind and will of God teaches that man is a sinner; he who says that he has not sinned contradicts that revelation, and in so doing shows that the spirit of that revelation is not in him.

II. THE CONFESSION OF PERSONAL SINS. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1. *The confession itself.* The confession, to be valid, must be sincere; it must be the expression of penitence. The apostle means more than a vague, general confession of sin. It is to be feared that many join in the "general confession" in church every Sunday without any true realization of their personal guiltiness, and whose confession, consequently, cannot be acceptable unto God. Our confession must be personal and particular; it must spring from the heart, and its sincerity must be evinced in the life. Confession must be made to God. In our text there is no suggestion whatever of confession to a priest. Confession to man is binding only when we have injured man, and then the confession should be made to the injured person or persons. But the confession and forgiveness of which our text speaks are things which transpire between the penitent soul and the pardoning God. 2. *The consequences of this confession.* (1) Forgiveness of our sins. As a consequence of genuine personal confession of sins, God exempts us from their spiritual penalties, sets us free from their guilt, and delivers us from condemnation. How completely and graciously God forgives (Ps. ciii. 12; Isa. xxxviii. 17; xlv. 22; lv. 6, 7; Micah vii. 10; Luke xv. 20—24)! (2) Cleansing from our sins. "And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Purification is promised as well as pardon; sanctification as well as justification. Of this sanctification we have already spoken (ver. 7). (3) The guarantee of these blessings. "He is faithful and just [Revised Version, 'righteous'] to forgive us our sins," etc. The character of God is a pledge that the penitent shall receive pardon and purification. He has promised these blessings; he is faithful, and will fulfil his promises. He is faithful, not only to his promises, but to his own holy nature. "God is Light," and he is true to himself in forgiving and sanctifying those who sincerely confess their sins. It seems to us that his righteousness here does not mean that, Christ having borne our sins and satisfied Divine justice, the forgiveness of all who believe on him is due to him or to them in him. That may be taught elsewhere, but we cannot discover it here. The justice or righteousness is that of the character of God; and pardon and purification from sin are bestowed in harmony with his righteousness. It may be, as Alford observes, that "in the background lie all the details of redemption, but they are not here in this verse: only the simple fact of God's justice is adduced." "Justice and mercy are forms of love. The same is true of righteousness, or right—this requires both justice and mercy; for no being can ever think himself righteous who does not exercise mercy where mercy is possible—'faithful and just' (righteous), says an apostle, 'to forgive us our sins.' God will be just, retributively, because he is righteous. He will also be merciful and forgiving because he is righteous."¹

Our subject presents the strongest reasons to dissuade us from attempting to cloak or deny our sins, and the strongest encouragement to humbly and heartily confess them unto God. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."—W. J.

¹ 'The Vicarious Sacrifice,' by H. Bushnell, D.D., pt. iii. ch. 3.

Vers. 1—4.—*Introduction.* I. SUBJECT OF APOSTOLIC PROCLAMATION. 1. *What is thrown into prominence.* (1) *The absolute concerning the Word of life.* "That which was from the beginning." By this form of expression we are taken back to a point which has existence only in thought, and from that point we are called to look forward. "That which was from the beginning," or, strictly, "that which is timeless," concerning the Word of life, viz. his Divine Personality and attributes, was included in the proclamation. It is put first as the grand background of the Incarnation. The Incarnate One must be thought of as having timelessness and all that belongs to timelessness. (2) *The historical concerning the Word of life.* "That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled." John uses the plural number, as writing in the name of the apostles, of whom he was the sole survivor. There could also be predicated of Christ that he was *the Object of sensuous perception.* This was not from the beginning, but in time. We thus come upon the historical existence of Christ. "That which we have heard." In accordance with the context, we are to think only of what they had heard from the lips of Christ. They had been so near him as actually to hear him speaking. They had heard him when he spoke the sermon on the mount, when he taught them to pray, when he bade the sea be still, when he uttered the seven voices on the cross, when he saluted them after his resurrection, when he blessed them in parting from them. "*Have heard.*" That which they had heard—the words and tone of voice—was their permanent possession; and it is the permanent possession of the Church still in substance, though not now associated with impressions through the sense of hearing. "That which we have seen with our eyes." Some had only come into contact with those who had seen Christ: *they* had seen him with their own eyes. They had seen him when he was teaching, when he was walking on the sea, when he was transfigured, when he was hanging on the cross, when he was risen, when he was going up into heaven. "*Have seen.*" The impressions received through the sense of sight remained with them, instead of which we have only the descriptions of the evangelists. "That which we beheld." By a change of verb we are referred to seeing *with an intention*, and by a change of tense we are referred to separate acts. On occasion after occasion they looked purposely, and satisfied themselves that he was indeed bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. "And our hands handled." This is joined closely in the same tense to what goes before. They had the solid evidence of handling on which to proceed. They not only touched, but touched with an intention. They must often have felt the touch of his hand; and we can think of them looking forward to an opportunity, and satisfying themselves, in the actual contact, that he was indeed their own flesh. There was one remarkable occasion after his resurrection; when he stood suddenly in the midst of them, they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they beheld a spirit; and he asked them to go beyond beholding. "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye beheld me having." And apparently they were each favoured with the convincing evidence of handling him. (3) *The designation of Christ as the Word of life.* "Concerning the Word of life." In the introduction to his Gospel John calls Christ "the Word." The natural interpretation is that he is the Word in relation to God, as essentially manifesting God. Instead of God here we have Life, which therefore is to be taken as a designation of God. Created life has only a partial significance; life in its absolute significance is only to be found in God. The chief elements of life are consciousness, activity, gladness; in the Word, God sees brought out the infinite richness of his own conscious, active, glad life. 2. *Parenthetical statement.* (1) *Designation of Christ as the Life.* "And the Life." In the former designation God is thought of as the Life; now Christ, as essentially manifesting God in the particular aspect, is designated the Life (John i. 4). (2) *Another manifestation which is connected with the evidence of sight.* "Was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness." As the Word, Christ was manifested to God; but here we come upon another manifestation. The reference is to the Incarnation, or his becoming flesh (as it is expressed in John i. 14). As the Word, he was hidden from men; as the Incarnate, he was manifested to men, specially to the apostles. He came within the sphere of their vision, and they were put in the position of eye-witnesses to the Life as manifested. (3) *The second manifestation not announced out of connection with the first.* "And declare unto you the Life, the eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

They realized the importance of making public the manifestation of the Life to them, but, at the same time, what he was before being manifested to them. He was eternal; while entering into time, in the life which essentially belonged to him, he was timeless. He was also with the Father—a Companion, as it were, in whom the fatherly love found its object. This was the blessed concealment out of which he came. It is only when the Incarnation is thus connected that its graciousness appears. He who manifested the fulness of the Divine life was manifested in a form level to sense. He who was manifested eternally was manifested in time. He who was manifested with the Father was manifested in the midst of uncongenial society. 3. *Former statement, which was left incomplete, resumed.* "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also." We are not told who the recipients of this Epistle were. They were not all Christians, for, having declared their message to others, they declared it to them also. Their message was based on facts for which they had the evidence of sight and hearing. In accordance with what has been said, they presented those facts with their proper setting, viz. as facts in time concerning him who was before all time. They also presented them with their proper interpretation, viz. as showing the Divine desire for human salvation. This gave a great simplicity and power to their preaching: they had a few facts to tell, which they themselves could attest. Christ is not now in the world, so that we can have faith founded on the testimony of our own senses of sight and hearing; but we can have faith founded on apostolic testimony. We owe a debt of gratitude to the apostles that they were as careful witnesses, looking purposely and handling purposely, and that they took such pains to make their testimony known; and we owe a debt of gratitude to the great Head of the Church, who made use of them for the eliciting and establishing of our faith.

II. AIM OF THE APOSTOLIC PROCLAMATION AND OF THIS EPISTLE. 1. *Aim of the apostolic proclamation.* (1) *Fellowship with apostles.* "That ye also may have fellowship with us." Fellowship depends, to a great extent, on a common range of experience. There were saving experiences which the apostles enjoyed, in connection with which many had fellowship with them; they wished these, too, to have fellowship with them in connection with the same experiences. Therefore they preached the Incarnation to them, for that was the condition of those experiences being enjoyed. (2) *Fellowship with God.* "Yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Of far more importance than having fellowship, even with apostles, is having fellowship with God. This is the principal end for which we are associated. We have fellowship with the Father. In his fatherly love he enters into all our experiences, and we have to enter into his loving thoughts and purposes and to share in his peace and joy. We have fellowship with the Father, as identified with his Son Jesus Christ—him whom he sent forth on the errand of human salvation. From his human experiences, even of death, the Son can enter into all our experiences; and we are to be encouraged to enter into sympathy with him in the whole extent of his saving work. The apostles proclaimed the Incarnation, that, within the Christian circle, this elevating fellowship might be promoted. 2. *Aim of this Epistle.* "And those things we write, that our joy may be fulfilled." It is implied that his letter was in keeping with the apostolic proclamation. In the joy of the experiences connected with the Incarnation there was one element of *pain*. It was the feeling that man did not share, or did not share more fully, in the joy of these experiences. He sought relief from this pain in *writing*. He had some joy in his readers experiencing the joy of the Incarnation; he wished to have his joy completed in the completion of their joy. This was the apostle's feeling, which, as the last of the apostles, he was conserving in the name of all.—R. F.

Vers. 5—10.—*Message from Christ brought to bear on fellowship with God.* I. NATURE OF GOD. "And this is the message which we have heard from him, and announce unto you, that God is Light, and in him is no darkness at all." Christ's message is supported by the conviction that he has a message to deliver. The apostolic message, which has still to be delivered, was received directly from the lips of Christ. It has particular reference to the nature of God, viz. his being Light, with which we are to associate infinite clearness of truth and infinite purity. He is Light, to the absolute exclusion of darkness, there being in him not the slightest trace of error, not the slightest speck of impurity. The light of the sun is a fit, though only an imperfect,

symbol of his truth and purity. Christ may have given the revelation in *these words*, though they are not to be found in the Gospels. It is implied in his being the Light, while at the same time the Word (John i. 1—9). It was because he manifested the essential light-nature of God that he was Light-bringer to men. We do not have here the good message (language which John nowhere uses), viz. mercy to men, though there may be suggestion of this in the great *diffusiveness* of light. We have that which mercy presupposes in God and seeks to diffuse among men.

II. THREE FALSE CONDITIONS CONDEMNED, AND THE THREE OPPOSED POSITIONS JUSTIFIED. 1. *First false position.* (1) *Stated.* "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness." The three hypothetical sayings, introduced in the same way ("if we say"), are unchristian. As one who would be warned as well as others, John includes himself. Christians, according to the conception in ver. 3, are those who say that they have fellowship with God. The position supposed here is saying this while we walk in the darkness, *i.e.* while we habitually move in this element—while we keep our life away from true and pure influences, loving error and impurity. (2) *Condemned.* "We lie, and do not the truth." Our lie is saying that we have fellowship with God. Our doing not the truth evidences our lie. We make our life a contradiction of the nature of God, which is light, and thus necessarily unfit ourselves for fellowship with God; for what concord hath light with darkness? It cannot be held that we can be indifferent to our manner of life and yet maintain friendship with God. 2. *First opposed position.* (1) *Stated.* "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light." This is the Christian supposition opposed to the other. As one who would be confirmed, John includes himself. Let us also include ourselves. Light is the Divine element; let it also be ours. God *is* in the light, *i.e.* has absolute fixedness in it. We are to *walk* in the light, *i.e.* to throw our life open to all true and pure influences, thus moving forward toward his fixedness. (2) *Justified. One good consequent.* "We have fellowship one with another." This results from our walking in the light. Having a common element for our life, and therefore common sympathies and antipathies, the foundation is laid for our having fellowship one with another. This, according to the Johannine teaching, is closely related to our having fellowship with God. But how are we to be fitted for this higher fellowship? The answer is given in what follows. By walking in the light, we come within the influence of the blood of Christ. *Another good consequent.* "And the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (a) *A present power.* The blood of Christ refers to the death of Christ, but is to be distinguished from it in marking it as having *present virtue*. It is a great living reality of the present. It is mentioned, along with other verities, in the twelfth of Hebrews: "Ye are come . . . to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." (b) *A human-Divine power.* It is the blood of Jesus, and therefore human blood; but it is also the blood of God's Son, and therefore blood of infinite virtue. (c) *A cleansing power.* It is blood that cleanses, because it was shed in satisfaction for sin. The cleansing is with a view to our having fellowship with God. There was constant instruction in this truth under the Jewish dispensation. The cleansing, in accordance with ver. 9, is to be referred to sanctification. Even after we have been cleansed from guilt, we need to be cleansed from impure thoughts and desires, in order that we may be fitted for fellowship with him who is Light. Our whole dependence for sanctification must be on the efficacy of the blood, along with the agency of the Spirit. (d) *A universal power.* It is blood that cleanses from all sin. The light-nature of God is constantly revealing the presence of sinful elements in our nature. We have the remedy in the blood of Christ, which will gradually remove all sinful elements, until, thoroughly purified, we are as fitted as creatures can be for holding converse with him who is a consuming Fire to all sin. 3. *Second false position.* (1) *Stated.* "If we say that we have no sin." This goes back on the previous thought, viz. the cleansing away of the remaining impurity, until we are completely fitted for fellowship with God. What if this is unnecessary? if our sanctification is already completed? This is the supposition which is now made. (2) *Condemned.* "We deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." It is too violent a supposition to be entertained in ignorance. It can only be entertained where there has been a considerable amount of *self-activity* in the way of presenting to the mind deceitful appearances—*sophisms*, such as the Gnostic idea of superior enlightenment. While there is

the activity of self-deception, there is not the activity of the truth. If it were active in us, it would show us that there was much remaining evil to be overcome. 4. *Second opposed position.* (1) *Stated.* "If we confess our sins." The precise converse would have been saying that we have sin. There is a going beyond that to the practice of the Christian duty of confession, which is literally, "a saying along with," i.e. along with God. It is a duty which cannot be performed unless with feelings of penitence, arising from a proper view of what we are and have done. What we are to confess is not merely that we have sin, i.e. have the taint still in us, are not completely sanctified; but we are to confess particular manifestations of sin. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil." David had his sin brought home to him very pointedly, "Thou art the man!" and he did not then hide it, but confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord." "It is much easier to make pious speeches to the effect that we are sinners in a general way, and expressive of general deep contrition, and of the misery engendered by sin, than to acknowledge the particular wrong we have done, and to endeavour as far as possible to repair it. Many who are ready enough to admit generally that they are sinners would be the first hotly to repel a charge of sinfulness on any one special point, so deep is the self-deception of the human heart, which is often furthest from God when the lips are busiest in honouring him." Let our confessions have the particularity which is here suggested. Let them be founded on self-knowledge, and on self-knowledge in particular manifestations. The sorrow that prompts to confession cannot be all that it should be unless we clearly realize wherein we have violated the spirit of the Divine precepts and especially of the gospel. (2) *Justified.* "He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." When particular sins are in question, there is brought in the blessing of forgiveness as well as of cleansing. God has pledged his word to forgive us our sins: "I, even I, am he that blot out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." He has also pledged his word to advance our sanctification: "I will put my Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." This Scripture itself is a distinct promise. If, then, we walk in the light, and fulfil the specific condition, viz. confess our sins, we may with the utmost confidence look to God to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness of disposition which would lead to the commission of sin. He not only holds himself bound by his promise, but the promise is thoroughly in accordance with his nature. In view of what he has done in redemption, he regards it as not only a gracious thing, but even a righteous thing, to attach the double blessing to confession of our sins. Doing, then, what he commands, we can appeal to him, even as righteous, to bless us. 5. *Third false position.* (1) *Stated.* "If we say that we have not sinned." This is a very large assumption, even if we do not take into account our pre-Christian state: "We have never committed sin since we entered into union with Christ. It is going beyond the previous assumption, inasmuch as this involves complete sanctification from the beginning. This, then, is the most thorough-going perfectionism. Thus perfect, we may say with Christ, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" But what is said about the assumption? (2) *Condemned.* "We make him a liar, and his Word is not in us." The wildest assumption receives the severest condemnation. The blood of Christ is for our continual cleansing. God is therefore dealing with us on the supposition of our partial sanctification. To claim complete sanctification is to make him a liar, i.e. to contradict this supposition. It can be said, further, that his Word is not in us, i.e. is not evidenced in our consciousness in what it says about our state. We do not need to go beyond the petition which Christ put into the mouth of disciples, "Forgive us our sins." It is the height of presumption to imagine that we can here outgrow the Lord's Prayer.—R. F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Vers. 1, 2.—Moreover, walking in the light involves accepting the propitiation wrought through Jesus Christ the Righteous.

The connexion with the preceding is close. We have just had (1) the confession that we do sin; we now have (2) the principle that we must not sin; and (3) the consolation that sin is not irremediable.

Ver. 1.—My little children; or, perhaps, *my dear children*; or, simply, *my children*. The diminutive (τεκνία), if it retains any force, expresses endearment rather than smallness or youth. The word occurs only once outside this Epistle (John xiii. 33), and it was, perhaps, from Christ's use of it then that St. John adopted it (vers. 12, 28; ch. iii. 7, 18; iv. 4; v. 21). In Gal. iv. 19 the reading is doubtful. Cf. τί με φεύγεις, τέκνον, τὸν σουτοῦ πατέρα; in the beautiful story of St. John and the young robber (Eusebius, 'Hist. Eccl.,' III. xxiii. 17). As distinct from παῖδια (ch. ii. 13, 18), the word seems to imply spiritual fatherhood. These things (the section, ch. i. 5—10) I write to you, that ye may not sin. The aorist forbids the rendering, "continue in sin;" as before, those who are walking in light and yet sin through frailty are addressed. Two apparently contradictory principles have been set forth: you must walk in light; you must confess that you sin. St. John now goes on to reconcile them. I write (1) to charge you not to sin; (2) [to tell you that] if we sin, we have an Advocate. Instead of understanding "to tell you that," we may take καὶ as "and yet"—a frequent use in St. John. There are two seemingly opposite truths—sin is wholly alien from the Christian, and the Christian is never wholly free from sin; and St. John struggles to give them their right balance, not in the dialectical manner of St. Paul, but by stating them alternately, side by side, varying the point of view. We have an Advocate. The possession of the Advocate is as continual (ἐχόμεν) as of the sin (ch. i. 8). Every one feels that "a Comforter with the Father" is an impossible rendering. But St. John alone uses the word Παράκλητος, four times in his Gospel of the Spirit (see on John xiv. 16), and once here of Christ. Is it likely that he would use so unusual and important a word in two different senses, and that in two writings intended as companions to one another? The rendering "Advocate," necessary here, carries with it the rendering "Advocate" in the Gospel. Moreover, what is the meaning of ἄλλος Παράκλητος, if Christ is an Advocate, but the Spirit a Comforter? If Christ is one Advocate and the Spirit "another Advocate," all is intelligible. Philo frequently uses παράκλητος of the high priest as intercessor for the people, and also of the Divine λόγος. There is a difference, however, between "Paraclete" as used of the Spirit and as used of Christ. It is applied to the Spirit in his relation to the disciples; to Christ in his relation to the Father. Christ is our Advocate πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα: his advocacy turns towards the Father to propitiate him. And not in vain; for he is

himself "righteous." A sinner could not reconcile God to sinners; but a righteous Advocate can, for his character is a warrant for the righteousness of his cause. Thus, δίκαιον is the set-off to ἐν τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ. One who has sinned needs an advocate; one who has not sinned can best undertake the office. Δίκαιον at the end, without the article, is gently suggestive of the plea, "Jesus Christ, a Righteous One."

Ver. 2.—And he (not quia nor enim, but idemque ille) is a Propitiator for our sins. Ἰλασμός occurs here and ch. iv. 10 only in the New Testament. St. Paul's word is καταλλαγή (Rom. v. 11; xi. 15; 2 Cor. v. 18, 19). They are not equivalents; ἰλασμός has reference to the one party to be propitiated, καταλλαγή to the two parties to be reconciled. Ἀπολύτρωσις is a third word expressing yet another aspect of the atonement—the redemption of the offending party by payment of his debt (Rom. iii. 24, etc.). Although ἰλασμός does not necessarily include the idea of sacrifice, yet the use of the word in the LXX., and of ἰλᾶσκεσθαι (Heb. ii. 27) and ἰλαστήριον (Rom. iii. 25; Heb. ix. 5) in the New Testament, points to the expiation wrought by the great High Priest by the sacrifice of himself. It is ἰλασμός, and not ἰλαστήρ, because the prominent fact is Christ as an Offering rather than as One who offers. With the πρὸς, cf. John viii. 46; x. 33; xvi. 8. Our sins are the subject-matter of his propitiatory work. And not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. Again we seem to have an echo of the prayer of the great High Priest (John xvii. 20, 24). The propitiation is for all, not for the first band of believers only. The sins of the whole world are expiated; and if the expiation does not effect the salvation of the sinner, it is because he rejects it, loving the darkness rather than the light (John iii. 19). No man—Christian, Jew, or Gentile—is outside the mercy of God, unless he places himself there deliberately. "It seems clear that the sacrifice of Christ, though peculiarly and completely available only for those who were called, does in some particulars benefit the whole world, and release it from the evil in which the whole creation was travelling" (Jelf).

Vers. 3—6.—Thirdly, walking in the light involves obedience.

Ver. 3.—And herein we perceive that we know him, if we keep his commandments (γινώσκουμεν, we come to know, we recognize; ἐγγνώκαμεν, we have come to know, we know). The token of our having this knowledge is stated hypothetically; not because, but if, we obey. To serve under another and obey him is one of the best ways of knowing his character. The knowledge is

no mere intellectual apprehension, such as the Gnostics postulated, but a moral and spiritual affection and activity. It is possible to know and hate (John xvi. 24). Again, the knowledge is not a mere emotional appreciation. Christianity knows nothing of piety without morality. To know Christ is to love him, and to love him is to obey and imitate him. By "keep" (*τηρῶμεν*) is meant "keep the eye fixed upon, observe."

Ver. 4.—The participial substantive (*δ λέγων*) now takes the place of *ἐάν* with the subjunctive, but the two are equivalent (cf. ch. i. 6, which is almost exactly parallel to this, and shows what "knowing him" really is, viz. having fellowship with him, just as not keeping his commandments is the same as walking in darkness). St. John says, *μὴ τηρῶν*, not *ὃν τηρῶν*, the case being hypothetical—if there be such a man, he is a liar, and has no idea of truth (see on ch. i. 8). He must have lost the very power of recognizing truth to maintain that he knows Christ, when he habitually transgresses his commands. It is no great thing, as Bede says, to know as the devils do, who "believe and tremble."

Ver. 5.—Once more (cf. ch. i. 7, 9) the opposite is stated and the thought carried further. But whoso keepeth his word (his doctrine as a whole, including the separate commandments), of a truth in him hath the love of God been perfected; i.e. as an accomplished fact; the relation of love has been established. In St. John *ἀληθώς* is no mere expletive; it expresses reality, and reality that is *known*. From ver. 4 we might have expected "of a truth *he knoweth* God;" but the apostle goes beyond this, and shows that really knowing God involves loving him (comp. ch. iv. 11). The context shows that *τοῦ Θεοῦ* is objective—his love of God rather than God's love of him. The insertion of *τοῦ Θεοῦ* here, and the drift of the Epistle thus far, are in favour of *αὐτόν* and *αὐτοῦ* in vers. 3-5 meaning God rather than Christ, although *αὐτός* in ver. 2 tells the other way. The last clause sums up and reaffirms, but as usual with a new turn of thought, the whole section (vers. 3-5), which begins and ends with *ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν*. Knowing God implies keeping his Word; and keeping his Word involves loving him; and all this implies being in him, i.e. having that fellowship with him and his Son in which the Christian's life (which is eternal life) consists, and to promote which St. John publishes his Gospel (ch. i. 3, 4).

Ver. 6.—Profession involves an obligation to act up to the profession. "He who says that he abides in God is by his words morally bound to walk even as his Son, the incarnate Revelation of his will, walked."

The change from *ἐν αὐτῷ* to *ἐκεῖνος* confirms the view that *αὐτόν* and *αὐτοῦ* mean the Father; but St. John's use of *ἐκεῖνος* to recall with emphasis a previous subject (John i. 8, 18, 33; v. 11; ix. 37; x. 1; xii. 48) makes this argument inconclusive. To be or abide in God or in Christ implies an *habitual condition*, not isolated apprehensions of his presence. Obedience, not feeling, is the test of union; and the Christian who is really such has least to tell of "experiences" of special visitations. He who is ever in the light has few sensible illuminations to record. Note the strong *καθώς*, even as (not merely *ὡς*, as); nothing less than "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 13) is to be aimed at. "Ye therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. v. 48).

Vers. 7-28.—(2) *Negative side*. What walking in the light excludes; the things and persons to be avoided—hatred of a brother, love of the world, antichrists. To this section vers. 7, 8 form an introduction, as ch. i. 5, 7 to the positive side.

Ver. 7.—Beloved; *ἀγαπητοί*, not *δδελφοί*, is the true reading. Addresses of this kind commonly introduce a fresh division of the subject, main or subordinate. Thus *ἀγαπητοί* (ch. iv. 1, 7); *τεκνία* (ch. ii. 1); *παῖδια* (ch. ii. 18); *ἀδελφοί* (ch. iii. 13). Sometimes, however, they introduce an earnest conclusion (ch. ii. 28; iii. 21; v. 21). In ch. iv. 11 *ἀγαπητοί* introduces a conclusion which serves as a fresh starting-point. Not a fresh commandment do I write to you, but an old commandment. Where it can be conveniently done, it is worth while distinguishing *καινός*, "fresh," as opposed to "worn out," "obsolete," from *νέος*, "new," as opposed to "old, aged." "New wine must be put into fresh skins" (Mark ii. 22). Are two commandments meant—one to cultivate brotherly love, the other to walk as Christ walked? Or is there only one, which from different points of view may be regarded as either new or old? Commentators are divided; but the latter seems better. Then what is the commandment which is at once new and old? The whole gospel, or the command to love one another? John xiii. 34 and xv. 2 will incline us to the latter view. The command was old, for "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. xix. 18) was part of the Mosaic Law. But the standard was new: "Even as I loved you;" "Even as he also walked;" and the *motive* was new: because "God so loved us" (ch. iv. 11). Brotherly love, enforced by such an example, and based on such a fact, was a new command as compared with the cold injunction of the Law. From the beginning may have either of two senses: (1) from of old, i.e. long

before the Gospel; (2) from the beginning of your career as Christians. This new and yet old command sums up the practical side of the Gospel which had been preached to them from the first. The second *ἀπ' ἀρχῆς* is spurious.

Ver. 8.—**Again.** The *πάλιν* indicates another point of view—what in one sense was not fresh, in another sense was so. It is impossible to be certain as to the meaning of *ὁ ἐστὶν ἀληθὺς, κ.τ.λ.* It may mean (1) "*which thing* (the newness of the command) *is true*;" or (2) "as a fresh commandment I am writing to you *a thing which is true*." But for the practical example of the life of Christ, and men's acceptance of it, the command to love one's neighbour might have remained old and become obsolete. "Ὅτι is almost certainly "because," not "that;" it introduces the reason why he writes, not the substance of, the fresh commandment. How can "the darkness is passing away," etc., be a commandment? The light, the true light (*τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν*); i.e. the real, the perfect, the very light, that which most fully realizes the ideal of light; in opposition to those "wandering stars, for whom the blackness of darkness hath been reserved for ever" (Jude 13; cf. John i. 4, 9; vi. 32; xv. 1). Christ is the perfect Light, as he is the perfect Bread and the perfect Vine.

Vers. 9-11.—Walking in the light excludes all hatred towards brethren, for such hatred is a form of darkness. These verses set forth in a variety of forms the affinity between love and light, hatred and darkness, and the consequent incompatibility between hatred and light. "Hate" (*μισεῖν*) is not to be watered down into "neglect" or "fail to love." St. John knows nothing of such compromises. Love is love, and hate is hate, and between the two there is no neutral ground, any more than between life and death, or between Christ and antichrist. "He that is not with me is against me." "Love is the moral counterpart of intellectual light. It is a modern fashion to represent these two tempers as necessarily opposed. But St. John is at once earnestly dogmatic and earnestly philanthropic; for the Incarnation has taught him both the preciousness of man and the preciousness of truth" (Liddon).

Ver. 9.—**He that saith.** For the fifth time St. John points out a glaring inconsistency which is possible between profession and fact (*ἐὰν εἰπώμεν, ch. i. 6, 8, 10; ὁ λέγων, ch. ii. 4, 9*); cf. ch. iv. 20. In all these passages the case is put hypothetically; but in some of the Gnostic teaching of the age this inconsistency existed beyond a doubt. Is in darkness even until now. His supposing that hatred is compatible with light proves the darkness in which he is. Nay,

more, it shows that, in spite of his having nominally entered the company of the children of light, he has really never left the darkness. "If ye loved only your brethren, ye would not yet be perfect; but if ye hate your brethren, what are ye? where are ye?" (St. Augustine).

Ver. 10.—Whereas he who loves his brother has not only entered the region of light, but has made it his home: he abideth in the light. It is difficult to determine whether the "occasion of stumbling" (*σκανδαλον*) is in reference to himself or to others. The context here and John xi. 9, 10 are in favour of the former. It is a man's own salvation that is under consideration here, not his influence over others: and *προσκόπτει, ὅτι τὸ φῶς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ* seems exactly parallel. To have no light in one is to be in danger of stumbling; to have light in one is to have no occasion of stumbling (comp. Ezek. xiv. 3, which is very parallel). But elsewhere in the New Testament *σκανδαλον* means a stumbling-block or snare in another's way, not in one's own way; and this makes sense here. There is yet a third explanation. *Ἐν αὐτῷ* may mean "in it," i.e. "in the light there is no occasion of stumbling." This makes a good antithesis to the close of ver. 11, "knoweth not whither he goeth."

Ver. 11.—Note the alternation: ver. 10 is the antithesis of ver. 9, and ver. 11 of ver. 10, repeating and enlarging ver. 9. Note also the climax effected by the gradual increase of predicates: in ver. 9 one, in ver. 10 two, in ver. 11 three. The brother-hater has darkness as his habitual condition and as the atmosphere in which he lives and works; and long ago (aorist) the continual darkness deprived him of the very power of sight, so that he is in ignorance as to the course he is taking. Cf. "They know not, neither will they understand; *they walk on in darkness*" (Ps. lxxxiii. 5); "The fool walketh in darkness" (Eccles. ii. 14). "St. John scouts all the pretences of men to illumination which do not involve the practical acknowledgment of brotherhood. A man may say he is in the light as much as he pleases; but to be in the light implies that he is able to see his brethren, and not to stumble against them" (Maurice).

Vers. 12-14.—Before passing on to the second thing which walking in the light excludes, viz. love of the world (vers. 15-17), the apostle twice makes a threefold address, first stating why he writes (*γράφω*), and secondly why he wrote (*ἔγραψα*), to the three classes named. This suggests several questions. (1) *What is the difference between "I write" (or, "am writing") and "I wrote" (or, "have written")* for this is a case where the English perfect may represent the Greek

aorist)? Five answers are given. (a) The change is made for *emphasis*: "I write; I wrote; there is nothing more to be said." But in this case the past tense should come first: "I wrote; I write it again." Moreover, we should expect the perfect rather than the aorist, as in $\delta \gamma \epsilon \gamma \rho \alpha \phi \alpha \gamma \epsilon \gamma \rho \alpha \phi \alpha$. (b) "I write" refers to what *follows*; "I wrote," to what *precedes*. And some have even tried to find out the three different portions in each part of the Epistle; e.g. "I write to you, little children" (ch. ii. 15-17); "to you, fathers" (ch. ii. 18-27); "to you, young men" (ch. ii. 28-iii. 22): "I wrote to you, children" (ch. i. 5-7); "to you, fathers" (ch. i. 8-ii. 2); "to you, young men" (ch. ii. 3-11). But this is fanciful and very arbitrary; and in this case also the past tense should come first: "I have written thus far to you; again I proceed to write to you." (c) "I write" refers to the *whole Epistle*; "I wrote," to what *precedes*. This answer has the sanction of the 'Speaker's Commentary,' but it seems to be quite frivolous. What could induce St. John first of all to tell each class that he writes the *whole* Epistle to them, and then to tell them that he wrote the *first part* of it to them? There would be little enough sense in first saying that he wrote the beginning to them, and then that he writes the whole to them; but there is no sense in the former statement if it comes after the latter. (d) "I am writing" is from *St. John's point of view*, as he pens the growing letter. "I wrote" is from *the readers' point of view*, as they peruse the completed letter. But what is gained by this change of standpoint? Is it probable that St. John would make three distinct addresses in the position of the writer of the Epistle, and then solemnly repeat them in the position of the recipients of it? (e) The Epistle is written as a companion to the Gospel: therefore "I write" refers to *the Epistle*, which he is in the act of composing; "I wrote," to *the Gospel*, which lies completed before him, and on which the Epistle serves as a commentary. This seems to be the most satisfactory explanation (see on ch. i. 4). (2) *Who are indicated by the three classes?* In the first triplet, $\tau \epsilon \kappa \nu \iota \alpha$, as elsewhere in the Epistle (vers. 1, 28; ch. iii. 18; iv. 4, 5, 21), refers to his readers as a whole, of whom $\pi \alpha \tau \epsilon \rho \epsilon \varsigma$ and $\nu \epsilon \alpha \nu \tau \omicron \kappa \omicron \iota$ are two component divisions. This is probably the case in the second triplet also, although the change from $\tau \epsilon \kappa \nu \iota \alpha$ to $\pi \alpha \iota \delta \iota \alpha$ renders this a little doubtful (see on ver. 13). (3) *Does the difference between "fathers" and "young men" refer to age as men or age as Christians?* Probably the former. In both Gospel and Epistle St. John writes to mature and well-instructed Christians. The following table will illustrate the view taken:—

I write this Epistle: Reasons for writing it:

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. To all of you. | You have been forgiven. |
| 2. To the old among you. | You have knowledge of the Word. |
| 3. To the young among you. | You have conquered the evil one. |

I wrote my Gospel: Reasons for writing it:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. To all of you (?). | You have knowledge of the Father. |
| 2. To the old among you. | You have knowledge of the Word. |
| 3. To the young among you. | You have strength, have God's revelation in your hearts, and have conquered the evil one. |

Ver. 12.—*I am writing to you, little children* (see on ver. 1), *because*, etc. Beyond reasonable doubt, $\delta \tau \iota$ is "because," not "that," in vers. 12-14; it gives the reason for his writing, not the substance of what he has to say (cf. ver. 21). *For his Name's sake* must refer to Christ, not only because of the context, but also of the instrumental $\delta \nu \alpha$ (cf. ch. iii. 23; v. 13; John i. 12); and Christ's Name means his character, especially as Saviour. Because they have already partaken of the $\lambda \alpha \sigma \mu \acute{o} \varsigma$ (ver. 2), and have had their sins washed away in the blood of Christ (ch. i. 7), therefore he writes to them this Epistle. Note the perfects throughout, indicating the permanent result of past action: $\alpha \phi \epsilon \omega \nu \tau \alpha \iota$, $\epsilon \gamma \nu \acute{o} \kappa \alpha \tau \epsilon$, $\nu \epsilon \nu \iota \eta \kappa \alpha \tau \epsilon$.

Ver. 13.—*Because ye know* (literally, *have come to know*, as in vers. 3, 4) *him that is from the beginning* ($\tau \acute{o} \nu \alpha \pi \alpha \rho \chi \eta \tau \epsilon \varsigma$). The context respecting Christ's Name and $\delta \eta \nu \alpha \pi \alpha \rho \chi \eta \tau \epsilon \varsigma$ (ch. i. 1) show that the Word and not the Father is meant. A more perfect knowledge of Jesus as the Eternal Word, and no mere $\sigma \omega \nu$ or emanation from the Deity, is the special prerogative of the aged Christian; and such are fit recipients of the $\alpha \gamma \gamma \epsilon \lambda \iota \alpha$ of the apostle. No less fit, but for a different reason, are the younger among his readers. To fight is the lot of the young soldier; and a victorious warfare against Satan is the distinction of youthful Christians. They have got the better of that evil one in whose power the whole world lies (ch. iii. 12; v. 18, 19; John xii. 31; xiv. 30; xvi. 11). Not that the warfare is over, but that it is henceforth warfare with a defeated enemy. Hence they also have a right to share in the apostolic message. *I wrote* (or, *have written*) *to you, children, because ye know* (or, *have come to know*) *the Father*. The reading $\epsilon \gamma \rho \alpha \phi \alpha$ must be preferred to $\gamma \rho \alpha \phi \omega$, on overwhelming evidence, both external and internal. The second triplet begins here, and this sentence should have been

given to ver. 14. It is difficult to determine what is meant by the change from *τεκνία* to *παῖδια*. *Τεκνία* occurs once with *μου* (ver. 1), and six times without *μου* in the Epistle, and once in the Gospel (xiii. 33), the probable source of this form of address. *Παῖδια* occurs in ver. 18 (see note) and John xxi. 5, and nowhere else in the New Testament as a form of address. Probably both words are applied to the whole of St. John's readers. Some would limit *παῖδια* to actual children; but in that case we should expect a different order—children, young men, fathers; or fathers, young men, children. These "children" know the Father to whom they have been reconciled by forgiveness of sins; they have become his *adopted* sons through the Name of his *own* Son (ver. 12).

Ver. 14.—The address to the fathers remains unchanged; their claim to Gospel and to Epistle is the same. The address to the young men is enlarged; their claim to the Gospel is that they are strong to fight, have God's revelation of himself as a permanent possession in their hearts, and have won victories over Satan. The context and John v. 38 and x. 35 utterly forbid us from understanding *ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ* of the "living Personal Lord" (cf. John xvii. 6, 14, 17; Rev. i. 9; vi. 9; xx. 4).

Vers. 15-17.—Secondly, walking in the light excludes all love of the world. This is another form of darkness.

Ver. 15.—*Love not the world*. Obviously, both "love" and "the world" are used in a different sense in John iii. 16, where it is said that "God loved the world." The one love is selfish, the other unselfish. In the one case "the world" means the sinful elements of human life, in the other the human race. It is most important to distinguish the different meanings of *κόσμος* in the New Testament. Connected with *κόμην* and *comere*, it means (1) ornament (1 Pet. iii. 3); (2) the ordered universe, *mundus* (Rom. i. 20); (3) the earth (John i. 9); (4) the inhabitants of the earth (John iii. 16); (5) *all that is alienated from God*, as here and frequently in St. John's writings. The things of the world are not those things in the world which may become objects of sinful affection, such as wealth or honour, still less such as scenery or physical objects. St. John is not condemning a love of those material advantages which are God's gifts, nor of nature, which is God's work. He is forbidding those things the love of which rivals and excludes the love of God—all those immoral tendencies and pursuits which give the world its evil character. The world (*κόσμος*) is order; the things in the world are the elements of disorder—those things which arise from each man making himself the centre of the world, or of some little world of his own creation.

These rival centres clash with one another, and also with the one true Centre. All this St. John forbids. With *τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ*, cf. *τί ἦν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ* (John ii. 25). Note the *μὴδὲ* (not *μήτε*), nor yet: "Love not the world; no, nor any of its ways." As so often, St. John goes on to enforce his words by a negative statement of similar but not identical import. Love of the world absolutely excludes the love of the Father. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Some important authorities have *τοῦ Θεοῦ* for *τοῦ Πατρὸς*; the balance is decidedly for the latter.

Ver. 16.—He still further emphasizes the command by explaining the negative statement just made. *Everything that is in the world has as its source, not the Father, but the world*. This shows clearly that *τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* cannot mean material objects capable of being desired; these have their origin in God who created them (John i. 3). To assert otherwise is rank Gnosticism or Manicheism. But God did not create the evil dispositions and aims of men; these have their source in the sinful wills of his creatures, and ultimately in "the ruler of this world" (John viii. 44). The three genitives which follow are subjective, not objective. The lust of the flesh is not merely the lust after the flesh, but all lust that has its seat in the flesh (Gal. v. 16; Eph. ii. 3). The lust of the eyes is that lust that has its origin in sight (*Augenlust*)—curiosity, covetousness, etc. (cf. "the lusts of their hearts," "the lusts of your body," Rom. i. 24; vi. 12). In the world of St. John's day the impure and brutal spectacles of the theatre and the arena would supply abundant illustrations of these *ἐπιθυμίας*. The vain-glory of life, or arrogance of living, is ostentation exhibited in the manner of living; the empty pride and pretentiousness of fashion and display. It includes the desire to gain credit which does not belong to us, and outshine our neighbours. In Greek philosophy *βίος* is higher than *ζωή*: *βίος* is the life peculiar to man; *ζωή* is the vital principle which he shares with brutes and vegetables. In the New Testament *ζωή* is higher than *βίος*: *βίος* is the life peculiar to man; *ζωή* is the vital principle which he shares with God. Contrast *βίος* here; ch. iii. 17; Luke viii. 14, 43; xv. 12, 30, etc., with *ζωή* in ch. i. 1, 2; iii. 14; v. 11, 12, 16; John i. 4; iii. 36; v. 24, 26, etc. *βίος* occurs only ten times in the New Testament (in 1 Pet. iv. 3 it is a false reading), *ζωή* more than a hundred and twenty times. Each of the three forms of evil here cited by St. John as types of *τὰ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* are dangerous at different periods of a man's life; each also has been a special danger at different periods of the world's history.

Ver. 17.—Seeing, then, that the love of the

world and the love of the Father are absolutely incompatible, which must we choose? Not the former, for its object is already passing away; while not only does the Father abide for ever, but he who loves him and does his will abides for ever also. The antithesis, as usual, is a progress; it carries us beyond the limits of the original statement. The world is passing away like a dissolving view. It has its sentence of death in itself; its decay has begun. And even if it were not passing away, our capacity for enjoying it would none the less certainly come to an end. "The sensualist does not know what the delights of sense are; he is out of temper when he is denied them; he is out of temper when he possesses them" (Maurice). To love the world is to lose everything, including the thing loved. To love God is to gain him and his kingdom. Some men would have it that the external world is the one thing that is certain and permanent, while religion is based on a mere hypothesis, and is ever changing its form. St. John assures us that the very reverse is the case. The world is waning: it is God alone and his faithful servants who abide. As St. Augustine says, "What can the world promise? Let it promise what you will, it makes the promise, perhaps, to one who to-morrow will die." The will of God is the exact antithesis of "all that is in the world." The one is the good power "that makes for righteousness;" the other is the sum of the evil powers which make for sin. Abideth for ever is literally, *abideth unto the age* (μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). The notion of endlessness is, perhaps, not distinctly included; for that we should rather have had εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων (Rev. i. 18; xi. 15; xxii. 5). The contrast is not between "passing away" and "lasting for ever," but between "passing away" and *abiding* till "the age" comes. But as "the age" is the age of eternity as distinguished from this age of time, the rendering "abideth for ever" is justified. The Jews used "this age" and "the age to come" to distinguish the periods before and after the coming of the Messiah. Christians adopted the same phrases to indicate the periods before and after Christ's second coming; e.g. *δ αἰὼν οὗτος* (Luke xvi. 8; Rom. xii. 2; 1 Cor. i. 20), *δ νῦν αἰὼν* (1 Tim. vi. 17; 2 Tim. iv. 10; Titus ii. 12), as opposed to *δ αἰὼν ἐκείνος* (Luke xx. 35), *δ αἰὼν δ ἐρχόμενος* (Luke xviii. 30), *δ μέλλων* (Eph. i. 21), and very frequently, as here and throughout St. John's Gospel and Epistles, simply *δ αἰὼν*. In Revelation the invariable expression is *εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*, the *τῶν* being omitted in Rev. xiv. 11. The exact meaning here, therefore, is "abideth unto the age," i.e. the coming of Christ's eternal kingdom.

Ver. 18.—Children (παῖδια) here must

apply to *all* those addressed in the Epistle; and this helps to fix the meaning in ver. 13. It is the last hour. What does this mean? There is scarcely room for doubt. The perishableness of the world has suggested the thought of its end, and St. John goes on to warn his readers that this thought is full of meaning to them; for they may recognize the time in which they are living as the last hour by the many antichrists that have arisen. "The last hour" can only mean *the last hour before the second coming of Christ*. Nothing but the unwillingness of Christians to admit that an apostle, and especially the Apostle St. John, could seem to be much in error about the nearness of the day of judgment, could have raised a question about language so plain. All explanations about its signifying the Christian dispensation, or the nearness of St. John's death, or the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem, must be firmly set aside. How could the rising of antichrists show that the Christian dispensation had begun? It was Christ, not antichrist, that showed that? What had antichrists to do with St. John's death? or with the fall of Jerusalem, which, moreover, had fallen many years before this Epistle was written? Just as the apostles, even after the Resurrection (Acts i. 6), remained grossly ignorant of the *nature* of Christ's kingdom on earth, so to the last they remained ignorant of its *duration*. The primitive Church had not yet found its true perspective, and, in common with all Christians of the first age, the apostles believed that Christ would return soon, possibly within the lifetime of some then living. "Yea, I come quickly" (Rev. xxii. 20) was by them understood in the most literal sense of ταχύ. But it will not surprise those who remember Christ's very strong declaration (Mark xiii. 32), to find even an apostle in ignorance as to the time of the second advent of Christ. But it may very reasonably and reverently be asked, What becomes of the inspiration of Scripture if an inspired writer tells the Church that the end of the world is near, when it is not near? The question of inspiration must follow that of interpretation, not lead it. Let us patiently examine the facts, and then try to frame a theory of inspiration that will cover them; not first frame our theory, and then force the facts to agree with it. But the question in its proper place requires an answer. The Old Testament prophets were often guided to utter language the Divine meaning of which they did not themselves understand. They uttered the words in one sense, and the words were true in a far higher sense, of which they scarcely dreamed. The same thing is true of the New Testament prophets,

though in a less degree, because the gift of Pentecost had given them powers of insight which their predecessors had not possessed. The present text seems to be an illustration of this truth. We can hardly doubt that, in saying, "it is the last hour," St. John means to imply that within a few years, or possibly even less time, Christ will return to judgment. In this sense the statement is not true. But it may also mean that the last period in the world's history has begun; and in this sense we have good reason for believing that the statement is true. "That one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" is not rhetoric, but sober fact. By the Divine standard times are measured, not according to their duration, but their importance; it is their meaning, not their extent, which gives them value. What are all the measureless prehistoric eons of the material universe compared with the time since the creation of rational life? What are the thousands of years covered by the Old Testament compared with the portion of a century covered by the New? The great crisis in the history of the world, constituted by the life and death of Christ, will never be equalled until he comes again. When he ascended to heaven the last hour sounded. There may follow a silence (as it seemed to St. John) about the space of half an hour, but (as human experience may prove) of half a thousand centuries. Yet the duration of the period, as measured by man, will not alter its essential characteristics; it was, is, and will still remain, "the last hour." **Even as ye heard** (when ye were instructed in the faith) **that antichrist cometh** (is destined to come). Antichrist in this also is assimilated to the Christ; he is *ὁ ἐρχόμενος*. This was the teaching of the gospel (Matt. xxiv. 5, 11, 23—26; Mark xiii. 22, 23; comp. Acts xx. 29; 2 Tim. iii. 1; 2 Pet. ii. 1). What does St. John mean by *ἀντίχριστος*? The four passages (ch. ii. 18, 22; iv. 3; 2 John 7) in which he uses the term do not enable us to answer the question with certainty. The predominant idea is that of *opposition* to Christ, and *rivalry* of Christ, rather than merely of *counterfeiting* Christ. If *ἀντίχριστος* were formed on the analogy of *ἀντιβασιλεύς* and *ἀνθύπατος*, it would mean "vice-Christ, vicar of Christ." It is, however, analogous to *ἀντίθεος*, *ἀντιφιλόσοφος*; and the Greek for a counterfeit Christ is *ψευδόχριστος* (Matt. xxiv. 24). But we are left in doubt whether this rival of Christ is a principle or a person. None of the four passages is decisive. Here we are not sure whether the arising of many antichrists proves that the *spirit* of antichrist is already in the world, or that by them the way is fully prepared for the one *personal*

antichrist. Either the existence of the antichristian character, or the approach of the antichrist, is given as evidence that the day of the Lord is at hand. The latter is the more probable. A great personal opponent to the personal Christ seems to be indicated both by St. John and St. Paul (2 Thess. ii. 1—8). The Jews expected a personal opponent of the Messiah to precede the Messiah—Armilus, Gog, Antiochus Epiphanes, and the like (Ezek. xxxviii.; xxxix.; Dan. vii. 25; viii. 25; xi. 36); and Christians from the earliest times have expected a similar prelude to the return of the Messiah. The term *ἀντίχριστος* is absolutely peculiar to St. John in the New Testament. By the *ἀντίχριστοι πολλοί* he probably means those early heretical teachers, who in various ways denied the Incarnation, and were thus forerunners of the antichrist—the Nicolaitanes, Simon Magus, Cerinthus, Diotrophes, Hymenæus, and Philetus. Besides these there are practical antichrists, "Let us mark, not the tongue, but the deeds. For if all be asked, all with one mouth confess that Jesus is the Christ. Let the tongue keep silent awhile: ask the life. If the Scripture itself shall tell us that denial is a thing done not only with the tongue, but also with deeds, then assuredly we find many antichrists. . . . If deeds are to be questioned, not only do we find many antichrists gone out, but many not yet manifest, who have not gone out at all" (St. Augustine).

Ver. 19.—They went out from us (*ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθεν*); just as the evil spirit went out of the demoniac (*ἐξῆλθεν ἐξ αὐτοῦ*, Mark i. 26). But they were not of us (*οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν*); they had not their origin with us, just as the unbelieving Jews were "not of God" (*ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστὶ*), but of the devil (John viii. 23, 44, 47). The emphatic repetition of *ἡμῶν*, five times in one verse, is quite in St. John's style. The "no doubt" of the Authorized Version, rightly omitted in the Revised Version, probably represents the *utique* of the Vulgate, which is a mistaken attempt to give a separate word to translate *ἐν* (compare *forsitan* in John iv. 10; v. 46. For the elliptical *ἄλλ' ἵνα*, comp. John i. 8). What follows is not clear, and is taken in three ways: (1) "That all are not of us," which seems to imply that some of them are of us. This can hardly be right. (2) "That all of them are not of us;" i.e. are aliens (ver. 21; ch. iii. 15; Rev. xxii. 3; Matt. xxiv. 22; Mark xiii. 20; Luke i. 37; Rom. iii. 20; Gal. ii. 16; Eph. v. 5). But in that case we should expect *πάντες οὐκ εἰσίν*, not *οὐκ εἰσιν πάντες*. (3) Two thoughts are mixed together: (a) "That they may be made manifest that they are not of us;" (b)

"That it may be made manifest that not all who are *with us* (μεθ' ἡμῶν) are of us (ἐξ ἡμῶν)." This seems preferable. The renegade and apostate was all along only nominally a Christian. Of the true Christian the declaration remains true, "No one snatcheth them out of his hand."

Ver. 20.—The thought of many antichrists suggests that of many Christs; *i.e.* many who have been anointed (χριστοί) by the Christ himself. "The false teachers have the spirit of antichrist; ye have a chrism from the Christ." The Johannine καὶ places the two antithetical groups side by side, while the emphatic *ὑμεῖς* (comp. ch. iv. 4) accentuates the contrast. And ye have an anointing from the Holy One. The unction or chrism is the Holy Spirit (John i. 33; ch. iii. 24; ii. 27). As Christ was anointed with the Spirit in all fulness, so each Christian is anointed with him in his measure (2 Cor. i. 21, 22). The twenty-first 'Catechetical Lecture' of St. Cyril, "On the Holy Chrism," should be read in illustration of this verse. "In apostolic language, each Christian is in due measure himself a Christ, empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit to announce the truth which he has learnt, to apply the atonement which he has received, to establish the kingdom which he believes to be universal" (Westcott). The ἀπό depends on ἔχετε, not on χρίσμα. The Holy One is Jesus Christ (John vi. 69; Acts iii. 14; Rev. iii. 7; comp. John xiv. 26; xvi. 7, 13). It is hard to decide between three readings: (1) καὶ οἰδατε πάντα, "and ye know all things" necessary to salvation, *i.e.* "the truth" (ver. 21; John xvi. 13); (2) καὶ οἰδατε πάντες, "and ye all know" that ye have this anointing; (3) οἰδατε πάντες, "ye all know—I did not write to you because ye know not the truth." There is evidence of a fourth variation, πάντας, "ye know all" the antichrists. If (1) be right, it does not mean that the Christian is omniscient, but that he has the basis of all knowledge; he can see things in their right proportions. The apostle's own disciple, St. Polycarp, writes to the Philippians (xii. 1), οὐδὲν ὑμᾶς λανθάνει.

Ver. 21.—The first οὐκ belongs to ὅτι, not to ἔγραψα: I wrote to you, not because ye know not, etc. It does not mean "I omitted to write to you because ye know not." Whatever meaning we give to the *οἰστis* in vers. 13, 14 need not be retained here. There is here no abrupt change from present to aorist. Moreover, ver. 26 limits this ἔγραψα to the present section. What in ver. 20 is spoken of as "all things" (assuming πάντα to be right) is here spoken of as "the truth." St. John writes to well-instructed Christians, to adults in the faith. It is precisely because they "knew the

truth" that he addresses them, especially to warn them against antichrists. We are in doubt whether καὶ ὅτι depends upon ἔγραψα ("and because") or upon οἰδατε ("and that"). The former is better; it introduces a second reason for his writing. Some take ὅτι in all three places as "that" after ἔγραψα: "I did not write to you and say that ye know not the truth, but that ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth." Every lie is fundamentally and *ab origine* (ἐκ) separate from the truth; and hence his readers will easily recognize lies and liars, for they know the truth.

Ver. 22.—Who is the liar, but he that denieth, etc.? From the lie St. John passes on to the utterer of it. "Ye readily distinguish any lie from the truth. Who, then, is the liar?" "The liar" does not mean the liar *κατ' ἐξοχήν*, as if this denial constituted the very acme of falsehood. To deny the very existence of God is surely a worse lie. Still less can we say that "the context leaves no doubt that 'the liar' is the same with 'the antichrist.'" The article (ὁ ψεύστης) refers to the preceding ψεύδος, just as in ch. v. 4, 5 ὁ νικῶν refers to the preceding νίκη. The very form of sentence is the same: τίς ἐστίν ὁ νικῶν . . . εἰ μὴ ὁ, κ.τ.λ., and there ὁ νικῶν cannot mean the victor, *κατ' ἐξοχήν*, who is Christ, and not the believer. So that the Authorized Version is not so very inaccurate in rendering ὁ ψεύστης "a liar." "Who tells lies, if not he who denies (and says) that Jesus is not the Christ?" This was the great Gnostic lie to which St. John's Gospel and Epistle give the answer. The antichrist is this, he who denieth the Father and the Son. "The antichrist" here is not the great adversary, but one having similar characteristics. He denies the Messiahship of Jesus, and thus virtually denies both the Father and Son (comp. 2 Thess. ii. 4). This truth St. John proceeds to restate and develop.

Ver. 23.—Every one who denieth the Son not only does that, but (οὐδέ) doth not possess the Father. To deny that Jesus is the Christ is to deny the Son of God, for the Christ is the incarnate Son; and to deny the Son of God is to deny the Father also, for the incarnate Son is the Revelation of the Father; and not only so, but to deny the Son is to cut one's self off from the Father, for "no one knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him." To emphasize this great truth St. John uses his favourite method of stating it both negatively and positively. To deny the Son is not to have the Father; to confess the Son is to have the Father (comp. ch. i. 5, 8; ii. 4, 27; iii. 6; iv. 2, 3, 6, 7, 8; v. 12). Note the solemn *asyndeta*.

There is not a single connecting particle in vers. 22-24; the sentences fall on the ear like minute-guns. "Every one that denieth." There is no exception. Even an apostle, if he denies that Jesus is the Christ, thereby also loses all possession of the Father. The history of philosophy verifies the statement. Deism has ever a tendency to end in pantheism or atheism.

Vers. 24-28.—Exhortation to abide in the truth and in God.

Ver. 24.—The *oñ* of the T.R. must certainly be rejected. The *υμεις* placed first marks the antithesis, "as for you," as distinct from the antichrists. With singular caprice the Authorized Version renders St. John's favourite verb, *μενετε*, in three different ways in this one verse—"abide," "remain," "continue;" thereby losing the emphasis of the repetition: "Let the good seed *abide* in your hearts; not be snatched away by the evil one. Then not only will it *abide*, but ye also (*καὶ υμεις*) will *abide* in the Son, and therefore with the Father." From the beginning; when they first heard the gospel, as distinct from what they have since heard from false teachers.

Ver. 25.—And the promise which he promised us is this, even the eternal life. *Αιωνος* is Christ; *αυτη* looks forward to "the eternal life," not backwards to the abiding in the Father (John iii. 16; v. 24; vi. 40, 54). *Την ζωην την αιωνιον* is in the accusative by attraction to *ην*. "What St. John would have us feel is this, that there can be no promise to compare with this—that we should share the eternal life, the life of God. . . . We often speak as if people were to be paid for being good; not as if the being good were itself God's highest gift and blessing" (Maurice). The reading *υμιν* (B) for *ημιν* is worthy of notice. In vers. 16, 17 St. John gives two reasons for shunning the world: because (1) the world is alien to the Father; (2) it is passing away. So here he gives two for holding fast the truth originally delivered to them: because the truth leads (1) to fellowship with God; (2) to eternal life.

Ver. 26 resumes for a moment and concludes the section respecting antichrists. "These things" refers to what precedes, especially vers. 18-23, as distinct from what now follows. The present participle (*των πλανωντων*) indicates the continual attempt of these false teachers to lead the "little children" astray. *Εγραψα*, as in ver. 21, is the "epistolary aorist" (see on 2 John 4).

Ver. 27.—Parallel to ver. 24, but stating as a fact what is there given as a command. The emphatic *υμεις* again marks the emphatic contrast between St. John's readers and the antichrists. *Απ' αυτου* means "from

Christ" (ver. 20). The indicative (*μενεις*) states what *ought* to be true of them, and is a delicate equivalent to *μενετω* (ver. 24). The anointing of Christ (*το χρισμα αυτου*) abides with them as a permanent gift, and renders further apostolic teaching unnecessary. It is quite a mistake to suppose that the superfluous teaching refers to the antichrists. The ideal to which the Christian must aspire is the being led into all truth by the Spirit; he will need no human teachers then (see the remarkable parallel to this in Jer. xxxi. 33, and the quotation of it in Heb. viii. 10, 11). The construction in the middle of the verse is amphibolous. We may take *καὶ ἀληθες εστιν* either as the apodosis of *ος* ("as his anointing teacheth you . . . so it is true") or as a continuation of the protasis, which is resumed by *καθως* ("as his anointing teacheth you . . . and is true . . . and even as"). The latter is better. The emphatic "and is no lie" is thoroughly Johannine (see on ver. 23). The conclusion of the verse is doubtful also. The reading *μενετε* is certainly preferable to *μενετε*; but *μενετε* may be indicative like *μενει* in the first clause, or imperative like *μενετε* in the next verse. The latter is more probable.

Ver. 28.—And now, summing up the whole section (vers. 18-28). "If he shall be manifested" expresses no uncertainty as to the fact of Christ's appearing; the uncertainty is in the time (comp. ch. iii. 2; John vi. 62; xii. 32; xiv. 3). In all these cases the point is the result of the act, not the time of it. The graphic *αιχρυνθημεν αν' αυτου* expresses the shrinking away in shame from his presence. The *παρουσια* (see on 2 Thess. ii. 8) is introduced without explanation as a well-known belief.

Ver. 29.—This verse forms a bridge between the two main divisions of the Epistle. The coming of Christ suggests the righteousness of Christ; for it is as the righteous Judge that he is coming, and those who would not be ashamed to meet him at his coming must be righteous also. Once more (ver. 27) we are in doubt between indicative and imperative: *γινωσκετε*, in spite of the preceding *μενετε* and following *ιδετε*, is probably indicative. To know that God (not Christ; comp. ch. i. 9; John xvii. 25) is righteous is to perceive that every doer of his (*την*) righteousness is a son of God (not of Christ; we are nowhere in Scripture said to be born of Christ). To partake of that righteousness which is God's nature is proof of birth from him. With *ποιειν την δικαιοσυνην*, compare *ποιειν την αληθειαν* (ch. i. 6; John iii. 21). Righteousness must be shown in conduct; mere desire to be righteous will not suffice. And the conduct must be habitual (*δ ποιων, not δ ποιησας*); a single

act of righteousness will not suffice. Note the change from *εἰδῆτε* to *γινώσκετε*. To know (intuitively) that God is righteous is

to come to know (by experience) that whoever habitually acts righteously is God's offspring.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*God's remedy for sin. Connecting link:* The being without sin, although that to which we cannot as yet pretend without frustrating the purpose of God's revelation of himself, is nevertheless a point to be aimed at in our advance in and towards the light, and is the purpose of the apostle in unfolding his teachings. Hence there immediately suggests itself the following topic—*The completeness of the Divine provision for the forgiveness and cure of sin.* It is by no means an unimportant part of the evidence of the Divine origin of the gospel that, while nowhere else is sin viewed so seriously, yet nowhere else is its cure provided for so radically. And whereas one of the first lessons a man has to learn is that of the terrible evil of sin, the next in order is that of its possible removal. To learn how deeply he is sunk in it, without being shown how he may rise above it, would plunge a man either into morbid indifference or into bitter and hopeless despair. On the other hand, to point out the greatness of the remedy to one who sees not the depth of the evil it is designed to meet, would be but to speak to inappreciative ears. Consequently, the preacher has to dwell on both in turn. Hence, lest any one should have been brought by the apostle's teaching to so vivid a sense of sin's pervasive poisoning as to despair of ever attaining to the end indicated in ver. 1, "that ye sin not," the apostle seems to say, "Of this you need not despair, for God's provision is so complete. If any man sin," etc. Hence two lines of thought may be indicated here.

I. WHAT IS THIS DIVINE REMEDY FOR SIN? Here the apostle gives us three steps, each succeeding one an advance on the former. 1. The entire work of God in providing a remedy for sin centres in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Let each word in the apostle's phrase have its full weight and meaning expanded as far as possible.) (1) *Jesus*—the Saviour. (2) *Christ*—the Anointed One, the Messiah. (3) *The Righteous One*—One who, being perfectly righteous, was so far fitted to undertake the sinner's cause; One who, being the Son of man, could represent earth to heaven, and who, being also the Son of God, could represent heaven to earth. In this mutual representativeness is the fitness of his mediation. As such: 2. His work is represented here as twofold. (1) He is a Propitiation. It is all-important to indicate here the wide distinction between the classical and the scriptural conceptions attached to this word (see Westcott, *in loc.*). In the one case man seeks to propitiate an offended and incensed Deity. In the other case the "Righteous Father" himself reconciles the world to himself by the giving up of his own Son to do a work which should at once clear the great Ruler from all connivance at sin, and thus open the way for a reception of the penitent sinner in abounding love and in perfect righteousness. [The student should study the entire Scripture usage of the words *ἱλασμός*, *ἱλαστήριον*; *כִּפּוּר*, *מִזְבֵּחַ*.] Nor should we confine ourselves to the thought that something that Christ *did* was the propitiation. He *is* the Propitiation. *Καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν.* He himself is, abidingly, the Propitiation. The propitiation is not simply an act once done; but the *ever-living Saviour himself*, who died for us and rose again. He covers sin with the mantle of his own forgiving love, having the infinite right to do it as the Priest upon his throne. (2) Jesus Christ the Righteous One is also an Advocate (*Παράκλητος*). The word "Paraclete" is one of wide significance. It would apply to one who undertook a cause on behalf of another—stood by him through all difficulties, and saw him safely through. The word is translated "Comforter" in John xiv.; here "Advocate." Neither is inaccurate; both are too limited. The Lord Jesus Christ, who came to us from the Father, is now our Intercessor with him. (For the *glory* of this office, cf. Heb. vii. For the *contents* of the pleading, see John xvii.) Of its method in detail we can form no conception; but we *know* that, if our cause is undertaken by the Lord Jesus, he will carry it through, and we shall prevail through him! 3. The propitiation is for the sins of the whole world. How unscriptural does any limitation of the merciful intent of the atonement seem in the presence of such phrases as this! The advocacy is for all

those who entrust their cause to him (Heb. vii. 25). As Westcott beautifully remarks, "He is not an Advocate who wishes to set aside the Law, but to carry it out and apply it."

II. HOW DOES ALL THIS BEAR ON THE DOING AWAY OF SIN IN US? The action of the Saviour's work is twofold. 1. *Objectively*. For us—Godward. It fulfils the Law. It vindicates righteousness. It reveals the purity of the great white throne, and the love of the eternal Father. It thus declares God's rectitude in the remission of sin. All that is needed to clear the way for the sinner having access to the Father righteously, is done. "It is finished!" 2. *Subjectively*. In us—manward. (1) It awakens hope, and thus banishes despair—an imperative condition, without which no further step can be gained. When hope dawns it is a sure sign all is not lost. (2) Faith is called forth. When the Spirit of God shows the glory of Christ to a sin-mourning spirit, then the Object of trust is disclosed, and trust reposes in that Object, and pardon is received. (3) Penitence is awakened. "A sense of blood-bought pardon soon dissolves a heart of stone." (4) Love is called forth to a living and loving Redeemer. The warmest affections of the soul go out to the Son of God, as to One "who loved us, and gave himself for us." Then (5) there is henceforth a constant and increasing loathing of sin. By means of "the expulsive power of a new affection" the poison of sin is driven out from the heart. What was once loved is loathed, what was once hated is loved. The new man declares a lifelong war against the sin which made his Saviour bleed. (6) The life is now devoted to the Lord Jesus, who, in the new kingdom of his grace, gives full scope for every power and faculty of the man, giving them "loved and Divine employ." And the more ardently the Saviour's service is entered on, the more rapidly doth sin perish and holiness adorn the life. And in this course the new career is entered on, in which, sustained by Divine grace and inspired by Divine love, the sin which once was his plague shall come to be for ever and for ever dead!

Vers. 3—5.—*Verification verified; or, knowing that we know God. Connecting link*: The redemption effected by Christ in doing away with sin restores the lost fellowship between us and God. In the act of fellowship we come to a heart-knowledge of God; and this true knowledge of God is constantly being verified by a life of obedience. Topic—*Certainty in the knowledge of God*. The closer our study of the Word of God, and the more minute our investigation of its phrases and words, the more striking will the far-reachingness of its teachings appear, and their adaptedness to meet the exigencies of modern times. And among the New Testament writers none of them is more adapted to an agnostic age than the Apostle John. Albeit there is a great difference between the despairing agnosticism of ancient days and the defiant agnosticism of our own, nevertheless, the words of the Apostle John do as really administer a rebuke to the pride of the later, as they supply the information yearned for by the earlier, age. His key-words being "life," "love," "knowledge," "fellowship," he is constantly throwing such flashes of light on the pathway of Christian thought, as to lead the devout student often spontaneously to cry out, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," even in the fierce glare of nineteenth-century criticism! If the true way of knowing God, and of knowing that we know him, be disclosed, either of the three following false theses will thereby be overturned: Whether it be maintained (1) that we know God apart from a supernatural revelation; or (2) that we cannot possibly know God at all; or (3) that knowing is an end in itself. The apostle's teachings demolish each and all! The first, by his showing that the true knowledge of God has been brought by the Son of God. The second, by showing that, even if we cannot rise to God, God has come down to us. The third, by declaring that God has come down to us in order to bring us into fellowship with himself. But even beyond these glorious truths does the apostle lead us. He shows us not only that we can know, but that *we can know that we know* (ver. 3). How? Let us carefully follow his tracks of thought.

I. THERE ARE "COMMANDMENTS" BROUGHT BY THE LORD JESUS CHRIST FOR THE OBEDIENCE OF MEN. (Vers. 3—5.) "His commandments." The tendency of many is to be impatient and erratic truth-seekers. The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us that, if we want to know the truth which as yet lies beyond us, there is one sure way thereto, even by the discharge of the duty which we already know; the truth we already possess

will thereby increase (cf. John vii. 17). As a summary, moreover, of the commandments of our Lord Jesus, we may take the sermon on the mount, in which the only life that will be of worth in his kingdom is set forth, and that too on his own Divine authority.

II. THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD JESUS ARE SUMMED UP BY THE APOSTLE IN TWO. The Lord Jesus summed up Old Testament commands in two (Matt. xxii. 37, 38). John sums up his Saviour's commands in two (ch. iii. 23): (1) Believing in the Name of Jesus Christ, i.e. confiding in him and following him. (2) Loving one another. How much stress the apostle lays on this we shall have abundant occasion to see in after homilies.

III. CAREFUL REGARD FOR AND THE PRACTICAL FULFILMENT OF THESE WILL EVER BE LETTING US MORE AND MORE INTO THE SECRETS OF THE LOVE OF GOD. There are two phrases—"Keeping his commandments," and "keeping his Word;" the former (so Westcott) being an observance of definite instructions, while the latter is the observance of a principle which is ever taking a new embodiment in the very process of life. This course of conduct will disclose to us the love of God. How? Thus our life will be a life of growing love. This love we have learnt of Jesus. Jesus is the perfect copy of the invisible Father. Hence we learn, practically, "God is love!"

IV. THUS WE COME TO KNOW THAT WE HAVE COME TO A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.¹ The Father's love is revealed through the Son. The Son by the Spirit reproduces his own love in our hearts. Thus a new world of love is ever opening up before our eyes. If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation disclosed to his view. A verification this of the glorious love of God, which brings with it a certitude of unspeakable worth and matchless glory!

V. THIS IS THE SEAL OF OUR UNION WITH CHRIST. Hereby know we that we are in him. The growing conformity of our nature to his likeness, and the ripening fellowship with him, are seals to our union with the Lord Jesus that cannot be mistaken.

In conclusion: The Apostle John makes use of all this to ward off and overturn the heresies of his day. We should likewise make use of it now. Not, however, by setting one speculation over against another; but by showing that the certitude of the believer is gained through taking the lowly pathway of duty, and that in the close following of him whom he believes and loves will be found the true secret of the highest knowledge—a knowledge which will develop from moment to moment in the actual course of life.

Ver. 6.—*Great professions involve great obligations. Connecting link:* In the fifth verse the apostle had just declared that a life of obedience to God certifies to the believer that he is in Christ. In this verse that thought is as it were turned round: not only is it true that, if a man diligently obeys, he has in that fact the proof of a living union with Christ, but it also follows that, if a man avows to others that he is living in union with the Son of God, he is bound to justify that avowal by a life in entire harmony therewith. Hence we get the following theme—*The avowal of a Christian life demands a Christ-like walk.* Two lines of remark are here suggested.

I. HERE IS A GREAT DECLARATION SUPPOSED. "He that saith he abideth in him." It has been not unfrequently remarked that old words and phrases which had long been employed in pagan terminology have to put on a new meaning altogether when used in Christian teaching. Not only is *this* true, but much more. There are in Christian teaching absolutely new phrases used. This is one of them: "in Christ." It is entirely new, (1) because no one ever sustained such a loving relation to the human soul as Christ sustains to it; and therefore (2) never could human souls be so related to any other being as they are to the Lord Jesus, specially when knit to him by a living faith and drawing their very life from him. If, e.g., we speak of being *in* Isaiah or *in* Moses, who is there that would not turn away in disgust from the absurdity? And yet the Christian knows and feels it to be perfectly natural thus to speak of his relation to his Saviour. Yea, more; so close, so real, so vital, is that relationship, that no weaker phrase would adequately express it! For what does he mean by it? Certainly not less than seven things. 1. That he worships him as the ideal and real Head of the entire human race. 2. That he recognizes the supreme

¹ Γινώσκωμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν.

Lordship of Christ. 3. That he relies upon the atonement made by Christ. 4. That he receives power from Christ every day and all the day long. 5. That he has no other conception of a worthy object in life than that life should be wholly for Christ. 6. That for life or death, for time or eternity, he commits his all to Christ. 7. And lastly, that the life he lives now, that the life he hopes for hereafter, is received from Christ himself, and can be sustained by him alone. For there is no such hypothesis in the text as that a man can be out of Christ one moment and in him the next, and *vice versâ*, thus alternating perpetually. The phrase is "*abideth in him*." It is not, however, necessarily supposed here that the man *is* in Christ. The only supposition is that he *declares* such to be the case. Hence the question arises—How is this declaration supposed to be made? Nothing can be clearer, both from the Gospels and the Epistles, that open confession of faith before the world was expected of believers, and was indeed the natural outcome of such faith.¹ There was the broader confession, when disciples were admitted to Christian training by the rite of baptism. There was the far fuller and deeper one when the ranks of believers gathered together around the table of the Lord, declaring that Christ was the Life of those that believe. In a word, while, in mingling with the world and in ordinary conversation, it was quite possible for a man openly to confess his Saviour, go where he would, yet the recognized public avowal of his faith and hope as a Christian was to be found in his taking his place among the ranks of the faithful, and in pledging himself to be everywhere true to his Saviour and to his fellow-believers, when he gathered with them around the Eucharistic board!

II. AN AVOWAL SO GREAT DEMANDS A CORRESPONDING WALK. "He that *saith* . . . *ought himself*," etc. 1. *How ought he to walk?* "Even as he walked." The outward walk ought to correspond with the verbal avowal. But who can suitably describe how Christ walked? Expansion of this is not possible within our assigned space. We can but hint. See Christ's purity, devotedness to God, love of communion with God, pity, benevolence, daring, patience, self-sacrifice, resistive force even to the death. A man who *says* he abides in Christ ought to reproduce that life in his own! We are not required to follow him in the waters of baptism, nor in the forty days' temptation, nor in his wondrous works; but in his Spirit and his life he has left us an example that we should follow his steps. He stands historically at the head of the human race, its most heavenly Inspirer, its noblest Figure, its most luminous Example. 2. *Why ought the walk to be conjoined with the avowal?* Dr. Westcott aptly calls our attention to the fact that the word here used is not *dei*, denoting a "must" in the nature of things, but *ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ*, which expresses a *special, personal obligation*. To whom, then, does the avowal owe it to "live like him whom he avows as his Lord and his Life"? Certainly (1) he owes it to himself to be consistent with his declaration. (2) He owes it to his Christian brethren with whom he is in Church-fellowship. (3) But supremely he owes it to his Lord, whose holy Name he thus takes upon himself. For our Lord Jesus Christ is in some sort represented by the professors of his Name. Alas! alas! while in every age there have been very many who have "adorned the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things," who can reflect without many a sigh and many a tear of the numberless ways in which our Lord has been wounded in the house of his friends? Surely, surely our Lord endured suffering enough for us when he was on earth. Do not let him suffer from us now he is in heaven! And if even thus the argument should fail to impress, let two matters more be weighed: One, that if the avowal is true, a man *will* make it his aim to live as Christ lived; for the life a man receives from Christ cannot possibly be other than like his own. Another, that if a man is not living a Christ-like life, he is thereby disproving the truth of the avowal he is making. The water in the stream cannot be muddy if it comes direct from the pure fountain-head.

We are well aware that a preacher's fidelity on this matter will be met by—*Objection* (1) such as this: "How ignorant of the ways of the world you preachers must be! Nothing can stand in our day against twenty-five per cent. profit." *Reply*: Our thesis is, if a man declares he is in Christ, he says he treads mammon underfoot; and if he *says* it, he is expected to show it. *Objection* (2): "Impossible! too high!" *Reply*: It is too high for a Christless man, but not for "a man in Christ." Note:

¹ Let the following passages be compared: 1 Cor. xii. 3; Rom. x. 10.

When life and profession harmonize with each other, and both harmonize with a perfect ideal, the life is what it ought to be, and all that it can be.

Vers. 7-11.—*Love and light. Connecting link:* The word "ought" (ver. 6) implies a command explicitly given or implicitly involved in other teaching; such is the case here. The Son of God has come. And from him as the Light the command has proceeded. What specific form the commandment has taken from his lips is the main teaching of this paragraph. Hence our theme—*The commandment, old and yet new, brought by him who is the Light.* The "connecting links" which are traceable in the writings of John, are very different from such as are discoverable in the Epistles of Paul. Paul works out mighty themes cumulatively. John treats key-words radiatively. Such words are "light," "love," "truth," "life," "knowledge," etc. Consequently, it would be a mistake to attempt to find in this Epistle any such continuous unfolding of one great theme, such, e.g., as the doctrine of justification by faith, which is dealt with by Paul in Rom. i.—viii. As another method, and that very widely different, is adopted in this Epistle by the Apostle John, so the work of the pulpit expositor in dealing therewith must vary from the method he would adopt in unfolding the Epistle to the Romans. We must take up the key-words of John as he uses them, and expound the teaching concerning them. In this paragraph we have two main lines of remark suggested.

I. TEACHINGS CONCERNING LIGHT AND LOVE OBJECTIVELY CONSIDERED. These are fourfold. 1. *The true Light is now shining.* A reference to John i. 4, 5 and iii. 19 will indicate the way in which the apostle refers to our Lord Jesus as the Light. God has never left men in absolute darkness concerning himself. Even before the Old Testament was written, devout men could "walk with God." But whatever light on the invisible men have had has come from the Lord Jesus Christ. "He is the true Light, which lighteth every man." When, however, he came into the world, men beheld the Source of light; the world has been clearer and brighter ever since; and to this day the light streams from Christ as from the Sun of Righteousness. 2. *Because of this the darkness is passing away (παρέραι).*¹ It is as if the veil were being lifted off which concealed the great realities on which the meaning and destiny of human life depend. And with new light thrown on the plans and mind of God for our race, it follows that fresh light is cast on the way in which men ought to walk. 3. *This being the case, additional force is given to human duty.* (Note the *οὖν* in ver. 8.) The clearer the light on a man's pathway, the greater his obligation to walk aright. Hence, when Jesus brings a fuller light, he must needs bring a command for us to walk accordingly. We cannot suppose the Son of God to come from heaven to light up our way, and that it can then be an indifferent matter whether we heed him or no. Surely not. The light has a commanding force. It is a new command, as brought in anew by the Lord Jesus, and felt with new force through his infinite love. It is an old one, inasmuch as it had been in force from the very beginning of the Christian economy, and even then was but the resetting of the old law of love which God had enjoined from the first. 4. *This command is that we should love our brother.* This is the burden of the whole paragraph. This is the sum and substance of that following of Christ to which all "who profess and call themselves Christians" are bound. The light which he brings is meant to guide us to a life of love. "Love one another, as I have loved you."

II. THESE SAME TEACHINGS CONCERNING LIGHT AND LOVE SUBJECTIVELY APPLIED. It is no wonder to find the apostle setting and resetting his key-words in so many different forms, and ringing the changes, so to speak, on "those charming bells"—life, light, love. A deep and true philosophy underlies the whole. Right conception existing in thought is truth. Right conception expressed in word is light. Right conception realized in act is duty. Right conception embodied in a life is love. There are five distinct statements made in this paragraph on the subjective side of our theme, all of them enforcing with terrific power the importance of obeying the command of love. 1. "He who loves his brother abides in the light." Both *φιλαθροῦν* and *φιλαδελφία* would be included here. When both are learned of Christ the pathway is light, and he who walks therein becomes "light in the Lord," receiving and reflecting

¹ See 'Speaker's Commentary' on "The Epistles of St. John," Introduction, § I. 3 (New Testament, vol. iv. p. 276).

the radiance of the central Sun. 2. Consequently, he sees where he is going. "There is no occasion of stumbling in him" (cf. John xi. 9, 10). 3. This is an unvarying law, all profession to the contrary notwithstanding (ver. 9). Let a man talk as largely and as loudly as he may, if he loves not, he is in the dark. No love, no light. He will not see the light God has shed on the destiny of the race. He will be in miserable darkness as regards his own. 4. Such a walk in the darkness will issue in his losing the power of seeing. "The darkness blinded his eyes" (cf. Matt. vi. 22, 23; 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4). Fishes in underground rivers become blind. The moral and spiritual eyesight may be trifled with till it is destroyed,¹ if a proper use be not made of the light God has sent to us in Christ. 5. When the power of seeing is gone, every step must be a leap in the dark. "Knoweth not whither he goeth." What an awful agnosticism! Can anything be more terrible than for a human soul to be compelled to plunge forward wildly, blindly, without a ray of light in any direction, simply because he would not follow the light God sent him, and tampered with his own power of seeing?

Thus both objectively and subjectively it is true: The light brought in by Christ points to love, and his love leads us on to the light. Following his light, we learn to love; imitating his love, we are moving forward to the light. Here, then, is the outward practical proof of our following Christ—a proof which even the world can to some extent appreciate, the proof without which no profession, nor words, nor deeds, nor sacraments, nor ordinances, can avail; it lies in this, and in this only, *in love*. The only possible proof that we can give that we love Jesus is by loving those for whom he died and in whom he lives, for his sake—by loving them *as he loved us*. This is the old, old line of duty, yet the one which is ever new. This is the true religion—to love. This is loyalty—to love. And when we have learned to love others as Christ loved us, we shall have within us the proof that his light is pervading our whole nature, and the pledge of our fitness for the inheritance of saints in light!

Vers. 12—14.—"*Little ones*," "*young men*," and "*fathers*." Here the thread of thought is broken. The apostle, instead of continuing his theme, turns for a little to those to whom he wrote and is writing; he recognizes the difference between the age, standing, and capacity of his readers, and reminds them that in each case his writing has had and still has a specific reason and intent. Topic—*The Word of God permanently suited alike for the young and the old*.

I. THERE ARE TO BE FOUND IN THE CHURCH WIDE DIVERSITIES IN AGE AND EXPERIENCE. There are, at least apparently, three classes specified—the children, the young men, and the fathers. The *children* are specified by two distinctive terms—"little children," "little ones." "Little children" as sustaining a common relation; "little ones" as being equally feeble and helpless (cf. Westcott, *in loc.*). There is room, however, for difference in opinion as to whether the apostle—aged and mature as he himself was at the time of writing—does not include all under the term "little children" here, as he certainly does in the first verse of this chapter. But it appears to us to be otherwise, and that the apostle afterwards varies the phraseology, saying "little ones," that he might make it clear that he, in this particular case, means "little ones" in age, *i.e.* as concerning the Christian life. That there were children in the early Churches appears clearly indicated in the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. And certainly in the Churches there have been, in all periods, the little ones, who have newly come to the faith; the young men, whose glory is in their strength; the fathers, whose glory is their ripeness in Christian experience and their attainments in saving knowledge.

II. THESE DIVERSITIES OF AGE ARE RECOGNIZED BY THE APOSTLE. In the fact of the apostle thus distinctly setting each class before him, and specifying each, we see a graciously designed adaptation of the sacred writings alike to young and old. And also in the specific reason given in each case. 1. John writes to the "little ones," because their "sins are forgiven" for the sake of Christ, and because they have "known the Father." The most glorious fact, forgiveness, and the most blessed relationship, fatherhood,—these, though deep enough and high enough for the researches of an eternity, are yet simple enough for babes in Christ to exult rapturously therein. 2. He writes to the "young men," because they "are strong," etc. The glory of a young man is his strength. High ideals, ardent pursuit, brave daring,—these are the delight of young

¹ Cf. Drummond's 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World;' chapter on "Degeneration."

men. And how abundant is the scope afforded in the teachings of the Word for the abandonment of all their energies to the noblest objects! 3. He writes to the "fathers," because they have "known him that is from the beginning;" i.e. in the ripeness of their attainment they have learnt the glory of Christ as the Eternal Word, and have come to see how the whole course of human history is bound up in him. Note: The fathers in Christ have gone on learning of Christ ever since they were little ones; the "little ones," consequently, should never be pressed too hard, nor be expected to see all that they will come to see by-and-by. Loyalty and docility should be expected of them; but not maturity of knowledge and of wisdom. In the Bible there is milk for the babes, as well as strong meat for those of full age.

III. THE APOSTLE REPEATEDLY PUTS THE DIVINE TRUTH DOWN IN WRITING, THAT IT MAY BE A PERMANENT DIRECTORY TO ALL. Γράφω . . . ἔγραψα. "I am writing . . . I wrote." (For the varied possible hypotheses on these words, i.e. whether John refers to a previous letter, etc., see Exposition; also Westcott, *in loc.*) The point here worthy of being dwelt upon is the gracious foresight, which, seeing the danger of the future ages to the faith of men, arranged that the truth should be repeatedly committed to writing, and so committed that in the after-years there should be *something for all*—for the little ones, the young men, and the fathers—to which, in all perils, seductions, and bewilderments, whether of doctrine or of practice, they may perpetually appeal, as the standard alike for truth and for duty (cf. Phil. iii. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 1, 2; ver. 26).

IV. THE TRUTH THUS PERMANENTLY RECORDED IS SUCH, AS WHEN RIGHTLY USED, WILL LEAD ON TO FURTHER ADVANCES IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. 1. Are there those who are but babes in Christ, and who are just taking their first feeble steps in Zion's pathway? In the glorious fact of which they are here reminded there is the noblest inspiration to progress. They are addressed (1) because their sins are forgiven; and (2) because they can rejoice in the Father's love as theirs. How great the achievement expressed in the first! How vast the possession pointed out in the second! Enough for them to rejoice in even at the outset of their Christian life with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. A treasure indeed to start with. They may well "sing in the ways of the Lord," hold on their way, and pass from more to more. 2. There are the young men, who glory in their energy, in whom the Word abideth, and who have in Divine might overcome the wicked one. They are addressed in the book, and a grand field is opened up for their energies and a trial ground for all their valour, as they are bidden to fight the good fight of faith and are cautioned against the antichrists of every age. Here may they learn how to bear the shield and to wield the sword; to step forth to war, having their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, sure to overcome in the strength of the great Captain of salvation. 3. There are the fathers, too, who in their maturity of life and love are learning the glory of their Redeemer as the First and the Last, as over the creation of God, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Here are disclosures of the Redeemer's glory in which they too may luxuriate; so that, let them become as ripe as they may, they will still find the teachings of the book far ahead of them. Yes; it is even so. As John thought of all in writing this Epistle; so, through the Spirit, in both Old and New Testaments there will be found simple teachings for the little ones, manlier words for robust energy, riper truths for those in the fulness of grace and knowledge. All, all may go to the book. It will give pictures for the child to look at, a shield and sword which the warrior may wield, and a pillow on which the aged and worn-out veteran may peacefully breathe his last.

Vers. 15-17.—*Love of the world forbidden.* *Connecting link:* Having paused for a moment in his theme to survey lovingly the believers of various ages to whom he is writing, the apostle now resumes the theme of love and life. Inasmuch as love is no merely benevolent sentimentalism disregarding moral distinctions, it must needs follow that the duty of loving in one direction must involve the corresponding duty of *not* loving in an opposite and alien direction. In the negative as well as the positive aspects of duty believers need instruction. Hence our theme—*The region in which love is prohibited, and why.*

I. HERE IS AN EARNEST PROHIBITION. "Love not the world." Owing to the poverty of language, it may be, one word has to serve several purposes. It is so with this term "world." Sometimes it means the globe itself (Ps. xcvi. 10). Sometimes the race

of people thereon (John iii. 16). Sometimes the outer form of things (1 Cor. vii. 31). At other times, as here, it refers to the world of busy human concerns, of thinking, planning, racing, hungering, thirsting, striving, and all for its own aims and purposes, irrespectively of the glory of God or even of questions of righteousness and truth. As such it is a sinful world, and on it our love must not be set. There are, however, three specific forms of sinfulness, against the love of which we are warned. 1. *The lust of the flesh.* The vain indulgence and pampering of the fleshly nature. If, e.g., we either eat or drink *merely* for pleasure's sake, or indulge in excess in either direction, or gratify the sensual appetites either in wrong directions or to too great an extent, we are neglecting the warning of the text. 2. *The lust of the eyes.* The fondness for glitter, glare, and show. The inordinate love of sight-seeing, etc. 3. *The pride of life.* Its vain-glory and love of ostentatious display. This will have no place in a consistent Christian's life. The spirit of the words, "My river is my own, and I made it for myself," is by no means extinct. Query: How far has the civilizing and humanizing effect of Christianity changed the "world"? Is the evil in it, and the consequent peril therefrom, as great as in the Apostle John's time? In other words, Is the prohibition of the text as needful now as it was then? In reply, note: (1) Beyond all question there is a vast improvement in many respects, notably (a) in the fact that sins to which no disgrace attached in the days of the old Roman empire are now all but unknown, or at least have to hide themselves from view; (b) in the fact that there is a very large amount of commerce, etc., in which there is "upon the brides of the horses, Holiness to the Lord." For this we may be devoutly thankful. In many directions, too, art, music, painting, sculpture, are consecrated to the Lord. (2) Notwithstanding all allowance to be made for these advances, there is still a sinful element of self-seeking, selfishness, pride, haughtiness, and boasting in the world, which is strenuously to be shunned. The lusts of the flesh are not dead yet. The pride of life lingers—nay, it flourishes yet. The "interests" of commerce are regarded as paramount. (3) There are forms of ill in the world which have actually developed under modern civilization, and against which it behoves a Christian steadily and steadfastly to protest. Selfishness of the lords of the soil, etc. In all that partakes of the world-spirit, i.e. self first, a believer is to have no concern, no sympathy whatever. (4) Nor can it be questioned that since the apostle's time there have arisen, and in our day there still exists, forms of the world-spirit even in the Churches of Christ. Sectarian strifes, heart-burnings, huge hierarchies, dead forms, high offices, gorgeous vestments, large ambitions, exclusive claims, etc. All these, though clad in religious guise, are as much a part of the lust and pride of the worldliness as aught outside; and, because found in the Church, must be more offensive to God, because of the pretence of sanctity which attaches to them. From all this our hearts must recoil. It is "the world," though baptized with the Church's sacred name. It is altogether inconsistent with the simplicity that is in Christ. It cannot be reconciled with the Lord's teaching in Matt. xx. 25—28.

II. HERE ARE MANY REASONS SUGGESTED AGAINST THIS PROHIBITED LOVE. Mainly five. 1. These things in the world which we are forbidden to love are themselves essentially and radically wrong. They are "not of the Father, but of the world," i.e. the world indulges its own lusts, pursues its own aims, seeks its own pleasures, without care for or thought of a higher will. The world is a self-seeker and self-pleaser, and will not be burdened with the larger and higher questions of God, righteousness, and truth. 2. The love of the world is incompatible with the love of the Father, i.e. with our loving him. We can love either God or the world. But no human heart can hold the two opposing at the same time. That is as absolutely certain as the doctrine of the impenetrability of matter. No man can serve God and mammon. The attempt has been made to form a God-and-mammon guild. But all such attempts must be miserable failures. 3. Besides, "perishableness" is inscribed on the world and all that is therein. "The world passeth away." And how sorely incongruous is it for an imperishable spirit to ally itself with a merely perishing framework!¹ No form of national life continueth alway. Families break up and pass away. Friends die. Nothing earthly is permanent. 4. And more than this, even if objectively the "world" continued pretty much the same, yet "the lust thereof" passes away; earth loses its power to charm; and the passions,

¹ For a striking illustration of the historic bearings of this statement, see 'Christian Charity in the Ancient Church,' by Dr. Uhlhorn, bk. iii. ch. i. p. 219.

if they have been lustfully indulged, retain their craving, but lose the power of enjoyment. But a more pleasing reason yet remains to be specified. 5. There is a far better pursuit open to us, which will open up nobler prospects. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Here the opposite course is pointed out—"doing the will of God." Losing our wills in his. "This is the way the Master went," finding his meat in the fulfilment of the Father's will. We know that that will is perfect wisdom and perfect love. And if we ever ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" our duty will be revealed to us (1) in the Word, (2) by the openings of Providence, and (3) the teachings of the Holy Ghost. He that lives for this end "abideth for ever;" i.e. the aims of his being can never be interrupted. If he lives, he lives to the Lord; if he dies, he dies to the Lord. If he toils, he does God's will. If he suffers, he bears it. If he be on earth, he fulfils his Father's will in this life; if he departs hence, he fulfils it in another. The supreme object of his existence is sure to be realized under any circumstances, through all outward changes, in all possible places, and in any state of being, and throughout the ages of eternity. He who is thus living can use the sublime boast of Paul, and say, "In nothing I shall be ashamed . . . Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. . . . For to me to live is Christ, and to have died is gain." A beloved and honoured pastor, the Rev. Thomas Craig, of Bocking, in Essex, after a pastorate of sixty-two years, during which he had often expressed the wish to die "in harness," was called to his rest after a very brief illness. After his death, a sermon he had begun to prepare for the pulpit was found half-finished upon his desk. It was from the text, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

Ver. 18.—*A last hour; or, the Divine enclosure of revealed time. Connecting link:* "The world is passing away," wrote the apostle (ver. 17), and now he proceeds to repeat and reimpress this fact upon his readers in two additional statements: (1) that a great crisis had already begun; and (2) that the mark of that being so was the appearance of antichrist,—by this, he says, we know that it is a last hour. (The phrase is anarthrous.) Here are two homiletic studies of the profoundest interest. One on the time-arrangements of the Divine dispensations; the other on antichrist. The first only do we now note; our topic—*The Divine enclosure of revealed time.*

I. THE GREAT SUPREME, WHO IS FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING, HAS GRACIOUSLY DIVIDED TIME INTO PERIODS FOR US. No finite minds can comprehend a whole eternity. They will make their own horizon, even if one be not disclosed. The eye requires a point of repose whichever way it turns. We are not, however, left to make our own. God has furnished us with one in each direction, before and behind. We have such phrases as, "in the beginning" (Gen. i. 1; John i. 1); "then the end" (1 Cor. xv. 24). In neither case can the phrase mean an absolute beginning or an absolute end. For with God is neither beginning nor end. Beginning and end can be such only *so far as God reveals time to us*. These are the two enclosures within which revelation moves. There are varied expressions in the Scriptures, moreover, to indicate several epochs which lie between the two extremes; and it would be a great gain to Bible students if, instead of wasting time and energy in attempting to fix dates for this event or that, they would take a larger view, comprehending all the time-expressions in the sacred volume, and endeavour to seize hold of and to apply the principles of the Divine government and the outlines of Divine plan thereby disclosed. Let the following references be carefully compared: "The last days," or "the latter days," as spoken of under the old dispensation (Gen. xlix. 1; Numb. xxiv. 14; Deut. iv. 30; Isa. ii. 2; Jer. xxiii. 20; xxx. 24; xlviii. 47; xlix. 39; Ezek. xxxviii. 16; Hos. iii. 5; Joel ii. 28; iii. 1; Micah iv. 1). In the New Testament we have the phrases, "mine hour" (John ii. 4); "his hour" (John xii. 1; viii. 20; vii. 30); "the hour" (John xvii. 1; xii. 23; iv. 21, 23; v. 28, 35; xvi. 4, 25, 32); "this hour" (John xii. 27); "your hour" (Luke xxii. 53); "times or seasons" (Acts i. 7); "forty-two months" (Rev. xi. 2); "three days and a half" (Rev. xi. 11); "time, and times, and half a time" (Rev. xii. 14; cf. Dan. vii. 25; xii. 7, 11, 12); "these last times" (1 Pet. i. 20); "these last days" (Heb. i. 2); "the last days" (Acts ii. 17; 2 Tim. iii. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 3; Jude 18; Jas. v. 3); "the last day" (John vi. 39, 44, 54; xii. 48); "the day of Christ" (Phil. i. 10); "the day of the Lord" (1 Thess. v. 2; Acts ii. 20);

"that day" (Matt. xxiv. 36; vii. 22; 2 Tim. i. 12, 18); "the last time" (1 Pet. i. 5); "the end" (Matt. xxiv. 14; xiii. 39; xxviii. 20; 1 Cor. xv. 24); "the fulness of times" (Gal. iv. 4; Eph. i. 10); "the age to come" (Heb. ii. 6; Eph. i. 21); "the ages" (Heb. i. 2; xi. 3); "ages of ages" (Rev. xiv. 11); "all the ages" (Ps. cxlv. 13 [LXX.]; Jude 25 [Greek]); "all the generations of the age of the ages" (Eph. iii. 21). The conception, developed with great care by Mr. Grattan Guinness,¹ that the clockwork of the heavens and that of prophecy are similarly set as to time, is one of exceeding attractiveness and grandeur, though our knowledge requires to be enormously wider ere we have the materials for its verification. At the same time, the broad fact remains that he whose being is "one eternal Now" has, both in his works and in his Word, enclosed duration for us in a series of periods smaller or larger, in order that our limited apprehensions may have some point from whence to start, and some goal towards which to look!

II. GOD HAS HIS OWN SPECIFIC PERIOD FOR EACH STEP TO BE TAKEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN AFFAIRS. So far as it is needed that we should know what that step may be at any age, prophecy unfolds the plans of God. We know, e.g., that this period is "the day of salvation" foretold by the prophets; that it was ushered in by the first coming, and will be closed by the second coming of the Son of God, for which we are bidden to wait and watch.

III. EACH SUCCEEDING PERIOD IS MARKED BY FEATURES PECULIARLY ITS OWN. "By this we know that it is a last hour." The Adamic, patriarchal, Mosaic, and prophetic periods were all distinctly marked. So was the transition period of the Baptist, and that of the Messiah's life, death, and resurrection; so also is this, the dispensation of the Spirit. A critical change takes place in each one, marking an advance on the times gone by, and serving as an introduction to those which are to come.

IV. HENCE EACH EPOCH MAY BE DESCRIBED AS "A LAST HOUR," inasmuch as it brings to a close some form of good (or of evil) which marked that which preceded. John the Baptist marked "the last hour" of prophecy. The Lord Jesus, "the last hour" of types and shadows; the Holy Ghost, "the last hour" of human probation. And our Lord Jesus reminds us that earthquakes, pestilences, etc., will mark the last hour ere he comes again, but that these will be but the beginnings of the "birth-pangs" that will usher in a new and glorious life. The Apostle John sees in the rise of antichrist a mark of "the last hour." Even so. It is the period in which Christ goes forth to judgment and to victory, when his foes are to be made manifest to their own destruction and to his glory!

V. STILL, THE WORD OF GOD BIDS US FIX OUR EYE ON THE CLOSE OF THIS EPOCH, referred to as "the day," "that day," "the great day," etc. We are looking for the reappearing of the Son of God, when all antichrists shall be trampled underfoot, and when he shall bring in the "new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

VI. EVEN "THE LAST DAY," "THE END" FOR WHICH WE LOOK, WILL NOT BE AN ABSOLUTE END. It will be a consummation; and with our God it may be as it were a new beginning. His ways are ever unfolding from glory to glory. Then let it be ours to recognize this method of Divine disclosure, and learn herefrom: 1. The limits of Divine revelation. It is enclosed between a "beginning" and an "end." Of what was before the one, of what will be after the other, we know nothing and can think nothing. 2. To use the revealed period, that of probation, so that, let the "end" be what it may and come how it may, we are "ready." 3. To look forward without fear, if we are in Christ. 4. To learn "the terrors of the Lord," his manifestations of himself, which make the righteous glad, will put rebellion and the rebel to increasing shame.

Ver. 18.—"*Many antichrists.*" *Connecting link:* In the preceding homily we had occasion to remark that the expression, "a last hour," indicated that a great crisis had already begun, and that the apostle declared that the mark of such a crisis was to be seen in the rise of "many antichrists." We then, with the thought of a last hour as the basis, endeavoured to indicate the time-enclosures of Divine revelation. Now we have to expand, as far as our space permits, the apostolic teachings which gather round the

¹ See 'The Approaching End of the Age,' 2nd edit., pt. iv.

expressions, "antichrist," "many antichrists." Topic—*Antichrist; a manifold series of negations.*

I. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTIAN AGE, THE SUPREME TEST OF TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD IN RELIGION IS THEIR RELATION TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Cf. Matt. xii. 30, where our Lord shows that there is no neutrality in reference to himself. Either for or against. And we know the apostle himself received a sharp rebuke and a touching lesson when forbidding one, who was casting out devils, because he did not follow with them. Our Lord then took occasion to give the converse of the former expression, saying, "He that is not against us is on our part." So that it is no wonder, after such a lesson (which he could not forget), that the one test of truth should be with John—How does it stand with reference to the Master? Does it enthroned or dethrone *him*? If the former, a wide divergence on minor topics would be allowed. If the latter, however specious its pretence, he would brand it as *antichrist*. This word (in the New Testament) is peculiar to John. It is found in vers. 18, 22; ch. iv. 3; 2 John 7. It is not at all improbable that he coined the word, although (so Westcott) the absence of the article in this verse indicates that it had become current as a technical name.

II. BELIEVERS HAD BEEN PREPARED TO EXPECT THE RISE OF ANICHRISTIAN HERESY. (Cf. Matt. xxiv. 5, 24; Mark xiii. 6; Acts xx. 29, 30; 2 Thess. ii. 3; 1 Tim. iv. 1.) And no one can read the Epistles to the Corinthians, Colossians, and to the seven Churches without seeing how very early, even during the lifetime of the apostles, sundry antichristian heresies threatened to make havoc of the Church. It would be inaccurate to fix the term "antichrist" solely on one individual or one system, even if our knowledge of this or that one were complete enough to enable us to identify it or him as one form of antichrist. For in the prophetic passages referred to such forms are pointed out as manifold. And the apostle declares that manifold are the forms already seen; for, says he, "even now are there many antichrists." So that we are forbidden by the terms of the passage to fasten on any one form of heresy to the exclusion of others.

III. THOUGH PROPHECY AND FACT SHOW MANY ANTICHRISTS, THERE IS ONE FEATURE MARKING THEM ALL, *viz.* NEGATION. (Ver. 22.) "He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son." Thus the apostle himself, if he seems to plunge us into uncertainty as to who is antichrist, when he declares that there are many, speedily relieves us of the uncertainty, by giving us one mark by which antichrist may be distinguished anywhere and in all ages, whatever the name he assumes, whatever the garb he wears. So far, of course, as the word goes, if (1) any one else professed to be the Christ; (2) if any one, under the guise of a prophet, opposed Christ; (3) if any one, under pretence of honouring his Person, denied his redeeming work; or (4) if any one set himself openly and entirely against Christ;—in either case the word "antichrist" would apply. Whether a man or a system opposes Christ's Person, mission, revelation, redemption, or commandments, he or it would be a deceiver and an antichrist. But the apostle lays most stress, yea, the entire stress, on the thought of a *denial*. "Every spirit that confesseth *not* that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh . . . this is the [mark] of the antichrist." What may be its claims *for itself* does not enter seriously into the apostle's mind thereon; if *it will not yield Christ his claims*, it is antichrist. For in denying the Son, it denies all the faith. If any one denies the Son, he denies the Incarnation. Denying the Incarnation, he denies revelation of God, and a Mediator between God and man. He denies, consequently, any link between man and God. Christ united man to God. Antichrist would disown or break the tie, so that man is cut off from God, thus bringing out the terrible result, "He that denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." Thus everything distinctive of the Christian faith goes in a moment, when once the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is denied (see Westcott, *in loc.*). This—this is antichrist! He would take away the ladder between earth and heaven!

IV. THE DEVELOPMENTS OF HISTORY SHOW US THIS ANTICHRISTIAN SPIRIT IN GREAT DIVERSITY OF FORM. Obviously, all we have space for is to name some of the more prominent of these forms of error. 1. *The heresies of the apostolic age.*¹ These are indicated in the apostolic Epistles and in the Apocalypse. Notably, there was Gnosticism. 2. *Sacerdotalism.* In the multiplication of priests and mediators the all-sufficiency of the one Priest and Mediator is denied. In the Church of Rome this evil has reached

¹ See Dr. Burton's Bampton Lecture on this theme.

an appalling height. We would not intimate that the Church of Rome is one form of antichrist; but so far as this one point is concerned, or any point of her teaching, which obscures the glory of the Redeemer, she is *so far* antichristian. 3. *Papal infallibility*. When the pope applies to himself the words, "No man cometh to the Father but by me," he is so far, certainly, antichrist. 4. *Socinianism*. The denial of the eternal Sonship, and consequently, yea, necessarily, of the Incarnation, is another antichrist. 5. *Deism*. Denying revelation is another. 6. *Anti-supernaturalism* is another. 7. *Positivism*,¹ in its denial of all but the phenomenal, and its worship of humanity, is another. 8. *Agnosticism*, in denying that God is knowable, or that he has ever made himself known, is another, and the most modern, most attractive, and most perilous form of antichrist existing at the present day. The growing culture of the day has broken off much of the roughness of religious controversy on all sides; but this system, which, under the guise of ignorance, declines all inquiry into religion, as lying beyond all possible knowledge, is about the most subtle fallacy by which men could be misled.

V. THE APOSTLE'S DISCLOSURE OF THE REAL ANTICHRISTIAN PRINCIPLE IS MOST VALUABLE AND INSTRUCTIVE TO EVERY AGE. It may be made special use of by at least six classes of persons. 1. *By the theologian*. Here is indicated: (1) The centre-point of his theology, the central sun which lights up the whole of it. (2) The testing-point, or touchstone to be applied to every system of thought—Where does it place the Christ? (3) The true tolerance which is demanded. (4) Also where he must be intolerant, viz. wherever the Christ is robbed of his glory. 2. *By the preacher*. In his preaching, the Son of God must be all in all; he must be preached as "wisdom from God unto us; even righteousness and sanctification and redemption." And his hearers must be taught to be very impatient of any form of thought which relegates the Christ to an inferior place. 3. *By the Christian*. A young man once said to the writer, "I wanted to be right; I wanted to be religious; but my religion wanted a *centre-point*; and now I have it in Christ." Just so. In Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is the immovable centre of all we believe and know. All Christian doctrine is what *it* is because Christ is what *he* is. When he is denied or dislodged, the whole Christian scheme falls to pieces. 4. *By the inquirer*. In the search after Christian truth, let him study the testimony concerning Jesus, his Person, and his work. And if at first he cannot see all in Christ that the matured Christian sees in him, let him "follow on," ready to receive the kingdom of God as a little child, and he will certainly come at the truth concerning his Saviour's glory. 5. *By the student of comparative religion*. Such a one sees here the main point of the Christian religion; and it is one with which there is nought in the world to compare. 6. *By the student of prophecy*. Since the Person of Christ as the incarnate Son of God is the supreme feature in Christianity, let him not wonder that in the Christian age, while the believer finds his chief glory in Christ, the unbeliever finds in him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. "You may say anything you like in praise of Christ," said a noted sceptic to the writer, "*if you will but put him on the merely human platform!*" Ah! it is here, it is here the great conflict will centre, and prophecy leads us to expect that it will grow fiercer and wilder till the end shall come. We know the issue: "*He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet.*"

Ver. 19.—*Deserters, self-revealers*. *Connecting link*: "Even now are there many antichrists" are the words we have just studied. Do not these words raise the question—But whence come these antichrists? The reply, as indicated by this verse, is painful enough. They went out from the bosom of the Church itself. They first espoused the cause of the Lord Jesus, and then from some cause or other took offence, went out, and since have fought against the very Saviour for whom they had vowed, with us, that they would live and die! Topic—*An early defection from the Church, and how it is accounted for*. Let us arrange our expansion of the teachings of this verse under two heads.

I. HERE IS A PAINFUL HISTORIC FACT, WITH AN APOSTLE'S COMMENT THEREON. 1. *There had been a defection from the ranks of the faithful*. They went out from us." How many questions we would like to ask the Apostle John about this! But details are not given us, nor are they accessible. We can gather little more than we

¹ See addresses of Mr. F. Harrison, in the weekly edition of the *Times*, January 3, 1884.

have hinted at already, that some—many—of those who now ranked with the anti-christian party had once sought admission to and found a home within the visible Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. What was the pressure put upon them from without we cannot tell; but outside pressure alone, however great, would not account for their apostasy. 2. *The apostle at once reaches a definite conclusion*—that, though these deserters had once had a name and a place on the Christian roll, yet they had never known that living fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ which alone is the actual *raison d'être* for Churches at all. 3. *This conclusion is something more than a decision of the judgment; it is a manifested fact.* "That it might be made manifest that they all were not of us."¹ "All." Without exception. They could not have drifted off from the ranks of Christ's followers and joined an antichristian heretical party if they had been really in Christ. 4. *Their defection was a Divine provision for the exposure of the hollowness of their profession.* 'Αλλ' ἵνα φανερωθῶσιν—"in order that," etc.; either they went out with that purpose, or God had that end in view. We cannot suppose the former. We are shut up to the latter. If there are hypocrites in the Church, God will not allow his Church to be wrecked by them, but will cause them somehow or other to be exposed to view. A gardener was once asked, "Why do so many pears fall off that tree?" "Oh! sir," was his reply, "it is only those that are rotten inside that fall off." Some there are who "receive the Word with joy," and "for a while believe;" but they have "no root in themselves, and in time of temptation fall away."

II. BOTH FACT AND COMMENT TEACH LESSONS OF PERMANENT VALUE. 1. *External Church-membership and vital fellowship with Christ and his people are by no means the same in substance or uniform in extent.* The one is a form; the other is the reality of which the form is supposed to be the expression. If there is the reality, the form should follow. But it is quite possible for the form to be adopted without any such reality behind it. Judas. Demas. Achan. 2. *There may be much to attract adherents to a visible Church.* The first outgushing of brotherly love and community of goods attracted Ananias and Sapphira. Success. "Nothing succeeds like success." When "religion walks in silver slippers" many will be ready to follow. Wealth. Power. Patronage. Splendour. Ornate services. All such features in the external framework and environment of Churches will attract numbers of adherents. And if such a phase of social life should show itself, as for it to be "the thing" to make a profession of religion, thousands will do it for the sake of going with the stream. 3. *Being in the external Church will not minister life, any more than it will prove its existence.* If belonging to God's own Church is a sure means of salvation, these deserters would have been saved by union with it, specially when under the oversight of the Apostle John! But no! No Church on earth can minister spiritual life to any soul, by any ordinances whatever. What a scathing rebuke to "sacramental efficacy," or any such doctrine, is the fact indicated in our text! Note: John had once had to learn that a man might be with Christ, though he did not follow with the apostles. He has now had to learn that a man may follow with apostles, and yet not be with Christ. 4. *All such merely external adherents are but dead weights in a Church.* They do not and cannot increase its living acting force; they are rather a drag on the body to which they are outwardly attached. When a living Church is encumbered with them it is like a living body tied to so many dead ones. 5. *It is even possible that many forms of antichristian evil may exist in such.* "Many antichrists. . . they went out from us." A living faith in a living Lord ensures unity in all essential points. But if men are only dead professors, numberless forms of error may take root in them and bear poisonous fruit. If, e.g., it has been fashionable to belong to this or that Church, to repeat a form of sound words, and to accept such and such a creed merely because it is the law of the land, there is scarcely any form of pestiferous error which may not nestle beneath such hollowness as that. Nor can any order of Church life, however free in action, pure in creed, scriptural in government, or becoming in its forms of service, be proof against the intrusion of dead professors. 6. *Consequently, any external Church may require weeding to a very considerable extent.* In such cases

¹ When the *πᾶς* is separated by the verb from the *ὅς*, the negation, according to the usage of the New Testament, is always universal (all . . . not), and not partial (not all) (Westcott, *in loc.*).

as those we have before us, this weeding process will often have to precede all others. The ground must be cleared of its cumberers, that the plants of grace may thrive the better. 7. *If Churches are on the whole loyal and sound, false men will "go out" from them.* "They went out," etc. This is an effective yet potent kind of Church discipline, when Church ministration and testimony are so faithful and effective that false adherents spontaneously quit its ranks. Happy is the Church whose constitution is so sound that foreign substances expel themselves from its body!¹ 8. *Where this is not the case, God will in his providence use another and a sharper remedy.* "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (cf. Isa. iv. 6). It may be: (1) Persecution. (2) Disease and death (1 Cor. xi. 32). (3) Fierce blasts of temptation. (4) Keen and searching criticism. (5) New forms of alien thought. All these may and will have a telling effect on formalists in the Churches in any age. Their defection will save the Church! 9. *Let us not be discouraged at the fact that we cannot prevent the intrusion of false members into the Church.* Doubtless we should be glad enough of the charism of "discernment of spirits;" but we see that even in the apostle's lifetime that was not granted for their convenience. It did not then ensure a Church being proof against imposture. But God will not let the Church be fatally injured by aliens within. It may be annoyed; but antichrist shall be exposed, and the living fellowship saved. 10. *Let each reader take home to himself three closely and sternly practical lessons.* (1) May a man be in the visible Church and yet be an "antichrist"? Then should not each one ask tremulously, "Lord, is it I?" (2) Is it so? Then let each one of us sympathize with the Church, and not pour scorn upon it. (3) Is it so? Then let us, each of us, say, "The more strenuously the foes of Christ, secretly or openly, fight against him, the more courageously will I fight for him!"

Vers. 20, 27.—*Unction. Connecting link:* If it be so that many who were in the Church have become ensnared by antichristian error, and have deserted the faith they once avowed, the question—a very serious one—suggests itself—Is there or is there not any sure preservative against such apostasy in any case? The apostle had already observed, indeed, that there was a reason which would account for some deserting; viz. "they were not of us." Still, another and closer question arises—What is it that makes the difference between being merely in the Church and being also of it? To this vers. 20 and 27 are an answer: "And ye [ye' emphatic] have an unction," etc., "a *chrism*," so the word is—an anointing from the Holy One. Hence our topic—*Chrism from the Christ the preservative against antichrist.*

I. LET US STUDY WHAT THE APOSTLE SAYS RESPECTING THIS UNCTION OR ANOINTING. 1. *Whence?* "From the Holy One;" i.e. from the Lord Jesus Christ himself. (1) He is "the Holy" (cf. Rev. iii. 7; John vi. 69, Revised Version; Acts iii. 14). (2) He it is who promised to send another Paraclete (John xvi. 16). 2. *What is the anointing?* Christ himself, the Anointed of the Father, anoints them with the Holy Ghost. Another symbolic word is used in John i. 33, "The same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost." In John xvi. 26 the Paraclete is said to be the Holy Ghost. The anointing here referred to is not a merely official privilege, but is an enrichment of believers, as such, with an endowment of the Holy Ghost. 3. *When was it given?* "The gift is referred to a definite time (ver. 27): *ἐν ἑλθόντι*; and the narrative of the Acts fixes this normally at the imposition of hands which followed on baptism (Acts viii. 14, etc.). But the context shows that the word *χρῖσμα* is not to be understood of the material signs, but of the corresponding spiritual reality" (Westcott, *in loc.*). There is no occasion to think that such a spiritual gift will synchronize in its bestowment with the time of administration of any external ordinance. Indeed, the opposite is indicated in Eph. i. 13. It is given after believing. Just as the penitent may receive pardon from Christ, so the believer may receive this unction from him. 4. *Where?* "In you" (ver. 27). Here the figure fails, and we evidently have a reality far transcending it. An unction to pervade the whole nature of the believer. The Holy Ghost takes up his abode in us. Believers are his temples. 5. *For how long?* *Τὸ χρῖσμα . . . μένει ἐν ὑμῖν.* The anointing is a permanent endowment, and not a fitful or uncertain boon. The incoming and indwelling of the Holy Ghost is assured for ever (John xiv. 16). Some gifts of the Spirit, as e.g. his supernatural charisms,

¹ Cf. Clemence's 'New Testament Church Order and Discipline,' p. 42.

or his bestowments of wisdom upon the natural man, may be lost; but this higher chrism in true believers, never! 6. *What are its effects?* (1) Direct. (a) Enlightenment. "Ye all know" (cf. John xvi. 13; 1 Cor. ii. 9—16). Those filled with the Spirit see the truth as others cannot. (b) Consequently, they can apply criteria of truth divinely given (ver. 27). (c) They are, in a most important sense, independent of human teaching (Heb. viii. 11). The transition from a traditional faith depending upon what man says, to a living one born of God, is of vital importance (cf. John iv. 41, 42). (2) Indirect. (a) The lie of antichrist will be perceived in a moment through the supernatural light given from above. The inward guidance of the Holy Ghost enables men to detect false guides. (b) The quick discernment of error will be the surest safeguard against it. As the anointing abides in believers, the abiding of such believers in Christ naturally follows. *Καθὼς ἔδιδάξαν ὑμᾶς μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ.*

II. HOW FAR DOES THIS UNCTION SERVE AS A SAFEGUARD AGAINST THE ANTICHRISTS OF THIS AND OF EVERY AGE? The teaching of the apostle, which in our first division we have carefully analyzed and arranged, we must now aim at using for its designed end. 1. *There are now many antichrists.* A legion of opposing foes set themselves in array against the Lord and against his gospel. *What* they are the Christian preacher knows but too well—atheism, agnosticism, deism, pantheism, positivism, etc. Several forms of error range themselves under the one word "anti-supernaturalism." As in apostolic days the great stumbling-block was "the offence of the cross," in our days it largely consists in the insisting on a supernatural revelation. 2. *Argument for argument, it is quite possible, and even easy, adequately to defend the Christian faith.* There have never been lacking competent advocates for God's truth, who have met the arguments of the unbeliever with complete and even crushing replies. Never was this more strikingly the case than now (A.D. 1888). Never were the enemies of the cross more daring in their denials. Never were the defences of the faith more magnificent than now. So complete, indeed; are they, that if the unbeliever did but see how the case stands, he would know that his was a lost cause. But: 3. *Something more than argument is needed for an effective guard against antichristian error.* Three things are necessary. (1) A disposition to weigh the argument. (2) The spiritual discernment to perceive things that are spiritual. (3) A readiness to receive the kingdom of God as a little child—to let God teach us what he will, and to let in the light from above. 4. *These conditions it is not in the power of man to ensure.* God will give them to every earnest prayerful seeker that he may be guided into all truth. But not the ablest pleader for God can create these conditions of success in any one with whom he pleads. 5. *Only by the anointing of the Holy One can these conditions be bestowed and maintained.* But by this anointing, by this rich enduing with the Holy Ghost, will that state of soul be initiated and sustained, to which the truth of God will readily find access, and by which it will be guarded against serious and fatal error. A finely cultivated taste will be a better safeguard against the violation of good taste than any technical rules apart therefrom. 6. *Hence the one point at which we should constantly and prayerfully aim is the sure neutralization of error by the fulness of a Divine enlightenment and power.* (1) For the Christian advocate this is the point to aim at. If he relies on argument alone, he will fail. The Divine Spirit can create the conditions under which the right argument will have its right effect. (2) So with the Christian. Let him plead for a discernment so accurate and quick that he will see error to be error without the need of argument about it. (3) So with our young people as they go forth into life, and have to meet with temptations everywhere to desert the Christian camp. Their true, their only sure safeguard is the fulness of the Holy Ghost, with all his renewing, enlightening, and quickening powers. Filled with the Spirit, they are safe anywhere; without the Spirit, they are safe nowhere!

Ver. 22.—*The greatest possible lie. Connecting link:* The chrism from the Christ will ward off antichrist, because it will give such clear and quick intuitions concerning what is true and what is false, that the lie of antichrist will be instantly seen to be such, and Christ's anointed ones will not be deceived by him. And the value of this safeguard against antichrist is seen in the fact that the lie he would propagate being not merely on a minor point of detail, but concerning the Person of the Christ himself, it covers so much ground and carries so much along with it, that this lie of antichrist

is the greatest which could be uttered. "Who is the liar," etc. (*ὁ ψεύστης*)? Hence the topic presented to the homiletic expositor. Topic—*The lie of antichrist the greatest falsehood possible.*

I. WHAT IS THAT WHICH ANTICHRIST DENIES? The several references to antichrist indicate that the main, if not the sole, mischief of antichrist lies in denial. It is not unfrequently so. To deny, or, if that be too daring an effort, to call in question, Divine testimony and even first principles, is the favourite method of the father of lies. It is an easy way of seeking to unsettle and beguile unstable souls, to cast doubt on everything. And as if he himself did not know the difference between a spirit of inquiry and a spirit of doubt, one of our foremost men of science has laid it down as an axiom that the first step in science is to doubt everything! The evil one knows too well that it is much quicker work to throw down than to build up. And hence he tries this easy way of ruining souls by attempting to overthrow all that is sacred in their religious beliefs. As he could not prevail against the King when he met him in single combat, he aims his deadly blow at his subjects, in order to seduce them from their loyalty by casting doubts upon and even denying the Christ. This denial, not without motive, gathers round the Son of God. If we lose him, all is lost that is peculiar to our faith, as we shall presently see. The denial of Jesus as the Christ may take one or more of four forms. 1. The denial of Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed of the Father.¹ In this respect the minds of the Jews (among others) are blinded to this day. 2. The denial of Jesus as combining the Divine and human natures in one person: according to the Gnostic theory that the Christ descended upon the man Jesus at his baptism, and left him before his Passion (see Westcott, *in loc.*). 3. The denial of Jesus as the eternal Son of the Father, and the consequent denial of the Incarnation. All the present systems of unbelief are at one on this point; though "neither so does their witness agree together" in aught save the denial. 4. The denial of Jesus as the Lord of his Church enthroned in heaven. The latest result of theology is affirmed to be, *inter alia*, "that the Christ holds no office whatever." The same in substance, the denial changes its forms.

II. WHAT DOES THIS DENIAL INVOLVE? Many errors are not only serious in themselves, but are even more so on account of others which they drag along with them (cf. 1 Cor. xv.). We have remarked that if we lose our Christ, we lose all. So, indeed, the apostle himself argues. "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father;" i.e. as Westcott aptly puts it, "He hath not the Son, whom he rejects, nor yet the Father, whom he professes to regard." According to this denial: 1. There is no Fatherhood and Sonship in the Divine Nature. 2. God is not the Father as Christ represented him (see 'Speaker's Commentary' on ver. 23). 3. We have no personal revelation of God, nor any message of love from the eternal throne. 4. We have no redemption. 5. We have no Saviour and no salvation. 6. We have no Head of humanity with living and regenerative power to quicken the dead mass of souls. We may have from one source or other, to some extent, a revelation of law, order, and duty; but we have no disclosure of any power or provision to quicken to obedience to the Law, observance of the order or fulfilment of the duty.²

III. ON WHAT GROUNDS IS SUCH A DENIAL MADE? Broadly and generally this denial comes either of a misguided intellect or a depraved heart. It may be made in the name of philosophy or of science (in both cases falsely so called). The Christ comes as Revealer and Redeemer. Antichrist denies both the revelation and the redemption, either on the ground (1) that we know nothing beyond phenomena, and that the infinite and eternal are absolutely and hopelessly beyond our reach; or (2) that humanity is working itself right by a method of evolution, in the struggle for existence casting off the weak and worthless, and letting only the fittest survive,—that thus no redemptive force *ab extrâ* is needed, the *vis medicatrix* is within humanity; or (3) that nothing at all of the supernatural can be entertained for a moment.

¹ For a brief indication of the forms which this denial now assumes, see Dr. Edersheim's 'Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,' Preface, p. xii.

² "That morality has a basis in human society, that nature has a religion, surely makes the death of the soul when left to itself all the more appalling. It means that, between them, nature and morality provide all for virtue—except the life to live it" (Drummond, 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World,' 5th edit., p. 168).

IV. THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THE DENIAL IS MADE. 1. *In spite of the clearest testimony to the facts and doctrines denied*—testimony, given by blameless men, in the teeth of their own natural and strongest prepossessions to the contrary. (Let this last clause be duly weighed.) 2. *In spite of the tenderest seal.* The blood of Christ. "The blood of the everlasting covenant." 3. *In spite of the most powerful confirmation.* The resurrection of Christ. The descent of the Holy Ghost. The sustentation of a living Church to this day, in spite of every conceivable effort to destroy it. 4. And in many cases the denial is made with a defiant recklessness, or a proud supercilious scorn, as if by the efforts of their pen men would wish the dearest hopes of millions to be dashed to the ground!

V. THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH WOULD FOLLOW THE SUCCESS OF ANTICHRIST'S DENIAL. If (as shown under division II.) the denial drags along with it all other Christian doctrines, then the basis and support of the noblest life ceases. Men talk largely about the evolution of the race, forgetting to note: 1. That it is only the portion of the race which is leavened by Christian thought that is thus advancing. 2. That the advance is prompted by men who, because leavened with Christian thought, are inspired by faith, hope, and love! But destroy Christian doctrine, then (1) *faith* must expire for want of an adequate Object; (2) *hope* must decline from the lack of a specific goal; (3) *love* must die out through lack of a revealed Object worthy of the perfect love of the soul, and then love to man will die out when the great reason for it and inspiration to it are withdrawn. And when neither faith, nor hope, nor love have any sustaining food, what will human life be worth? Life is dependent upon environment. Withdraw the environment, and life must decline from want of sustentation from without. Clearly, then, the lie of antichrist is the master-lie!

VI. APPLICATION AND INFERENCES. 1. If these things be so, then no one need be surprised that some of the controversies respecting Christian doctrine which have been carried on in the Church have been so sharp and bitter. The many who look thoughtlessly over the history of the divisions of Christendom, and who laugh at or pour scorn on the sternness of religious war, would do well to look a little deeper. If they understood more, they would jeer less. Tolerance may arise from short-sightedness or indifference; intolerance, from the clear foresight of what *must* follow if such and such an error be permitted to flourish. And the more ardently a believer loves his Lord, the more angry is he likely to be at aught which would obscure his glory! Of all the apostles John loved most fervently, yet he it is who lashes most severely. 2. Let us, too, be very jealous for the honour of our Lord and Master; and if any, in our hearing, deny him the glory which is his due, let us not be found wanting in the defence. We should at least insist on such points as these: (1) that men have no right to deny, any more than to affirm, save on adequate grounds; (2) that violent prejudice against the admission of the supernatural is but a faulty prepossession, which hinders the reception of evidence; (3) that it is never right to rob men of an inspiring power for virtue, unless the denier has something better to put in its place. 3. The confession of Christ, by contending for the right doctrine concerning him, should in every case be attended with a Christ-like life. We shall best contend for him *non sonando, sed amando*.

Ver. 23.—*Having the Father. Connecting link:* Having shown us of how much the lie of antichrist would deprive us, the apostle declares how rich we are when that lie is rejected, and the truth of Christ abides in us. Topic—*The vast wealth of the believer.* No uncertainty can attach to the expression, "he that hath the Son;" for while we are sure it must include abiding in the confession of the Son in all his glory and grace, we are equally sure that the confession must be the submission to, the acceptance, the embrace of Christ with all the heart, as well as the avowal of him with the lip (cf. 1 Cor. xii.). To "have" Christ is to have received him as a Saviour, to own him as the Revealer of the Father, to honour him as Lord, to follow him as Leader, to grow up to him as the Head. Now, our text contains a remarkable statement about those who thus "have" Christ. They "have" the Father also. In what sense? 1. In the Person of Christ as the incarnate Son they have the exact Image of the Father, so that they see him through the Son (John xiv. 9). 2. Through the atoning work of Christ—they learn the self-sacrificing love of the Father, "τὴν ἐαυτοῦ ἀγάπην" (Rom.

v. 8; 1 John iv. 10). 3. Through the mediation of Christ they have access to the Father (Eph. ii. 18; Rom. v. 2). 4. Through the intercession of Christ they have constant communion with the Father; not merely occasional access as to a King, but a filial fellowship with a Father. 5. Through Christ as the channel of communication between earth and heaven they receive of the infinite wealth of the Father (1 Cor. iii. 21—23). 6. Through the impartation of power and life from Christ they share the life of the Father (Gal. ii. 20). We are not only *ἐν τῷ ᾧ*, but also *ἐν τῷ Πατρὶ* (ver. 24). 7. Through the gracious leadership of Christ they will *have an* everlasting home with the Father (John xiv. 2, 3). And *such* a Father! Then how ought we: (1) To delight in God in Christ with rapturous joy! (2) To rouse all the powers of our soul to contend against those who would miserably impoverish us by compassing the destruction of this blessed life! (3) To honour such a Father by a calm, pure, heavenly life! Well might Faber ask—

“O little heart of mine! shall pain
Or sorrow make thee moan,
When all this God is all for thee—
A Father all thine own?”

Vers. 24, 28.—*Duty annexed to privilege. Connecting link*: The apostle had just said that wherever the Christly chrism was bestowed, it would prove so effective a guard against antichrist that he who received it would abide in Christ, since, being taught of God, he would not be deceived by any pretences of antichrist, however plausible. He now guards that thought from abuse by balancing his statement concerning the believer's privilege with another, which reminds him of his responsibility and duty, saying, “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. . . . And now, little children, abide in him; that when he shall be manifested, we may have freedom of speech, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” Hence our topic—*The duty of abiding in Christ*. There are six or seven lines of thought which are here put before us.

I. THE EXPECTATION OF THE BELIEVER IS THE SECOND COMING OF THE SON OF GOD. The Apostle John was not alone in the assertion of this. He joins, indeed, with the rest (cf. ver. 28; ch. iii. 2; Rev. i. 7; xxii. 20). Paul gives his testimony thereto (2 Cor. v. 10; Phil. i. 6, 10; Col. iii. 4; 1 Thess. i. 19, 20; iii. 13; 2 Thess. i. 10; ii. 1; 2 Tim. i. 12; iv. 8). Peter also (1 Pet. i. 13; v. 4). There are in our day two widely divergent views as to the place the second coming of Christ holds in the Divine plan. But there is no difference among believers as to that coming being “the blessed hope,” and as to its being the great event for which all should be “ready” (2 Pet. iii. 12—14). This, this, is indeed the Christian's greatest ambition, to be ready for that day. For—

II. AT HIS SECOND COMING THE LORD JESUS WILL BE MANIFESTED. The deep meaning of the Saviour's “manifestation” is concealed in the word “appear” (Authorized Version). The Revised Version brings it out to clear light. When he was on earth “a weary Man and full of woes” there was a veil over his true glory, through which only a few could see. When he comes a second time, he will be seen as he is, “in his glory” (Matt. xxv. 1—46; ch. iii. 2; 2 Thess. i. 7—10; 1 Tim. vi. 14, 15; Heb. ix. 28).

III. BEFORE HIM AN ACCOUNT WILL HAVE TO BE RENDERED. The word *παρρησία* is literally “liberty of speech to speak out all that we think.”¹ It denotes “the entire freedom with which we unburden, in the presence of an intimate friend, all which can weigh upon our heart.” So Neander. But such a word thus used obviously suggests, as Westcott remarks, such passages as 2 Cor. v. 10; Rom. xiv. 10—12; and also, we would add, Heb. iv. 13 (Greek); xiii. 17 (see Rom. viii. 19; Col. iii. 4; Luke xii. 2; Matt. xii. 36).

IV. THERE IS A SOLEMN ALTERNATIVE BEFORE EVERY MAN. Either “to have confidence” or “to be ashamed.” In the former case, how blessed the freedom! In the latter, how dire the distress! The original reads not merely “ashamed before him,” but “ashamed from him,” as if conscious guilt would itself act as a repellent force to bar men from their Lord (see Mark vi. 30 as illustrative of loving unburden-

¹ See Dr. Alexander in ‘Speaker's Commentary,’ *in loco*.

ing of the soul; Rev. i. 7 as illustrating the reverse. Compare also 2 Thess. i. 9 for a similar use of *ἀνθρ.* What if the Saviour's word "depart" should be a terrified shrinking from the presence of the Lord (cf. Gen. iv. 16; iii. 8)? Who would not labour and strive and pray, that at his Saviour's appearing he may be ready to meet him with a holy joy, and lovingly to unburden his whole soul, as one who, though indeed "looking for *mercy*," yet shrinks not back with shame?

V. TO ENSURE THE RESULT WE MUST MOST DESIRE, WE MUST ABIDE IN CHRIST. There are two expressions in the text, "Let that [Word] abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning." "Abide in him." Our Lord had joined these two together in the hearing of John, long years before (John xv. 7). The two go together. Faith receives the Word, and it lives in us. Faith clings to Christ, and we live in him. This, this is to be our daily life, and then, let the Lord come when he will, we shall not be ashamed. Note: It is not the imperfections of a loyal soul that will make him ashamed when Christ comes, but the faithlessness of an apostate soul who has to confront a deserted Lord!¹

VI. TO THE LIFE OF FAITHFUL ABIDING IN CHRIST WE ARE MOST TENDERLY URGED. "And now, little children," etc. 1. This is the gospel tone (Rom. xii. 1). Sinai thunders. Calvary pleads. 2. This is the spirit in which the true ambassador for Christ must and will speak (2 Cor. v. 20). 3. This is the tone which tells most powerfully. The cords of love do more than the whips of the taskmaster. God "draws" us with loving-kindness. Let us, then, hear the voice of the Saviour tenderly calling, "Hold fast to me, whatever others do." (1) Honour, (2) gratitude, (3) love, (4) safety, all demand our lifelong *Yea*.

Ver. 25.—*Eternal life. Connecting link*: Whatever may be the arts used and the temptations set before us by antichrist to draw us away from the Father by tempting us to apostatize from the Son, there can be offered to us by antichrist nothing so great as, *yea*, nothing to compare with, the vast promise left us on record by our own gracious Lord and Master; for "this is the promise which he [himself] hath given us, even the life, the eternal life." Whence our topic—*The greatest of all promises from the greatest of all Promisers*.

I. LET US FIRST INQUIRE INTO THE CONTENT AND MEANING OF THE PROMISE. "The eternal life." The phrase is so expressively worded as to indicate that there is one well-understood kind of life which forms the sum and substance of the hope put before Christian believers. It had been, indeed, very clearly defined by our Lord himself (cf. John xvii. 2, 3). So that on the highest possible grounds we are precluded from any warrant for confounding the phrase "eternal life" with continuity of existence. The latter, indeed, is postulated thereby; but it might be, quite apart from the former.² The eternal life is that state of being in which the highest part of man's nature is in communion with the Highest One, and in which a perfect organization that can never be impaired is in perfect correspondence with a perfect environment that can never change (Drummond, pp. 203, *et seq.*). Or, to reset this definition in scriptural phraseology, it is an unbroken and unending enjoyment of God by perfected natures in a perfected world. But there is this difference between the two definitions—the one lies in the region of science, and declares in what it must consist if it could be secured; the other lies in the region of revelation, and declares in what it does consist as Divine

¹ "It is possible to understand the words as referring to the apostle's joy in the crown of his work [inasmuch as he says, not, 'abide in him, that ye may have confidence;'] but, 'abide in him, that we may have confidence'"] (comp. 1 Thess. ii. 19, etc.; Phil. iv. 1). The parallel with 1 Thess. ii. 19, etc., is certainly close; but it seems to be more natural to suppose that the apostle made himself one with those who shared his life, and the absence of the personal pronoun seems to exclude the notion of any contrast between him and them" (Westcott, *in loc.*).

The remarkable verse in Heb. xiii. 17 leads me to think that more weight is due to the change of person in the verbs used in the text than some would attribute thereto; but I do not venture to speak confidently, and therefore have not developed that point in the homily.

² For a fuller discussion of this point than is here possible, the writer may perhaps refer to his work on 'Future Punishment,' 2nd edit. (Snow and Co.) See also Drummond's 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World,' 5th edit., p. 216.

love secures it! There are three factors in the making of this life. 1. God, and the riches of his love as the sustaining energy of the soul. 2. A nature ripened in holiness, and divested of all decaying tendencies in its bodily enswathement, as the developed life of the soul. 3. A world of undecaying fitness and beauty as the sphere of activity of the soul. Now, the first is precisely that which is the delight and the food of the soul even *here*. God! God in Christ! The second, so far as concerns the ripening the nature in holiness, is now being secured by the sanctification of the Spirit; and as concerns the freeing of the soul from decaying elements, it is ensured by the body being left behind as a worn-out vesture. The third is revealed as the ensuing outcome of God's plan in preparing a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. The work already done upon the globe is a prophecy that God is preparing it for something higher. The work already wrought on the soul of the believer is a prediction that it will be carried on to completion (1 Cor. ii. 9; Phil. i. 6; ch. iii. 1, 2; cf. ch. i. 3, in which Jesus Christ himself is spoken of as "that Eternal Life," etc.). But the main point now to be insisted on is this—not only that all the elements which go to make up eternal life are even now in existence and action, but also that the consummation, the perfection, and the perpetuity of the life which now exists in germ and develops in growth, are all matter of distinct and definite promise; yea, that this is the promise in which all lesser ones are contained. That we have not to be tantalized with a vision of glory, saying, "That is it if it could be attained," but that we may live under the inspiration of a promise which says—It is the Father's will that you should be kept from falling, and presented "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy"!

II. THIS, THE GREATEST OF ALL PROMISES, COMES FROM THE GREATEST OF ALL PROMISERS. Not all the conclaves of the wisest philosophers could create or sustain the lowly life of a blade of grass! Yet, somehow or other, there is a promise on record of a gift of life, of the highest life, to men of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, to a great multitude which no man can number; and that that life shall be sustained *for ever*! Well may the apostle lay stress on the personal pronoun *he*; for assuredly none but a Divine Being could have the right to make such a promise, for no one but he who is Lord of life could possibly guarantee its fulfilment! The promise, indeed, was first made long before Christ came (Titus i. 2). But in and by the Lord Jesus Christ has it been again vouchsafed. 1. *Where and how has Christ promised eternal life?* (Cf. John vi. 37—40, 54; x. 27, 28; xi. 26; xii. 26; xiv. 3, 19; see also John xvii. 2, 3.) But such words as these do not stand alone. Christ bids us "eat his flesh, and drink his blood;" *i.e.* he gives us himself to live upon—he nourishes us with his own life. All his pledges, moreover, were confirmed by his resurrection and ascension, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost, by whom he now imparts and nourishes the life which he promises eternally to sustain. 2. *What are the qualifications of Christ for making such a promise as this?* (1) He has all authority, and therefore *may* make such a promise (John xvii. 2, 3). (2) He is the Almighty, therefore *can* fulfil it (Heb. vii. 25; Rev. i. 8). (3) He is himself the Life-giver (1 Cor. xv. 45). (4) He is the Life-sustainer (Heb. i. 3). (5) His love leads him to long that his people should be with him (John xvii. 24). (6) His love changes not (John xiii. 1). (7) His being changes not (Heb. xiii. 8). (8) As far as the experience of believers this side the grave informs us, they find that in and by Christ they have already this very life; and up to the close of his earthly career he proves himself faithful to his own (ch. v. 12 (Greek), first part; Gal. ii. 20; 2 Tim. i. 12). Let each of these seven lines of illustration be followed out, and they will prove abundantly that Jesus is and ever will be equal to fulfil the promise he has made.

III. ARE THESE THINGS SO? Then: 1. Let us see that, since the objective ground of the good hope of the believer is found in the word of promise, *there is just one point to which the test of validity needs to be applied, viz. the person of him who promises*. If he is true, it is! How clear and yet how pure the ground on which we stand! 2. It should never trouble us to find that *neither science nor philosophy can either light us or help us in this matter*. We never have looked to them as guides to immortality, and never will. 3. *The ground on which the promise is given removes all improbability of its fulfilment*. "Grace;" "love;" "The riches of his grace;" "Herein is love!" 4. Both objectively and subjectively, *the enjoyment of the first-*

fruits makes us sure of the harvest. Objectively (Rom. v. 10). Subjectively (Phil. i. 6). 5. *This clear and definite goal to human existence* gives to theories of advance, development, evolution, an intelligible meaning, a crowning glory. 6. *The reason of life is thus magnificently told us.* It is that we may become like unto the Son of God, conformed to the type of all goodness, and that for ever! 7. *How guilty shall we be, and how miserably poor, if we miss this life!* "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God!" Oh! if there be a higher life spoken of by others and experienced by them, and if any have not this higher life, and know they have not, ought they not to cry mightily to its Lord and Giver, saying, "Lord, give me this higher life"? They will not cry in vain. God never deserts the imploring soul.

Lastly: *The theme prepares us for an answer to the charge of unbelievers, and for a retort upon them likewise.* We are told that the Christian aims are selfish in cherishing the hope of eternal life, and in being inspired thereby. What? Is it selfish to find an inspiration in the hope of being free from all selfishness, and of becoming more and more God-like for ever in benevolence and love? We reply that *not* to desire eternal life is base ingratitude. It is like saying to the eternal Father, "Father, I know quite enough of thee already, and do not wish to know more; nor do I desire time to grow that I may become more grateful to the goodness and mercy which have crowned my days." The truly loyal son will long to do something to recompense his Father's care, and to fulfil the words, "As a bridegroom rejoiceth over a bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee!"

Ver. 29.—*Re-born!* This verse marks a transition. It is not, indeed, absolutely disconnected from the preceding ones, but yet it rather prepares the way for what is about to follow. One phrase therein contained—"born of him"—is much used by the Apostle John; as Bishop Alexander remarks (in 'Speaker's Commentary,' *in loc.*), "it is one of the *loops* which connect this Epistle with the Fourth Gospel;" and it is also grandly developed in its meaning and bearing in the remaining chapters of this Epistle. Another feature of the verse is its recognition of different orders of knowledge, as indicated by the use of the two verbs *εἰδῆτε* and *γινώσκετε*—the one marking knowledge direct and absolute; the other, a knowledge gained by observation and inference. The latter verb may be either indicative or imperative. We may read, "If ye know . . . ye perceive," or, "If ye know . . . perceive ye." We adopt the latter, understanding the apostle to point it out as a duty to exercise rightly the spiritual faculties, and, so doing, to draw the conclusion, when they see a man practising righteousness habitually, that that man has received his love of righteousness from the Righteous One. The *ἐάν* here by no means marks an uncertainty as to whether Christ is righteous, but merely indicates concerning the two facts named in the text that, wherever a man knows the first, he ought to be equally assured of the second. Our text, therefore, suggests—

I. HERE IS A FACT PUT BEFORE US DIRECTLY IN THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION. There is a Righteous One (cf. ver. 1; Acts iii. 14; 1 Pet. iii. 18). Inasmuch, moreover, as he, the Son, is "the Image of the invisible God," then in the righteousness of the Son we see imagined that also of the Father. And thus we come to know it as the supreme declaration of revealed truth that righteousness is on the throne of the universe. The philosophy of to-day declares, "Amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty that he [the man of science] is ever in presence of an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed."¹ To this "absolute certainty" of the man of science, revelation adds that that infinite and eternal energy is light without a speck of darkness (ch. i. 4); love which changeth not; righteousness without a flaw. We *know* this.

II. HERE IS A SECOND FACT GATHERED INDIRECTLY FROM CHRISTIAN OBSERVATION. It is this: Supposing a man to be continuously living a righteous life, we can gather from thence that he is drawing his life from the Righteous One. Note: It is not a casual or occasional good deed which will manifest this. But the continuity of righteousness—always, everywhere, under all circumstances, and in spite of all temptations, *ὁ ποιῶν*. Given, then, this man, what are the inferences which we ought with

¹ Herbert Spencer, in the *Nineteenth Century*, January, 1884.

certainly to draw? See him; his course is no uncertain, fickle one; he is in love with righteousness, and with nothing but righteousness; towards God his most devout, reverent love goes forth; towards man he is uniformly true and kind. As for himself, the soul regulates the body, the spirit governs the soul, and God governs all. Tell us what he ought to be and do at any moment, and we can tell you what he will be and do at that moment. Tell us where he ought to be at any instant, and we will tell you where at that instant you may be sure to find him. His path is as the light, brighter and brighter to the perfect day. Now, when we see such a man, what do we with certainty know about him? 1. *We know that he is alive.* "Alive unto God." He is a spiritual man. He has passed from death unto life. 2. *We know that such a life is from God.* It is divinely originated and sustained. A stream can rise no higher than its source. Only a spiritual Being could originate such a spiritual life. The Divine Spirit has quickened the human (Eph. i. 1—6). 3. *We know that such a life is begotten of the Divine nature.* The physical world is God's handiwork. The social and moral worlds are called into being by his power. The order of the cosmos proclaims wisdom and skill. But not here is there aught which is begotten of God, or which is the outcome of his very nature. Music, beauty, fragrance, are all of God; but they are not *born* of God. But here, here in this man whose whole nature is renewed to righteousness, there is one whom God has made in his own image and in the image of his Son. 4. *We know that such a life is a very special product.* It is one which is a peculiar manifestation of God. You may learn what an architect is as an architect by seeing the buildings he has designed. But you may learn more of what he was as a man from one of his children than of all the products of his designing genius. So here, and much more so. When the Spirit of God creates and sustains a nature in holiness, such a nature is, in its way, a manifestation of himself. 5. *We know that such a life sustains a peculiar relation to God.* Being "born" of him, the man is in God's family—one of his sons. Not in the general sense alone, in which we all are the offspring of God, but in a higher sense; he is a member of "the household of God"—of one family in heaven and on earth. Of what in privilege and prospect accrues to those "born of God" we shall speak further as we follow the apostle in his thought. Here we take our stand and say, "When we know that a man resembles God in nature," we are sure that he is a child of God by the second birth, even of the Holy Ghost.

III. TO RECOGNIZE ONE WHO RESEMBLES GOD, AS HAVING BEEN BORN OF HIM, IS A SACRED DUTY. "Know ye" (margin, Revised Version) is most in harmony with the context. But whether John means that we do know it, or that we ought to know it, either way the practical force is the same. For: 1. In the band of holy God-moved men we see the very highest manifestation of God's nature which earth affords. 2. In these we see the home of God's delight. He dwells with his own, and communes with them. They have fellowship with the Father. 3. In these we see those of mankind who are ripening for a higher destiny, and whose radiant faces shine in the light of a nobler state. 4. This conclusion is not to be denied to any because they "follow not us," nor because they do not belong to this or that Church. *Wherever* there is a God-like man, there is a Heaven-born one. 5. This conclusion is *not* to be drawn where there is no holiness of heart and life, however high the rank, or sound the creed, or rigid the Churchmanship, or constant the reception of sacraments. Without holiness "no man shall see the Lord."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*Our Advocate and Propitiation.* "My little children, these things write I unto you," etc. Very tender and eminently Johannean is the opening of this paragraph. "My little children." The appellation suggests: 1. *The spiritual paternity of the apostle.* St. Paul addressed the same words to those Galatian Christians whom he had spiritually begotten (Gal. iv. 19). He referred with great tenderness and force to the same relationship in writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. iv. 14, 15). Probably many of those to whom St. John was writing were his spiritual children. 2. *The spiritual affection of the apostle.* The use of the diminutive indicates this. 3. *The spiritual*

authority of the apostle. His fatherly relation to them, his tender affection for them, and his venerable age combine to invest his words with authority. Our text teaches—

I. THAT THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST DISCOURAGES SIN. "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not." The "these things" are the statements made in ch. i. 6—10. The fact that sin exists even in the Christian is there affirmed, and gracious provision for the forgiveness of sin and for the sanctification of the believer is set forth. And now, in order that no one by reason of these things should look upon sin as inevitable, or regard it with tolerance, or fail to battle against it, St. John writes, "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not." St. Paul guards against the same misuse of the provisions of the rich grace of God thus: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Rom. vi. 1, 2). That the provisions of Divine grace for the pardon of sin afford no encouragement to its commission is proved by: 1. *The object of Christ's mediatorial work.* To "save his people from their sins." "He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (cf. Eph. i. 4; ii. 10; v. 25—27; Titus ii. 14). 2. *The cost of Christ's mediatorial work.* The great price at which pardon and salvation were rendered possible should powerfully deter from the practice of sin. "God spared not his own Son," etc.; "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ," etc. Since redemption from sin is so expensive a process, sin must be not a trifling, but a terrible evil. 3. *The influence of Christ's mediatorial work.* The love of God manifested in our Lord and Saviour is fitted to awaken our love to him. Love to God springs up in the heart of every one who truly believes in Jesus Christ; and love to God is the mightiest and most resolute antagonist of sin.

II. THAT THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST RECOGNIZES THE LIABILITY OF EVEN GOOD MEN TO SIN. "And if any man sin." This liability arises from: 1. *Our exposure to temptation.* Sometimes we are confronted by our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion." But more frequently are we in danger by reason of "the wiles of the devil." "Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light," that he may deceive souls and lead them into sin. We are also assailed by temptations in human society—temptations which are plausible and appear harmless, but which are full of peril to us. 2. *The infirmity of our moral nature.* There is that in us which is ready to respond to temptation. Thus temptations which appeal to our sensual appetites sometimes prove too strong for our spiritual principles, the sensual in us not being in complete subjection to the spiritual. Temptations which promise present pleasure or profit, but involve the risk of some of our most precious interests in the future, are sometimes successful because of defective spiritual perception or of moral weakness. This liability to sin is confirmed (1) by the history of good men, e.g. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, David, Peter; (2) by our own experience.

III. THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST ANNOUNCES GRACIOUS PROVISION TO MEET THE LIABILITY OF GOOD MEN TO SIN. "And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father," etc. 1. *Jesus Christ is our Representative with the Father.* "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." The word translated "advocate" means one who is called to our side; then a Comforter, Helper, Advocate. "Representative" is a word which, perhaps, expresses the meaning here. Jesus Christ "appears before the face of God for us." He stands by us with his face directed towards the face of God the Father, obtaining for us the forgiveness and favour, the stimulus and strength which we need. As Professor Lias puts it, "We have One who stands by us (*παρά*), yet looks toward (*πρός*) the Father, and who, one with us and with him, can enable us to do all things through his all-powerful aid." And he is "righteous." In this he is unlike us. We are unrighteous, and therefore unfit to appear before the face of God. But he, being perfectly righteous, is fitted to appear before God on our behalf. 2. *Jesus Christ is also the Propitiation for our sins.* "And he is the Propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." The primary meaning of "propitiation" was that which appeases or turns away the wrath of the gods from men. But we must take heed that we do not rashly apply the ideas of heathenism as to its gods, to the only living and true, the holy and gracious God. So much has been said and written concerning the propitiation, which seems to us to have no warrant in the sacred Scriptures, and much that has not been honourable to the holy and ever-blessed God and Father, that it is with diffidence that we venture upon any remarks concerning it.

'The New Testament does not give us any explanation of the propitiation; it presents as with no theory or scheme concerning it; it simply states it as a great fact in the Divine way of salvation. And it would have been well if the example of the sacred writers in this respect had been more generally followed. Here is the declaration of St. Paul: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a Propitiation, through faith, by his blood, to show his righteousness," etc. (Rom. iii. 24—26). Jesus Christ himself is said to be the Propitiation for our sins. No particular portion of his life or work, his sufferings or death, is specified in our text as constituting the propitiation. Christ, in the whole of his mediatorial ministry—life and work, sufferings and death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession—is our Propitiation. We venture to make two observations. (1) The propitiation was not anything offered to God to render him willing to bless and save us. If proof of this were required, we have it in ch. iv. 10: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the Propitiation for our sins." God did not provide the propitiation to propitiate himself. Our Saviour is the Gift of the Father's love to us, not the Procurer of that love for us. It is nowhere said in the Scriptures that Christ reconciled God to man. Such reconciliation was never needed. The great Father was always disposed to bless and save man. (2) The propitiation was designed to remove obstructions to the free flowing forth of the mercy of God to man. Here was an obstruction: man had broken the holy Law of God, had set it at nought, and was still doing so. But man cannot be pardoned while he stands in such an attitude and relation to Law. Love itself demands that Law shall be obeyed and honoured. True mercy can only be exercised in harmony with righteousness. The well-being of man is an impossibility except he be won to loyalty to the Law of God. Jesus Christ vindicated the solemn authority of God's holy Law by his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. Again, there was an obstruction in the heart of man to the free flowing forth of the mercy of God to him. Man regarded God with distrust and suspicion, if not with enmity. "Alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works" is the apostolic description of unregenerated man. The propitiation was designed to reconcile man to God, and dispose him to accept the offered salvation. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." The sacrifice of Christ is the supreme manifestation of the infinite love of God towards man (cf. ch. iii. 16; Rom. v. 8). When that love is heartily believed in, man is reconciled to God; he no longer regards him as an enemy, but as his gracious and adorable God and Father. This accords with the statement of St. Paul that Christ Jesus is "a Propitiation *through faith* by his blood." "The true Christian idea of propitiation," says Bushnell, "is not that God is placated or satisfied by the expiatory pains offered him. It supposes, first, a subjective atoning, or reconciliation in us; and then, as a further result, that God is objectively propitiated, or set in a new relation of welcome and peace. Before he could not embrace us, even in his love. His love was the love of compassion; now it is the love of complacency and permitted friendship."¹ And this propitiation is for all men. "The Propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." If any are not saved, it is neither because of any deficiency in the Divine purposes or provisions, nor because the propitiation of Christ is limited to certain persons or to a certain number only. The salvation of Jesus Christ is adequate to all men, and is offered freely to all men. If any are not saved, it is because they refuse the redemptive mercy of God in Christ Jesus.—W. J.

Vers. 3—5.—*The true knowledge of God and its infallible proof.* "And hereby we know that we know him," etc. We have in our text—

1. AN EXALTED SPIRITUAL ATTAINMENT. To "know him," i.e. God. This is not to be altered and weakened into knowing certain doctrines concerning him; it is the knowledge of God himself. We may know, or think that we know, much about him, without knowing himself. This knowledge of God is not intellectual, but moral and spiritual. It is not the trained and vigorous intellect that sees God, but the pure heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." This knowledge is that inward and spiritual acquaintance with him which arises out of our faith in him and our love to him. Our Lord speaks of it as identical with eternal life. "This is life

¹ 'The Vicarious Sacrifice,' part iv. ch. 2.

eternal, that they should know thee the only true God," etc. Again, this knowledge is intimately and vitally related to love. "Every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." It is by love that we know him. Without love we cannot know him; the more we know him the more we shall love him, and the more we love him the more clearly and fully shall we know him. Yet, fully and perfectly, we can never know him. The ocean cannot be contained in a tea-cup. The finite cannot comprehend the Infinite. To the most advanced and holy of created intelligences God must ever remain incomprehensible. But we may know him truly, savingly, progressively, blessedly.

II. THE PROOF OF THIS EXALTED ATTAINMENT. "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments," etc. The sure evidence that we know him is "keeping his commandments" and "keeping his Word." The idea of the word (*ἐντολή*) which St. John uses here is "that of a charge laid upon us by one whom we ought to obey, a charge which love and duty urge us to fulfil, instead of the old idea of a law enforced by penalties, under which the slightest dereliction of duty constituted us transgressors. In short, he regards the Christian's duty as of personal rather than legal obligation" (Professor Lias, M.A.). It is certain, as Ebrard says, that "his Word" (ver. 5) means essentially the same as "his commandments." "Nevertheless, 'his Word' is not perfectly synonymous with the 'commandments,' but denotes the revelation of the Divine will as one whole." The word translated "to keep" (*τηρεῖν*) will repay notice. It means "to watch, to guard, to watch over protectively"—"guarding as some precious thing." Thus it comes on to signify "to observe practically"—"observing to keep." When it is used to express obedience, it is obedience because the commandments and the Word are esteemed as precious, and are regarded as treasures not to be broken. "The Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and righteous, and good." 1. *This keeping is habitual.* This is indicated by the use of the present tense in ver. 3: "if we keep." It does not denote the perfect keeping of the commandments without any omission or defect, but their habitual observance. It does not mean sinlessness, but that he who knows God, as a rule obeys him; he does not "walk in the darkness," but "in the light." 2. *This keeping is the development of love.* "Whoso keepeth his Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." There has been much discussion of the question whether the love of God to man or the love of man to God is here meant. The discussion seems to us unnecessary. God is the great Fountain of love. All love flows from him. "We love, because he first loved us." Our love to him and our love to each other are effects of his love to us. If, therefore, we say that the love of God in this verse is our love to him, we speak of his own love in one of its effects. The love of God has been perfected in him who keeps his Word. This cannot mean that the love to God of that man who keeps his Word is so perfected as not to admit of further growth or progress. We may get at the meaning thus: love aims at obedience, delights in obedience. Our Lord demands obedience as an evidence of our love to him (John xiv. 15, 21, 23, 24; xv. 10). If we take "perfected" as meaning that which is appropriately developed, that which has attained its end, then we see how love is perfected in keeping his Word. Our love to him is the effect of his love to us, and his will is that we should express our love to him by keeping his commandments, and when we do so his love attains its design—it is perfected. 3. *This keeping is joyous.* It is the keeping, not of that of which we would fain be rid, but (as the verb implies) of a prized treasure in which we delight. It is joyous, too, because it springs from love. Obedience to those we love is delightful. God's "service is perfect freedom." Where this obedience is not, the profession of the knowledge of God is false. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." A man may be well versed in theology, may hold an orthodox creed, may be a member of a Christian Church, and may profess that he knows God, but if he does not heartily keep his commandments he "is a liar." "They profess that they know God; but by their works they deny him" (Titus i. 16). Let us examine ourselves by these inspired tests. Are we vindicating our Christian confession by our obedience to Divine commands? Are we expressing our love to God by a life conformed to his holy will? If we are, let us rejoice that we have in this a well-founded assurance "that we know him." And let no one dishonour God and delude himself with the false profession that he knows him.—W. J.

Ver. 6.—*Christian profession and consequent obligation.* “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself,” etc.

I. A PROFESSION OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. “He that saith he abideth in him,” i.e. in God. In the paragraph of which our text is a part there is a gradation of ideas as to the relation of the Christian to God: to know him; to be in him; and to abide in him. 1. The Christian is in God by spiritual fellowship. Through Christ the Christian is brought into intimate and hallowed communion with God—he believes his revelation of himself, he endeavours to apprehend his thoughts, he accepts his gracious will, he receives his best inspirations from him. Thus he has his spiritual being in God. He derives his inner life of thought, affection, purpose, and power from him. 2. The Christian is in God by mutual love. “We know and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love; and he that abideth in love, abideth in God, and God abideth in him.” We may obtain help to the understanding of this by considering how our trusted and beloved friends dwell in us and we in them. Distant from us locally and corporeally, yet they are with us truly and spiritually. How the child dwells in the being, occupies the thoughts and affections, of the loving parent! These are imperfect figures of how the true Christian lives in God the Father through Jesus Christ his Son (cf. John xiv. 20, 21, 23; xv. 4; xvii. 21—23). And to say that we abide in him is to profess fidelity and perseverance in this exalted and sacred relation. It is a great profession.

II. THE CONSEQUENT OBLIGATION OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT. “Ought himself also to walk even as he walked.” We have here a change in the pronoun, indicating a change of person. The former personal pronouns from ch. i. 5 to this clause point to God the Father; the present one denotes God the Son. The Christian is to walk as he walked. It cannot be said that the eternal God walks. He is ever the same. His being admits of no advancement or progress. Man is said to “walk in the light;” but of God it is said that he “is light,” and that “he is in the light” (ch. i. 5, 7). But Christ walked this earth as our Example. He spake of his life in this world as a walk: “I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following” (Luke xiii. 33). He hath left us “an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. ii. 21). It is the moral, not the miraculous, in his life that we are called to imitate—his devotion and reverence, his truth and righteousness, his humility and self-sacrifice, his love and holiness. In his character and conduct we have the clear and complete expression of the will of the Father. To walk as he walked is the obligation of every one who professes to be in God. This includes: 1. *Living after the example of Christ.* “Learn of me;” “I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you” (John xiii. 13—15); “Walk in love, even as Christ also loved you,” etc. (Eph. v. 1, 2). Let us endeavour to act in our lives as our Saviour and Lord would act if he were in our place. 2. *Growing in likeness to Christ.* Walking implies advancement. The Divine life in man is a progressive thing. We are summoned to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” “Let us go on unto perfection” (Heb. vi. 1—3). In this respect let us copy the example of St. Paul: “I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus,” etc. (Phil. iii. 12—14). And let us endeavour to prove the reality of our Christian profession by treading in the footsteps of our perfect Exemplar.—W. J.

Vers. 9—11.—*Living in light and love.* “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother,” etc. Our text teaches—

I. THAT THE EXERCISE OF BROTHERLY LOVE IS AN EVIDENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. “He that loveth his brother abideth in the light.” To be “in the light” and to “abide in the light” is to live a true Christian life, a life in harmony with the light of God. By the “brother” we are to understand here neither our fellow-man nor our neighbour, but the members of the Christian community, those who by profession are Christian brethren. We say, “by profession,” because it is clear that in vers. 9 and 11 persons are spoken of who are professedly but not really Christians. We show that we are in the light by our affection for those who are in the light. “God is Light” and “God is Love;” if we are sharers in his light we shall also be sharers in his love. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if

ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 34, 35). "In this one thing," says Stier, "and in no other, is discipleship approved. It is not *knowledge* which avails, not a so-called *faith*, even though, like that of Judas, before the devil entered him, it could cast out devils and remove mountains; rather is this knowledge and this genuine faith known by this love. As little avails the *confession* of my Name, or of all the truth concerning my Person and my kingdom. Where this walking in the truth is not found, the confession becomes an all the more frightful lie. As the disciples of the Pharisees were known by their phylacteries, and as the disciples of John were known by their fasting, and every school by its shibboleth—the mark of the disciples of Christ is to be love. And that a genuine love, as Christ loveth."

II. THE EXERCISE OF BROTHERLY LOVE PROMOTES THE STABILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. "He that loveth his brother *abideth* in the light." Love is an expression of faith; it also increases and invigorates faith. The outgoing of the heart in holy affection to the Christian brotherhood strengthens the new life within the heart. Pure affection for others augments the wealth of our being. "The heart grows rich in giving." The exercise of brotherly love promotes the sanctity and strength of the entire Christian life, the susceptibility of the soul to Divine influences, its firmness in holy principles, and fidelity and facility in Christian practices.

III. THE EXERCISE OF BROTHERLY LOVE PROMOTES THE SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. "There is none occasion of stumbling in him." 1. *Brotherly love will give no occasion of stumbling to others.* Love will keep us from doing any wrong to others, from giving any cause of offence to others, or from doing anything whereby they may be led astray from the path of rectitude or caused to stumble in that path. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." 2. *Brotherly love will preserve us from stumbling ourselves.* Love is not quick to take offence. Love is forbearing, patient, humble; and humbly walks peacefully and safely where pride painfully stumbles and falls. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself," etc. (1 Cor. xiii. 4—7).

IV. THE ABSENCE OF BROTHERLY LOVE IS AN EVIDENCE OF A LIFE OF SIN, NOTWITHSTANDING A PROFESSION OF LIFE IN THE LIGHT. "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. . . . He that hateth his brother is in the darkness," etc. St. John mentions no middle condition between love of the brethren and hatred of them. As Düsterdieck says, "On the one side is God, on the other the world: here is life, there is death (ch. iii. 14): here love, there hate, i.e. murder (ch. iii. 15); there is no medium. In the space between, is nothing. Life may as yet be merely elementary and fragmentary, love may be as yet weak and poor; but still, life in God and its necessary demonstration in love, is present really and truly, and the Word of our Lord is true, 'He that is not against me is with me' (Luke ix. 50): and on the other side, the life according to the flesh, the attachment to the world, and the necessary action of this selfishness by means of hatred, may be much hidden, may be craftily covered and with splendid outer surface; but in the secret depth of the man, there, where spring the real fountains of his moral life, is not God but the world; the man is yet in death, and can consequently love nothing but himself and must hate his brother, and then that other Word of the Lord is true, 'He that is not for me is against me' (Luke xi. 23). For a man can only be either for or against Christ, and consequently can only have either love or hate towards his brother." Mark the characteristics of this life from which brotherly love is absent, as they are here sketched. 1. *Darkness of moral condition.* He "is in the darkness"—in it as the element of his moral life. 2. *Darkness of moral action.* He "walketh in the darkness." His course of life and conduct is in keeping with the gloom of error and sin. 3. *Darkness as to destination.* He "knoweth not whither he goeth." He knows neither the way he is walking in nor the end to which it leads. 4. *Darkness of the spiritual being.* "The darkness hath blinded his eyes." Persons who have long been imprisoned in darkness have frequently lost their physical vision. So here it is said that the moral darkness in which the sinner dwells has destroyed his spiritual vision; and he walks on in moral night, imagining that he is walking in the light of day (cf. John ix. 41).—W. J.

Vers. 12—14.—Seasons of life and their appropriate spiritual experiences. "I write

unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you," etc. Our text teaches: 1. *That the revelations of redemptive truth are adapted to every season of human life.* St. John writes to little children, to young men, and to fathers. To each of these classes the Bible has much to say, and much that is appropriate to each class. The Bible is the book for the little child, for the venerable sage, and for all the intermediate seasons of life. 2. *That there should be an appropriate relation between the physical seasons and the spiritual experiences of human life.* Some of these seasons and experiences are mentioned in our text; and to these we now turn our attention.

I. AN EXPERIENCE COMMON TO ALL CHRISTIANS. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his Name's sake." In this place we regard the "little children" as addressed to all the apostle's readers, irrespective of age. The word which he uses (*τεκνία*) is employed seven times in this Epistle, and always as comprehending the whole of his readers. 1. *The great blessing enjoyed.* "Your sins are forgiven you." This forgiveness is an accomplished fact, and is realized by the Christian as a present blessing. And how great a blessing it is! He who receives it is set free from the guilt of his sins, delivered from their condemnation, exempted from their punishment; and there is imparted to him a blessed consciousness of the favour of God—"the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost." Dr. Maclaren has well said, "Not putting up the rod, but taking your child to your heart, is your forgiveness. . . . And pardon is the open heart of God, full of love, unaverted by any consequences of my sin, unclosed by any of my departures from him." 2. *The medium through which the blessing is obtained.* "For his Name's sake." The Name is that of Jesus Christ, the Saviour and the Anointed of God. The Name is suggestive of all his work for us and for our salvation—his perfect redemptive work, with which the Father was well pleased. We have forgiveness and "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

II. AN EXPERIENCE APPROPRIATE TO CHILDHOOD. "I have written unto you, little children, because ye know the Father." The word used for "children" (*παιδιά*) here is not the same as that in the preceding verse; and we think, with Ebrard, that the apostle does not now address all his readers, but those only who were children in age. One of the first indications of the intelligence of a child is its recognition of its father. Very early in life the heart of the child knows its father. Not as the result of teaching or reasoning, but in the natural unfolding of its powers it makes the recognition. And those who are children in the Christian life know God as their Father, not by evidences or arguments, but by the trust and love of their heart, which have been awakened through Jesus Christ. They know him as their Father, not only because they are his creatures, but by the gracious, loving, tender relations which he sustains to them, and by the existence and exercise of the filial spirit in themselves. They have "received the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father." It seems to us that "little children" in many cases apprehend and realize the Divine Fatherhood more clearly and fully than Christians of mature age; and that they do so because their faith in him is simpler and stronger.

III. AN EXPERIENCE APPROPRIATE TO YOUNG MANHOOD. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one." 1. *The possession of spiritual strength.* "Ye are strong." Strength should characterize young manhood. Strength of body is a good thing; strength of mind is better; strength of soul is best. Spiritual strength is the strength of confidence in God, of love to God and to man, of worthy purposes, of righteous principles, and of vital accord with truth. And this strength finds expression in patient endurance, and earnest labour, and resolute resistance to wrong and battling for the right. The last aspect of this strength is probably prominent in the clause under consideration. The young men were strong in moral conflict. The interpretation is confirmed by the use of the same word in Luke xi. 21, "When the strong man armed," etc.; and in Heb. xi. 34, "Waxed valiant in fight," or, as in the Revised Version, "mighty in war." And this strength is derived through Jesus Christ. Apart from him we can do nothing. We can do all things in him that strengtheneth us. "Therefore be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." 2. *The possession of Divine truth.* "The Word of God abideth in you." The Word of God is the revelation of his mind and will which he had made to man, with perhaps special reference to the gospel.

They had received this Word, and it was prized by them; they retained it as a treasure (cf. Ps. cxix. 162). It dwelt within them (1) as an illuminating force (cf. Ps. xix. 7, 8; cxix. 105, 130; Prov. vi. 23); (2) as a regulative force (cf. Ps. xxxvii. 31; cxix. 1—11, 101). 3. *The attainment of spiritual victory.* "Ye have overcome the evil one," *i.e.* Satan. He is the wicked one, "because the first in wickedness, because most industriously wicked, and because most obstinate and persevering in wickedness." St. John cannot mean that the young men had completely and finally vanquished Satan. He does not so readily accept and submit to defeat, but renews his attacks again and again. The apostle writes of the victory achieved in conversion. There is a sense in which all who have become new creatures in Christ Jesus are already conquerors of the wicked one. They are "delivered out of the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. i. 13; and cf. ch. v. 18). As Alford says, "Whatever conflict remains for them afterwards, is with a baffled and conquered enemy."

IV. AN EXPERIENCE APPROPRIATE TO MATURE MANHOOD. "I have written unto you, fathers, because ye know him which is from the beginning," *i.e.* Jesus Christ (cf. ch. i. 1). The appropriate occupation of age is not conflict, but contemplation; not stormy strife, but serene meditation; to penetrate more deeply into the heart of truth, to get clearer and deeper visions of the Eternal and the Divine, to know more and more of Jesus Christ, and of God in Christ. Maturity in the knowledge of Christ is becoming in Christian fathers. "The whole sum of Christian ripeness and experience is this knowledge of 'thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ.'"

Let each of these classes addressed by St. John seek to realize its own appropriate experience.—W. J.

Vers. 15—17.—*An apostolic prohibition, and the reason thereof.* "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," etc. The text is not addressed to either of the three previously mentioned classes in particular, but to all the apostle's readers. Genuine Christians need to guard themselves against love of the world. The worldly spirit is about us, it pervades much of society, it is active and vigorous; and within us there is a residue of the old worldly and sinful nature. By reason of these things even a true Christian is in danger of loving the world. Notice—

I. THE APOSTOLIC PROHIBITION. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." 1. *The world is not the material universe.* This is a creation of God, and it vividly illustrates some of his infinite perfections. "The heavens declare the glory of God," etc. (Ps. xix. 1—6). The light is the garment in which he robes himself (Ps. civ. 2). The fertility of the earth is an illustration of his bounty and beneficence. A divinely inspired poet, having surveyed the creations of God, exclaimed, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches." We read, "The Lord shall rejoice in his works." There is in nature endless significance for our instruction, much that is vast and sublime to awe us, much that is beautiful to delight us, much that is bountiful to supply our needs, and much to lead our thoughts to God. There is a sense in which we may love this beautiful creation, and with all the more of warmth because our Father made it and sustains it. 2. *The world is not the world of men as such, or mankind.* It is not the world of John iii. 16, "God so loved the world," etc. With the love of benevolence and pity God loved the world of sinful men. And we should cherish feelings of kindness and pity for those who do not yet know Jesus Christ—should love them as God loved the world. 3. *The world here is the world of sinners as distinguished from those that are true Christians,* or, as Ebrard expresses it, "unchristian humanity." By "the world" St. John does not mean the material, but the moral world, the heathen world. In his view, as Dr. Culross says, "the world is in sin. Its sinful condition is variously represented. It is in darkness; it knows not God; it finds his commandments grievous; it lies in wickedness; it is in death—not merely exposed to it as a penalty, but in it as a condition. The 'things' of it are such as these—'the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.' . . . The 'world' of John's day we know, as to its actual condition, from other sources. Let any one turn over the pages of Tacitus, Juvenal, Martial, or Persius, with their often-unconscious disclosures of prevailing licentiousness and cruelty; and what he learns will put 'colour' into John's outlines. The same world—at heart—we still find in the

present century, under modern conditions. It has grown in wealth. It has become civilized and refined. Law has become a mightier thing. The glory of science was never half so bright. But, looking close in, we still find the old facts—a dislike of God and love of sin, pride and self-sufficiency, a godless and selfish use of things, men ‘hating one another,’ selfishness fighting selfishness, an infinite mass of misery.”¹ “Neither the things that are in the world, . . . the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vain-glory of life.” By “the lust of the flesh” we understand the inordinate desire for sensual indulgences, the longing for the gratification of the carnal appetites. How prevalent is this lust! We see it in the epicure, in the wine-bibber, and in others in still coarser and more degrading forms. It is most terrible in its effects upon the soul. “The lust of the eyes,” interpreted by the aid of other Scriptures, seems to mean the eager desire of possession directed towards temporal and material goods, or covetousness. It is not the desire to look upon pleasing, or beautiful, or sublime things, which is here condemned, but the sinful look of avarice. In confirmation of this view, see Prov. xxiii. 5; xxvii. 20; Eccles. iv. 8; v. 10; Luke xiv. 18, 19. Probably there is also a reference to the feeling of hatred and the desire of revenge, as indicated in Ps. xvii. 11; liv. 7; xci. 8; xcii. 11. “The vain-glory of life” is “the lust of shining and making a boasting display.” It points to that which is so prevalent in our day—the desire for grand houses, and costly furniture, and fine horses and carriages, and rich and fashionable dresses; the effort to give luxurious parties and splendid entertainments, and to outshine our neighbours in our mode of life. These things are of the world, worldly; and these things Christians are exhorted not to love.

II. THE REASON OF THIS PROHIBITION. The reason is twofold. 1. *Because the love of the world excludes the love of God.* “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Man cannot love the holy Father and the unchristian world. These two affections cannot coexist in one heart. Either of them, by its very nature, excludes the other. And “the things that are in the world,” the love of which is prohibited, are “not of the Father, but of the world.” They do not proceed from him; they are utterly opposed to his character and will; and, therefore, affection to them cannot dwell in the heart that loves him. Sensuality and covetousness and vain-glory are irreconcilably opposed to love to God. 2. *Because the world and worldly things are transient.* “The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.” “The world” is still the unchristian world. It has in it no elements of permanence. The darkness of moral error and sin must recede before the onward march of the light of truth and holiness. The principles and words which oppose the Church of God are transient; they are passing away. Shall we set our hearts upon such fleeting things? And the lusts of the world are evanescent also. The gratifications of the flesh and of the senses quickly cease. The things which many so eagerly desire and pursue, the pleasures and riches, the honours and vain shows of this world, are passing away like dreams of the night. And even the appetite for some of these things fails. The time comes when the desire for sensual gratifications ceases. Indulgence in the pleasures of the world tends to destroy the capacity for enjoying them. When that time comes, the man of the world, sated, wearied, disappointed, regards these things bitterly and cynically, finding that he has wasted heart and life upon them. Therefore let us not love them. But, on the other hand, “he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” The doing of his will is the evidence and expression of our love to him. Here, as so frequently in the writings of St. John, we see the importance of action. It is not love in profession that is blessed, but love in practice. “If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments.” It is not the creed that is commended, but the conduct. He who thus acts out his love to God abides for ever. He is connected with a stable order of things. He is vitally related to God himself, and is an heir of immortal and blessed life. He is now a participator in the life of Christ; and to all his disciples he gives the great assurance, “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

By all these considerations let us not love the unchristian, unsatisfying, and perishing world; but through our Lord Jesus Christ, let us seek to love the Father with an ever-growing affection.—W. J.

Vers. 20, 27.—*The unction from the Holy One.* “But ye have an unction from

¹ ‘John, whom Jesus loved,’ ch. v.

the Holy One, and ye know all things. . . . But the anointing which ye have received," etc.

I. THE NATURE OF THIS BLESSING. "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One." The "unction," or "anointing," does not signify the act of anointing, but the material which is used in the anointing—the oil, or ointment, or unguent. Here it denotes the Holy Spirit, whom the Christians to whom St. John was writing had received. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed, and Christians are spoken of in the New Testament as "kings and priests" (Rev. i. 6); but we cannot see in our text any reference to either of these aspects of Christian character and life. The apostle is rather contrasting his readers, who had received the anointing from the Holy One, with the antichrists, who were opposed to the Anointed. As Alford expresses it, "The apostle sets his readers, as *χριστοὺς*, anointed of God, over against the *ἀντίχριστοι*." They possessed the Holy Spirit. He was within them as their Teacher, Comforter, Sanctifier. This blessing is of unspeakable and inestimable worth.

II. THE SOURCE OF THIS BLESSING. "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One;" i.e. Jesus Christ. In ver. 1 St. John speaks of him as "the Righteous." In ch. iii. 3 he says that "he is pure." St. Peter said to him, "We know that thou art the Holy One of God" (John vi. 69). And he afterwards spake of him as "the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts iii. 14). And he spake of himself to "his servant John" as "he that is holy, he that is true" (Rev. iii. 7). He baptizes with the Holy Spirit (John i. 33). He sends the Holy Spirit (John xv. 26). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is ascribed to him (Acts ii. 33). Therefore we conclude that he, our Lord and Saviour, is the Holy One from whom Christians receive the anointing; i.e. the Holy Spirit.

III. THE EFFECT OF THIS BLESSING. "Ye know all things. . . . And ye need not that any one teach you." The "all things" cannot, of course, mean all things in science and art, in history and philosophy. An examination of the context will lead us to the true meaning. In ver. 20 St. John says, "Ye know all things;" in ver. 21 and the next sentence he says, "Ye know the truth;" and in the following verse and the next sentence he shows what the truth of which he had spoken is, viz. "that Jesus is the Christ." By the "all things," then, the apostle means "the truth . . . that Jesus is the Christ." All things in the Christian system are comprised in that one great fact. "He who knows this one thing," says Ebrard, "that Jesus is the Christ, knows already in that one thing *all*; there is no most distant height or depth of truth which is not contained or involved in that simple proposition." This interpretation includes other interpretations which are not so clearly drawn from the context; e.g. Alford, "All things needful for right action in the matter under consideration;" Barnes, "All things which it is essential that you should know on the subject of religion;" and others, "All things necessary to salvation." These and others are comprised in the knowledge "that Jesus is the Christ." This knowledge they attained by means of "an unction from the Holy One." We do not understand that the Holy Spirit had communicated unto them new truths, or directly revealed any truth to them. But by reason of his influence they saw the truths which they had received, more clearly, and grasped them more firmly. This is well illustrated by Dr. Chalmers: The Spirit "does not tell us anything that is out of the record; but all that is within it he sends home with clearness and effect upon the mind. When a telescope is directed to some distant landscape, it enables us to see what we could not otherwise have seen; but it does not enable us to see anything which has not a real existence in the prospect before us. The natural eye saw nothing but blue land stretching along the distant horizon. By the aid of the glass there bursts upon it a charming variety of fields, and woods, and spires, and villages. Yet who would say that the glass added one feature to this assemblage? And so of the Spirit. He does not add a single truth or a single character to the book of revelation. He enables the spiritual man to see what the natural man cannot see; but the spectacle which he lays open is uniform and immutable. It is the Word of God which is ever the same." So the Holy Spirit had brought into clear and impressive light the things which they to whom this letter is addressed had learned from the sacred Scriptures and from St. John and other Christian teachers, and had enabled them to realize their importance and power. And as a matter of fact, in our own day we see persons whose educational

advantages have been of the slightest, whose powers and opportunities for study have been most limited, who yet have a clear and comprehensive acquaintance with the essential truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And the reason of this is, they "have an anointing from the Holy One," they are enlightened by the Holy Spirit (cf. John xiv. 26; xvi. 13, 14; 1 Cor. ii. 13—16). But St. John writes further, "Ye need not that any one teach you"—a statement on which Alford remarks, "His assertions here are so many delicate exhortations, veiled under the declaration of their true ideal state of unction with the Holy Spirit who guides into all truth. If that unction were abiding in them in all its fullness, they would have no need for his or any other teaching." The reference is to their knowledge of the great comprehensive truth "that Jesus is the Christ." They were not dependent upon any one for teaching concerning this vital and fundamental fact. But generally speaking, "the Divine unction does not supersede ministerial teaching, but surmounts it."

IV. THE OBLIGATION OF THIS BLESSING. More fully stated this is the obligation which is inseparable from the possession of this anointing from the Holy One. "Abide in him," i.e. in Christ, as the context clearly shows. The person spoken of in vers. 27 and 28 is evidently the Lord Jesus. The exhortation to abide in him is based on the assurance that the anointing which they had received abode in them (ver. 27). The "in him" must not be toned down to his doctrine, or his system, or anything of that kind. "In him" by the exercise of the faith of the heart, by the attachment of holy love, by intimate and reverent communion with him, and by participation in his life and spirit. Thus are we to abide in him (cf. John xv. 4—7). From our subject we learn: 1. *That the illumination of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to a clear and correct apprehension of the great truths of Christianity.* "Words and syllables," says Cudworth, "which are but dead things, cannot possibly convey the living notions of heavenly truths to us. The secret mysteries of a Divine life, of a new nature, of Christ formed in our hearts, they cannot be written or spoken; language and expressions cannot reach them; neither can they be ever truly understood, except the soul itself be kindled from within, and awakened into the life of them" (cf. 1 Cor. ii. 10—12). 2. *That the "anointing from the Holy One"—the influence and presence of the Holy Spirit within us—is a preservative against the seductions of error.* "If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father . . . but the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you," etc. 3. *That the possession of this Divine preservative is not an encouragement to presumption, but a reason for perseverance.* Because the anointing which they received of Christ abode in them, St. John exhorts his readers to "abide in him."—W. J.

Vers. 1—6.—*Sin supposed: sin dealt with.* There is here a contrast to the statement in the last verse of the first chapter. There, a man was supposed to deny the commission of sin. Here, the apostle supposes its existence, and shows how God has dealt with it. We have here—

I. DIVINE PROVISION AGAINST EXPERIENCE OF SIN IN BELIEVERS. 1. *Advocacy as far as our need for it is concerned.* "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye may not sin. And if any man sin," etc. John addresses Christians in the circle of Churches of which Ephesus was the centre, in whom he was deeply interested, as his little children. This term of affection, which Paul only uses once in his Epistles, John uses seven times in this Epistle. It is in accordance with affection being the strongest element in his nature, and also in accordance with his advanced age in comparison with Paul. The addition of the personal pronoun is found only here and in ch. iii. 18. In presenting the contrast, John would naturally have gone on to say, "If we sin." But that would have had the appearance of treating the experience of sin in believers too much as a matter of course. He therefore considers it necessary to interpose words in which he states it to be the object of his writing to them, that they should not sin. It is important to note, in view of subsequent statements, that he does not write to them as *sinless*, but as those who have the ideal of *sinlessness* before them. Struggling on toward sinlessness, we have yet the experience of sin. It was not thus with the Master, who, in his struggle on toward perfection, could say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" "No mere man since the Fall is able, in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but

doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed." This applies even to those who are assisted by grace. Our nature is not thoroughly renewed, and so, as the language bears here, there are *acts* of sin which, according to a former thought, we have to confess to God. How, then, with the constantly recurring consciousness of sin, are we to be advanced to sinlessness? In the answer which the apostle gives to this we are not to understand that he excludes our own pleading; for he repeatedly in this Epistle assumes that it is our duty to ask of God, which must pass into earnest pleading. But, in bringing in the advocacy of *Another*, he views our own advocacy as being insufficient by itself. It is not difficult to see how this should be. It is really involved in that which gives rise to constantly recurring acts of sin. It is one and the same disposition which leads us to shut our eyes to our need, and also makes us lukewarm in seeking the remedy. It unfits us for our being our own advocate, that we have an *insufficient knowledge of our case*. We cannot go into it with that thoroughness and skillfulness with which an advocate should go into a case which he undertakes. We do not know precisely the stage to which we have already come in our deliverance from sin, nor have we an adequate conception of the goal of sinlessness to which we have yet to come. We are, therefore, more or less working in the dark, and our pleading for ourselves must partake more or less of ignorance. "So find we profit," says Shakespeare, "by losing of our prayers." We have not a right idea of the blessings which we really need. We are like children, who ask many things of their parents which it is not wise for them to grant. Again, it unfits us for our being our own advocate, that we have an *insufficient earnestness in urging our case*. To be delivered from sin, from particular sins which beset us, from the love of sin, is a matter essential to our well-being. We ought to plead for it as for our life, and this continuously. We are not to plead as though we would rather be refused, or in the more earnest tone only by fits and starts. But how can our advocacy be up to the mark of what advocacy should be, when what we have need to plead for is earnestness of the whole soul, and this in every successive moment of life? If, then, we are to have perfect advocacy, we must look away from ourselves. 2. *The advocacy that we need*. "We have an Advocate." It has sometimes happened that a person against whom a charge has been laid, for whom a good plea could be presented, has suffered materially for want of an advocate properly to present the plea. This cannot be said of us, for we are told here that, if we sin, *we have an Advocate*. The Divine love has been beforehand with us, and the case of our falling into sin, as we do, notwithstanding our covenant position, and notwithstanding our struggle after sinlessness every day, is met by the provision of an Advocate. There is the same word here which in John's Gospel is translated "Comforter." It is literally *one who is called to our side*. There is no inconsistency in the translation; for in the Gospel we are to think of One who stands by us in our distresses, whereas here we are to think of One who stands by us so that we do not sink under our experience of sin on our way to sinlessness. The Paraclete in the Gospel is the Holy Ghost; but he is said to be *another* Comforter. Christ had been the Paraclete of his disciples, ever at their side to keep them from sinking of heart. He had been their Paraclete even in the sense of Advocate. What are we to understand by the night spent in prayer before the ordination of the twelve? While it was for himself, was it not also for them, "that they might rise to the height of their high calling, not puffed up, but divinely filled with grace and lowly power; till all—all save one—should be found finally not unworthy of this ministry and apostleship? And for us, and for all the long line of Christian generations to be built up on those twelve foundations, believing through their word: may we not so read that long night-prayer of consecration and of intercession by our Priest and King? What are we to make of that prayer for Peter on the last night of our Saviour's earthly life: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"? Have we not here an open vision of the manner in which he was engaged in his private devotions? The Spirit makes up in this respect for the want of Christ's earthly presence; for he is with us to help our infirmities in prayer, and is engaged himself in intercession. The Spirit's advocacy on earth does not, however, supersede our Lord's advocacy in heaven. For even the sending of the Spirit was to be an answer to Christ's future intercession. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." When we sin, then—which is the experience

of all believers in this life—this is the heavenly advocacy that we are to take advantage of. Our minds may turn to the inexhausted power of Christ's work on earth. But, according to what is laid down here, we are to turn our minds more immediately to our Saviour's advocacy. The high priest did not stop with the offering of sacrifice in the court of the temple; but he followed it up by going into the most holy place, and going with incense, which is to be regarded as the symbol of acceptable prayer. So "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." His appearance there means continued priestly service in the form of advocacy for us. As acting for us he takes up our individual cases, with a view to our being brought forward, each in our own way, to sinlessness. Christ has all the *knowledge of our case* that is needed for advocacy. We have to make up for the deficiency of our child. He has to be educated for all the relations of life—educated even physically, educated for business, educated for society. With our larger acquaintance with life we superintend his education; and there is much which he does not comprehend or see the use of now, but which, we hope, he will feel the benefit of hereafter. Christ occupies a similar vantage-ground with regard to our life. He can take up all the threads of our life. He can comprehend its working, in view of the past and in view of the future. He can follow out in detail the whole struggle with sin. And he can judge infallibly how our outward circumstances need to be arranged, how our hearts need to be influenced, with a view to our complete deliverance from sin. All this he turns into matter of intercession for us, and we have the comfort of thinking that the ignorance which cleaves to our prayers is covered by the perfect knowledge of his intercession. He has also all the *interest in us* that is needed for advocacy. It is said that Jesus died *once for all*; but the spirit in which he died was not momentary and evanescent. We sometimes attain to an elevated state of feeling, and then we fall back into an habitually lower state. But the same intensity of interest in us which led Jesus to die for us he has carried into his risen life, and the form which it takes is intercession. We are given to understand that his life on high is directed to the carrying forward of the work of grace in believers; and is this not the guarantee of its completion? "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." The latter Scripture is sometimes quoted in the sense that, while there is life there is hope; but, in accordance with the other Scripture, it is to be understood in the sense that there is, in the living interest and unfailing intercession of the Saviour, covering all deficient interest in our prayers, guarantee for our salvation being carried to the uttermost, *i.e.* being thoroughly completed in sinlessness. 3. *Explanation of its sufficiency.* "With the Father." Christ is our Ambassador at the court of heaven. He is there to represent us, and to protect and advance our interests. But we are not to think of any reluctance on the part of the First Person needing to be overcome, or of all the desire to save us being on the part of the Son. Rather is the Saviour's advocacy to be regarded as the manifestation of the earnest desire of God (without distinction of Person) for our salvation. For it is with the *Father* that Christ intercedes. Does not this suggest to us his being easily reached? Christ tells us of a judge who seemed unreachable, and yet he was found to be reachable by the very lowest of considerations. If there is a way of reaching the worst kind of mind, how much more must there be a way of reaching the Father's heart? Will he take no heed of his children who cry unto him day and night? Will he not interpose for their deliverance from sin when their case is taken up by their heavenly Advocate, who, from all eternity, stands to him in the most intimate of relations? Will the face of his Son turned toward him, and his continual pleadings on our behalf, be unheeded? (1) *Our Representative.* "Jesus Christ the Righteous." He is Jesus, *i.e.* in our humanity, and, at the same time, Christ, *i.e.* the Anointed of God promised to men. He has, therefore, the qualification of nature that is needed for our Representative. But he has also the qualification of character, being here called the Righteous. He does not need to shrink from standing in the presence of God as our Advocate; for he has all the righteousness in our humanity which God demands. He has met the Divine requirement all round, even as the Representative of sinners. God, therefore, looks upon him with infinite pleasure. And will he not be willing to bless us

for the sake of so righteous an Advocate? (2) *His work*. "And he is the Propitiation for our sins." The character of Christ had to do with his work. It was because he always pleased the Father that his work could have value. He is here called "the Propitiation." He was also the Propitiator, but he is called the "Propitiation," as being more distinctive. For whereas a propitiator has usually the means of propitiation outside himself, in Christ both are united. From the sacrificial association of the word, there can be no doubt that the reference is to his death. It was of the nature of a propitiatory offering. The heathen idea was that there was the feeling of revengefulness on the part of the gods toward men. Therefore men had, by their offerings, to propitiate them, *i.e.* to appease them and to make them favourable. The Christian idea is essentially different. It is that God always and necessarily is benevolently disposed toward men, and desires fellowship. But sin has placed an obstacle between us and the Divine love and fellowship. On account of this sin God is angry with us. But Christ is the Propitiation, *i.e.* receives into himself in his death the desert of sin, so that now, as is most pleasing to God, the Divine love and fellowship can be enjoyed. This is properly God reconciling the world unto himself—he who never had thought of evil toward men himself graciously removing the obstacle which sin interposed between us and him. *It is the propitiatory work of Christ that is the basis of his advocacy*. He does not plead our desert, which would tell against our happiness; but he pleads his own offering, the virtue of which was not exhausted in his own age, but is as great to-day as it was eighteen centuries ago. He is the Propitiation absolutely, *i.e.* has atoning virtue without stint—one with his Personality. It is as natural for him to give forth atoning virtue as it is for a rose to give forth fragrance. He is an Offering and a Sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. As incense is grateful to the sense of smell, so, in an infinite degree, is Christ, in his atonement for sin, pleasing to God. Our Advocate, then, in his own inexhaustible sacrificial worth, does not want a plea, and a very strong plea, for the Divine love breaking forth upon us sinners with all blessing. "And not for ours only, but also for the whole world." There is a difference which does not seem to be unintentional. Christ is the Propitiation for the *sins* of believers: he is not the Propitiation for the sins of the world, but for the world itself, as not so much sinning as being in a state of sin. With this difference, he is the Propitiation in the same sense. It is said in a way that is liberating to thought, that he is the Propitiation for the *whole* world. Most perversely Calvin attempts to limit the reference of the atonement here. Luther gives the evangelical exposition: "It is a potent fact that thou too art a part of the whole world, so that thine heart cannot deceive itself and think, 'The Lord died for Peter and Paul, but not for me.'" The meaning of the universal reference of the atonement is most precious, *viz.* that love, which is inseparable from God, has found outlet in the provision of suitable means for the salvation of all sinners of mankind. It is not said that Christ's advocacy extends to the world. "We [believers] have an Advocate." And yet it is worthy of notice that it is in connection with Christ being the Propitiation for the whole world that Christ's advocacy is so plainly taught. If, then, we have an Advocate, what is our duty? It is not to forbear praying ourselves, but rather to join our prayers to our Saviour's advocacy. When difficult matters have to be taken into a court of law, there requires to be the employment of an advocate. It is no easy matter for us to be carried through constantly recurring experiences of sin up to complete salvation. The action which we require to take, and, with new experience of sin, to renew, is to put our case into the hands of our Advocate.

II. EVIDENCE OF THE DIVINE PROVISION AGAINST EXPERIENCE OF SIN IN BELIEVERS BEING PERSONALLY EFFICACIOUS. 1. *The sign of knowledge*. "And hereby know we that we know him, if we keep his commandments." The second "know" (which in the original is in a different tense from the first) is to be understood of the experience of covenant love and fellowship. John wishes to class himself, as we should all wish to class ourselves, with them that know God in this way. But how are we to know, *i.e.* have the consciousness, from moment to moment, that we are thus classed? The sign given here is *obedience*. This is the first "hereby" of the Epistle. There are commandments of God, *i.e.* instructions laid down by him who not only has supreme authority, but supreme knowledge and love. These we are to tend as we would tend a plant. There are certain rules founded upon observation which must be attended to

in horticulture. So we have to apply the maxims of past experience and Divine wisdom to our conduct from moment to moment. We are to see to their having their proper place in regard to the development of our life. (1) *Issue of disobedience.* "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." There is not here a classing with others, but a singling out. The person singled out is bold in his assertion, "I know him;" but he belies it by his conduct. He does not see to the Divine pleasure being carried out in his life, but makes his own pleasure his rule. And, as his assertion is bold, so is his characterization bold. He is described, both positively and negatively, as to his permanent state. He is a liar, *i.e.* lives in an atmosphere of lies; and the truth is not in him, *i.e.* does not rule his thoughts and actions. (2) *Issue of the activity of obedience.* "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected." Instead of singling out, there is now throwing wide the door. Let every one be included in this class who fulfils the conditions. Instead of his commandments we have his Word, by which we are led to think of the commandments in their unity, and especially in their vitality. The Word is the Divine revelation, ever instinct with Divine power, which, entering as a vital principle into us, ever comes forth in new manifestations in our life. This Word we are to tend, so as to bring it forward to all beautiful forms. What, from the Divine side, is the issue of our tending the Word? It is not said, as the contrast would have led us to expect, that the truth of God is in us; but the truth is carried forward into the personal relation. "In him verily hath the love of God been perfected." As love to God is included in what we are to cultivate, this must be God's love to us. According as we cultivate the Word does the love of God toward us reach its end. When our obedience is no mere outward form, but is active, then it can be said that God's love is having its way. Let us, then, in the activity of our obedience, allow freedom for the carrying out of the Divine thought and desire regarding us. 2. *The sign of union.* "Hereby know we that we are in him: he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked." There is here, first, classing with others, and then singling out. The sign of our union to God is here declared to be the imitation of Christ. The assertion which *each* of us makes is that we abide in God, *i.e.* are in God, and mean to continue in God. This assertion brings with it no little obligation. What is the "ought" by which we are bound as making the assertion? It is to walk, even as *that Person* walked. That is the literal translation, and there is only One to whom it can refer. It is he in whom God sees all his thought and desire regarding men. It is he who perfectly kept the commandments, perfectly kept the Word, was the living realization on earth of all that God demands from us. While we go for comfort to his heavenly life of advocacy, we are to go for direction to his heavenly life. He has left us in great detail a pattern of purity, of unselfishness, especially of central obedience. Let us look upon this pattern and then upon our blurred, blotched lives; and, if there is thereby produced in us a deep sense of our own deficiency, let us take encouragement from the thought that he who asks us to copy into our life such a picture of holiness will also supply the needful grace.—R. F.

Vers. 7—11.—*The commandment of brotherly love.* I. THE COMMANDMENT OLD. "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." The commandment indicated in the previous verse, *viz.* to walk as Christ walked, is in this paragraph identified with the commandment of brotherly love. His heart warming to his readers, he addresses them as "beloved." What he has in his mind to lay upon them by his letter was no new commandment. It was an old commandment, older than his connection with them. From the beginning, *i.e.* from their first contact with Christianity down to his connection with them, it had been presented to them. It was no subsidiary matter, such as the form of Church government, which could be held back for a time, but was the very essence of the message which had been delivered to them.

II. THE COMMANDMENT NEW. "Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth." Changing his point of view, he calls it a new commandment. Its being new is contemplated as inhering both in Christ and in them. It is new, because the darkness is passing away and the true light already shineth. What was

this but the new light of Christianity, viz. the light introduced by Christ and spread among Christians? Granted that the duty had been known before, it had been greatly obscured. What an obscurity had there been of it in heathen life! And the light that had been shining in the land of the Jews had been partial. It was only when Christ came and showed its perfect realization, that it could be said to be light having all the elements of truth. Realized in Christ, it was also being realized partially in his people. Thus, not in all places, but in many places, was the darkness giving place to the light, giving promise of the ultimate entire displacement of darkness and prevalence of light.

III. CONDITION OF FULFILLING THE COMMANDMENT, ABSENT. "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now." It is to be inferred that the condition of our loving our brother is our being in the light, *i.e.* as the element in which we live. It is not enough to say that we are in the light; *saying* must be taken along with *acting*, or the state of the feelings. Let a man's character be this, that he hates his brother (is even unsympathetic), he may say that he is in the light, but it is a moral impossibility. The light may have been shining widely around him, may have been shining around him for long years, but it has never yet penetrated his being and displaced his natural darkness. He is in that darkness even until now. This is John's way of putting the Master's lesson, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord." Let us demand from ourselves reality.

IV. CONDITION OF FULFILLING THE COMMANDMENT, PRESENT, WITH BENEFIT. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." The commandment is now stated positively; the condition is stated with a modification. "He that loveth his brother *abideth* in the light," *i.e.* is so related to the light as to have it continually penetrating his being. The advantage of being thus made loving by the light is that he has guidance at every step. He sees what lies in his path, and does not fall over obstacles.

V. CONDITION OF FULFILLING THE COMMANDMENT, ABSENT, WITH DETRIMENT. "But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes." To the state formerly mentioned is added the corresponding walk. The walk of the unloving is in the darkness. He does not see what lies in his path, and may be tripped up at any moment. This follows with a double certainty. The surrounding darkness keeps him from seeing what is immediately before him; but that is not all. The darkness in which he has been moving has operated to destroy his spiritual vision, just as fishes in a dark subterranean cave are known to have become eyeless through long disuse of the organ. —R. F.

Vers. 12—17.—*The great danger of Christians.* I. HOW ADDRESSED. 1. *First time.*

(1) *Generally.* "I write unto you, my little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his Name's sake." In accordance with ver. 1, we are to understand by "little children" all his readers. It is a designation expressive of affection more than of subordination. Christians are addressed according to their fundamental position. What we need first of all is to have our sins forgiven. As unforgiven, our position is fundamentally wrong; we lie under the Divine condemnation. As forgiven, our position is fundamentally right; we come into the Divine favour. The ground on account of which we are forgiven is here said to be his Name (Christ's), *i.e.* what he is declared to be. Because he is declared to be Saviour, to be the Source of all atoning virtue, by believing on him as such we have our sins forgiven by the Father. Those who are thus forgiven can be appealed to against the encroachments of the world.

(2) *Older section.* "I write unto you, fathers, because ye know him which is from the beginning." While all Christians are forgiven, they are divided into the *class of the fathers* and the *class of the young men*. There are those who have been a long time Christians. These, the fathers, are addressed as having the fruit of experience. They know him which is from the beginning, viz. Christ. They have a large amount of peculiarly Christian experience. They know him who best reveals the deep things of God, who was at the beginning, and entered into the Divine counsels about redemption. They know the love of him who, having an unbeginning existence and glory, entered into time and into the midst of sinful men, and devoted himself in shame and anguish

and death—the love this which passeth knowledge. Those who have attained to this experience may well be appealed to against thinking of substituting for it a more worldly experience. (3) *Younger section.* “I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the evil one.” There are those who have not been a long time Christians. These, the young men, are addressed as having victory, the prize of strength. They have not had time for experience, but are in the midst of the conflicts which give rise to experience. Their adversary is here called the evil one, i.e. one who, as the great impersonation and champion of evil, heartily wishes their destruction, and seeks, by all stirrings with and solicitations from without, to compass their destruction. Especially are they exposed to his assaults as having, in their youth, strong passions and illusionary views of life, without the counterpoise of experience. But Christ has always his representatives among the young men. They have not been deterred by their powerful adversary from taking up their position on his side, and showing an active interest in his cause. These youthful victors may well be appealed to against thinking of throwing away victory for the sake of a few worldly pleasures. 2. *Second time.* (1) *Generally.* “I have written unto you, little children, because ye know the Father.” There is not the same Greek word here for “little children” that there is in the twelfth verse. It is a word which points to his hearers not so much as objects of his affection, as placed under his authority and care. There is not sufficient reason for destroying the symmetry of the passage, and supposing the reference to be to those who are literally little children. These are an interesting class, for whom Christ cared separately when he said, “Feed my lambs;” but they are to be regarded here as falling under the class of the young men. For even the little children may win victories over the evil one, by taking up their position on the side of Christ, and standing by his side in all that he requires of resistance to evil, and, beyond that, though their equipment is but small, of aggression on evil. Christians, both old and young, are addressed according to what essentially belongs to them. Being forgiven, they also know the Father, i.e. they have been adopted into his family, have his authority and loving care exercised over them, and are endeavouring to fulfil their duties to him as their Father. That is the basis on which their life goes forward, and they may well be appealed to against taking a worldly basis for their life. (2) *Older section.* “I have written unto you, fathers, because ye know him which is from the beginning.” In writing to the fathers there is no change in his language. We need no new object of knowledge; for the knowledge of Christ comprehends all that we can know. What we need is to have our knowledge of him deepened, extended, cleared, ordered into a more complete whole; and this admits of endless progress. When we have known Christ for years, do we feel that we have exhausted the meaning of his words and his love? The fathers, then, may well be appealed to a second time, not to go aside, like the first human pair, to a forbidden knowledge. (3) *Younger section.* “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one.” In writing to the young men, to the fact of victory he adds the conditions of victory. The immediate condition of victory is strength. The condition of strength is the indwelling of the Word of God. When Christ was in his youthful conflict he opposed a decisive word from the Old Testament to the devil’s lie. Three times he conquered by the use of the same means. Young men are to have their inexperience and rawness made up to them by their grasp of what God has spoken. The Word as a whole, and in its parts, must be in them—in their memory, in their understanding, in their heart—ready for use. And when the needed word is brought up clearly before them, they are rendered invulnerable. Young men who have felt this to be the secret of their strength may well be appealed to not to allow the strength they have acquired to be sapped by worldly compliance.

II. HOW WARNED. 1. *Worldliness forbidden.* “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” We must connect with the world here the idea of that which is *abnormal*, or separated from God. But we are not to think of the morally corrupt world, the world that lieth in the evil one. We are to think of the *world of created good as apart from God*; for it is represented as passing away. What, then, is to be our feeling, the feeling of all Christians—for there is now no distinction of old and young—or rather, what is *not* to be our feeling with regard to the world? The feeling which is most peremptorily vetoed is that of *love*. Some would say, “Love not

the world too much;" what the writer of this Epistle says is, "Love it not at all." Nay, he is yet more explicit. With regard to the various things which constitute the world, as though each passed before him in succession, he says, with the same peremptoriness, "Love them not at all." 2. *Worldliness incompatible with love to God.* "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Earthly things, such as a living, money, art, office, may be sought legitimately and worthily in connection with God. But when they are sought as complete, as ends in themselves, they become rivals to God, and love to them can only be cherished at the expense of love to God. Love to the world and love to the Father (who adopts us in Christ) are so contrary that one heart cannot contain them both. 3. *Three aspects of the worldliness that cannot be traced to God.* "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vain-glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." We have not here all sin; for such sins as hatred of the brethren, heresy, spiritual pride, are not included; we have only three aspects of one sin, viz. worldliness. "The flesh" points to that in which worldly enjoyment has its seat; "the eyes" point to means by which there is a ministering to worldly enjoyment; "life" (means of living) points to there being guarantee of worldly enjoyment. Within the flesh there is the stirring of desire for worldly enjoyment; the eyes are ministers to the flesh, presenting objects for desire. Objects not desired, but possessed beyond what we can appropriate of them for worldly enjoyment, produce a feeling of vain-glory. All this stirring within the flesh, this desiring through the eyes, this gloating over possession, has no high origin; it is not of the Father, but of the world. 4. *Worldliness linked to the transient, not to the abiding.* "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." The transitoriness of the world is brought in as a dissuasive from worldliness. There is a constant flux in earthly things, and the pleasures connected with them are momentary.

"But pleasures are like poppies spread—
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snowflake on the river,
A moment white—then melts for ever;
Or like the borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm."

Not merely does the world pass away, but also *the lust thereof*. After a time our capacity for enjoyment is diminished. Those that look out at the windows are darkened; the daughters of music are brought low; and desire fails (Eccles. xii.). Death severs our connection with the world, and puts an end to all earthly appetency. What is this transitoriness of the world meant to teach us? The voice which is here given to it is this, "Love not the world." If our love is fixed on the world, then the time is coming when we shall be left with a total blank. Divine wisdom counsels another course. It is to do the will of God, i.e. to believe in Christ, and to follow Christ. The recommendation of this course is that it links us to the eternal order of things. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." There are creatures that keep themselves from being drifted about in the waters by fastening themselves on to a rock; so in our mutable element we must secure fixity for our being by attaching ourselves to him who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."—R. F.

Vers. 18—29.—*Antichrist.* I. PERIOD OF ANTICHRIST. "Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour." The apostle addresses his readers with the authority of age and experience. He has been referring to the transitoriness of the world; from that he passes to *the last hour*. What was designated in Old Testament times *the age to come*, extending from the Incarnation to the second coming, is here called not "the last age," or "the last days," but, more strongly, "*the last hour*," to emphasize the fact that we know not the *hour* when the present order of things is to terminate. The solemnity of the end is fitted to have a salutary impression; and it is kept dark, that we may always have the feeling of its being the *last hour*. The present era is for the Christian manifestation; but opposed to it is *the*

antichristian manifestation. John is the only New Testament writer who uses the term "antichrist." Paul's designation is "he who opposeth himself." Antichrist is more than opposer; he is one who opposes under the guise of Christ. He is one who would supplant Christ by assuming to be and to do what Christ is and does. Our Lord had said that many would come in his name, saying, "I am Christ." This was doubtless the foundation for the teaching about the coming of antichrist. John follows the Master in referring to a *plurality* of antichrists. It would seem to follow that the *personal* element changes; the spirit remains. Those who represent separate antichristian manifestations are antichrists; the whole of these manifestations, personally represented, is antichrist. In the apostle's day there were not wanting quasi-Christian movements; they are not wanting still. When Christianity is active, attempts are made to meet the demand it makes, with something *spurious*, resembling Christianity, but not really Christianity. There is a displacing of Christ by priestly pretension, by the multiplication of rites, by the authority of the Church, by the merits of the saints; or there is, on the other hand, an explaining away of the Incarnation and the substitution, hero-worship, the gospel of mere science. Such antichristian developments, however much to be regretted, are only to be expected. John would seem to say that they are the writhings of the last hour, the rising up of evil against him by whom it is being destroyed, increasing in bitterness as the end approaches.

II. RELATION OF THE ANTICHRISTS TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest how that they all are not of us." The same idea is brought out by Paul when he describes the development as an apostasy, *i.e.* a falling away from the Christian position once occupied. The leaders were apostates, perverts, men who used the intellectual quickening, general enlightenment, and even the forms of thought they had got from Christianity, against its essential principles. The leaving of the Christian society by the antichrists of John's day was to be accounted for by their not being animated by the common sentiment, or rather, as it is put, by their not being sustained in their life from the society, but from some other source. They had never been able to say that all their springs were in the Church (Ps. lxxxvii. 7). If they had thus derived from the Church, they would have remained in the Church. But not being the Church's true progeny and upbringing, *they went out*. By this there was served a good *probationary purpose*. Their true character and position were clearly brought out. They were known as persons whom the Church did not own. It is well, when there is so much life in Christian societies, that those who are not of them feel the necessity of going out. It is well, also, when it is made clear with whom we have to do.

III. CONFIDENCE IN THE CHRISTIAN DISCERNMENT OF HIS READERS. "And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and because no lie is of the truth." Christ has not left his people without suitable provision against deception. He is here called the Holy One; and we may conclude that his own holiness has to do with his discernment. It is through his own holy experience, acquired in this world, that he sees things. And so it is the good who have true discernment. "Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." Without holy experience, intellectual giants and the most successful men of business are blind. Christ's provision is closely allied to his own name, *viz. chrism*. It is he who is himself the Christ, the Anointed of God, that supplies the chrism, the anointing oil for his people. After the tabernacle had been constructed, it had to be consecrated by the application, to all its parts and furniture, of the holy anointing oil, for the preparation of which special instructions were given. When Samuel poured the vial of oil on Saul's head he said, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall come upon thee." The anointing of David is thus described: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." What was conferred on prophets and priests and kings is now conferred on Christians, *viz. the anointing Spirit*. The Spirit gives us a pure, deep, rich experience through which we can see things. We are here described *ideally*, as those who, with the anointing of the Spirit, *know all things*. As we are said to be omnipotent within the sphere of our

doing, so we are said to be omniscient within the sphere of our knowing. As in the one case we must think of what is proper for us to do, so in the other case we must think of what is proper for us to know. We are to regard this as guarantee against deception. "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." But it is not possible with what provision we have secured to us. There is no false appearance beneath which it is impossible for us to see, no truth into which it is impossible for us to penetrate. In writing, John recognized the favoured condition of his readers as qualified to know the truth, and to detect every lie as belonging to another category.

IV. ANTICHRIST DEFINED. "Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also." Having recognized their power to detect every lie (passing from the abstract), he asks vividly, "Who is the liar?" i.e. the utterer of the supreme lie, the denier of truth by pre-eminence? His answer is virtually a definition of antichrist, viz. "he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ." Jesus was a historical Person, who had been seen, heard, handled; what was to be predicated of him? As there was a definiteness about Jesus, so there was a definiteness about the Christ, or the Messiah, i.e. there were certain ideas which the Old Testament put into the word, and which the Jews were trained to associate with it. There were these ideas in the Jewish mind as to the work of the Messiah—that he would tell all things (John iv. 25), that he would be a King, that he would be the Saviour of the world (John iv. 42), in a word, meet all spiritual need. There were these ideas as to his Person—that it would not be known whence he was (John vii. 27), that he would abide for ever (John xii. 34), that he would be the Son of God (John i. 49). These ideas were far from being distinctly or consistently held; but they were founded on the Old Testament. When Jesus claimed to be the Christ, it was according to the pure Old Testament conception. The distinguishing part of the conception was his being the Son of God. This was understood by Peter (Matt. xvi. 16), and also by the high priest (Matt. xxvi. 63). The liar here is defined to be he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ; and then this denier of Christ—named antichrist—is regarded as denying therewith the Father and the Son. The antichristian lie, then, comes to be the denial of the Incarnation, which is the key-note of the Epistle, viz. the union of the Son of God and man. The Jewish antichrist refused to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, declared him to be an impostor, and thus set aside the Incarnation. The Gnostic antichrist, which is more pointed at here, taught that the æon, Christ, descended on the man Jesus at his baptism, and left him before the Passion. The antichrist is not confined to one shape or to two shapes, but is protean; its inmost character, however, always is the setting aside of the Incarnation. If God has not formed the connection with humanity, which is pointed to in the Incarnation, then his Fatherhood is not revealed; and we do not *have* the Father, i.e. possess him in living fellowship. Denying the Incarnation, we cannot have the joy of the thought that he has gone the length of sacrificing his Son for us. But, confessing God Incarnate, we have the joy of the Son dying for us, and of the Father giving him up to the death for us.

V. ADVANTAGE OF HOLDING TO THE CHRISTIAN POSITION. "As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise which he promised us, even the life eternal." That which they heard from the beginning was the *truth about the Incarnation*. If that *abode* in them, constantly mingled with their being, then they would also abide in the Son and in the Father—would have constant communion, not only with the incarnate Son, but with his Father. The promise contained in the Incarnation is the *life eternal*. What could such condescending love mean but that, in communion with the Son and the Father, we should have our highest well-being inalienably secured to us? Let, then, the Incarnation dwell in our minds. Let it elevate our conception of God; let it touch our hearts; let it be motive-power to our wills. According as it takes possession of us do we advance toward the goal of our being.

VI. RENEWED EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE IN HIS HEARERS. "These things have

I written unto you concerning them that would lead you astray. 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 his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him." The antichristian teachers were busy at their work, trying to lead them astray. That was his motive for writing to them as he had done. He did not thereby intend to convey any want of confidence in them. They had immediate communication with Christ, access to his thoughts through the reception of the anointing Spirit. The anointing abiding in them made them independent of any human teacher such as he was. Christ was present, in his Spirit, to teach them as every new occasion required—to teach them what was truth and what was no lie, to teach them always in the way of opening up the meaning of the original message. Thus taught by his Spirit, they abode in him, notwithstanding the attempts to lead them astray. This doctrine does not exclude new developments; but these must be developments of the original teaching. We have thus a safeguard against extravagances. We are not to despise human helps; but it is well that we can all have the truth witnessed in our minds. Our teachers are not intended to see for us (which is the Roman Catholic idea), but to help us to see for ourselves.

VII. EXHORTATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR KNOWLEDGE, IN WHICH TRANSITION IS MADE TO A NEW SECTION. "And now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him." In this hortatory part he addresses them, not as under his care, but rather as objects of his warm affection. They knew, as we have seen, how to abide in Christ; let them, then, abide in him. It was a great fact that Christ was to be manifested, i.e. in glory, though there was uncertainty as to the time of the manifestation. What was their relation to that manifestation? Were they prepared, the moment of its occurrence, to pass into his presence with boldness, and not "as a guilty thing surprised," to shrink with shame from him? They *knew* what was required. It was a requirement founded on what they *knew* God to be, viz. *righteous*. "The righteousness of God is the Divine attribute of an active nature, by virtue of which God wills and performs all things which are conformable to his eternal Law, prescribes suitable laws to his creatures, implements his promises made to man, rewards the good, and punishes the ungodly." The requirement, then (to which there is no exception), is *doing righteousness*, i.e. actively fulfilling our duties. The inner abiding in Christ must pass into the outer life of God-defined and God-like activity. Only thus can we show ourselves to be begotten of God—with which idea the new section begins.—R. F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—ch. v. 12.—3. SECOND MAIN DIVISION. *God is Love.*

Ver. 1—24.—(1) *The evidence of sonship. Righteousness.*

Ver. 1—3.—The Divine birth is the outcome of the Divine love.

Ver. 1.—Behold what manner of love! *Ποταμός*; literally, "of what country," in the New Testament always implies amazement (Matt. viii. 27; Mark xiii. 1; Luke i. 29; vii. 39; 2 Pet. iii. 11); but, as the original meaning leads us to expect, it implies marvellous *quality* rather than marvellous *size*. "Love" must be taken literally: the Divine love itself, and not a mere proof of it, has been given. *Ποταμὸν ἀγάπης* strikes the key-note of the whole section. "And

the goal of this love (*ἡ*) is that once for all (aorist) we have received the title 'children of God.'" And, whatever cavillers may say, the title is rightfully ours. (The words, "and (such) we are," are quite rightly inserted in the Revised Version after "children of God.") This is shown by the fact that the world does not recognize us as such, because from the first it did not recognize God. Had it known the Father, it would have known the children. *Διὰ τοῦτο* in St. John refers to what precedes (v. 16, 18; vii. 22; viii. 47; x. 17; xii. 18, 27, 39); it does not merely anticipate the *ὅτι* which follows it. In logical phraseology we have here first the major premise, then the conclusion introduced by *διὰ τοῦτο*, then (to clench the argument) the minor premise introduced by *ὅτι*—

We are children of God;
Therefore the world knows us not;
For the world knows not God.

But we must beware of supposing that every one who fails to recognize *our form* of Christianity is necessarily of the world. St. John invariably (but comp. Rev. xxi. 7) speaks of "children of God" (*τέκνα Θεοῦ*), St. Paul generally of "sons of God" (*υἱοὶ Θεοῦ*). The latter expression can apply to adopted sons; the former, strictly speaking, implies actual parentage. In saying *καληθάμεν, καὶ ἐσμεν*, St. John appeals to the conscious nobility of Christians: we have this magnificent title with its corresponding dignity.

Ver. 2.—Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest (or, *it never yet was manifested*) what we shall be. The emphatic *νῦν* is in opposition to *ὁπώρα*: our present state is known; our future remains still unrevealed. Again (ch. ii. 27, 29), we are in doubt about the construction. What is the nominative to "shall be manifested" (*φανερωθῇ*), "he" or "it"? The context is strongly in favour of "it," *i.e.* "if it shall be manifested *what we shall be*;" ch. ii. 28 seems to favour "he," *i.e.* "if Christ shall be manifested." The context must prevail. "Our future state is not yet made manifest. We know that on its manifestation we shall find ourselves like God." The two things will be contemporaneous. The 'Speaker's Commentary' quotes the following anecdote: "When some heathen converts to Christianity were translating a Catechism into their own language, they came upon 1 John iii. 2. They stopped. 'No; it is too much,' they said; 'let us write that we shall be permitted to kiss his feet.' Beware of inverting the meaning of the last clause, *ὅτι ὁψόμεθα, κ.τ.λ.* It does not mean that the seeing God is a *proof* or *sign* of our being like him (Matt. v. 8), but the *cause* of our being like him: "We shall be like him, *because* we shall see him." God is light (ch. i. 5), and light is *seen*. In this life (*νῦν*) we cannot see the light of the Divine nature "as it is," but only as it is reflected; and the reflected light cannot transmit to us the nature of the Divine original, though it prepares us to receive it. Hereafter the sight, "face to face" (1 Cor. xiii. 12), of the Light itself will illuminate us through and through, and we shall become like it. Rothe takes "like him" to mean like Christ (Rom. viii. 16, 17, 29; 2 Cor. iii. 18; comp. John xvii. 24; Col. iii. 18; comp. Rev. xxii. 4; i. 7).

Ver. 3.—Such being our hope, based upon God's promises (*ἐν' αὐτῷ*), of becoming like him, we must keep this prospect ever in view, and live up to it. Commentators differ as to whether *αὐτῷ* refers to the

Father or Christ, and so also with regard to *ἐκείνος*. The best way is to take *αὐτῷ* as God, and *ἐκείνος* as Christ; this agrees with *αὐτόν* in ver. 2, with *ἐκείνος* in ver. 5, and with the common use of the two pronouns. It is doubtless possible, especially in St. John, to take *ἐκείνος* as merely recalling the person already indicated by *αὐτός* or otherwise, and make both pronouns here refer to God. At first sight this seems to make a better sequence between vers. 2 and 3: hereafter we shall be like God; therefore here we must strive to become pure as he is. Moreover, it is of the Father that it is written, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (Lev. xi. 44; 1 Pet. i. 15, 16); and again, "Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. v. 48). But the other is simpler grammatically, and preserves the logical sequence equally well. Hereafter we shall be like God. Every one who has such a hope as this will aim at becoming like God here; *even as Jesus Christ has set us an example*, a perfect realization of human conformity to God.

Vers. 4—12.—Sin is absolutely incompatible with Christ's work of redemption and our union with him (vers. 4—8), and also with being born of God, as is shown by the presence or absence of brotherly love (vers. 9—12).

Ver. 4.—Once more the apostle turns from the positive to the negative. Having shown what birth from God involves, he goes on to show what it excludes. "Every one that doeth sin" evidently balances "every one that hath this hope" (ver. 3), and "to do sin" is the exact opposite of "to do righteousness" (ch. ii. 29). Sin is lawlessness (*ἡ ἀνομία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία*). Both words having the article, the two terms are exactly equivalent—all sin is lawlessness, and all lawlessness is sin. *Ἀνομία*, like "lawlessness," expresses the *ignoring* of the law rather than the *absence* of it. "The law" means the law of God in the fullest sense, not the Mosaic Law. In short, sin is defined as the transgression of God's will.

Ver. 5.—Two additional reasons for the absolute separation of the children of God from sin. (1) They know well that the Son of God was manifested in the flesh to put away the sins (of the world, John i. 29); not mere "sins," one here and one there, but "the sins" (*τὰς ἀμαρτίας*), whatever sins exist. *Ἡμῶν*, though strongly supported, is probably not genuine. *ἄρην* in itself means not "to take on himself, or bear," but "to take away;" it expresses the removal rather than the manner of removal. But it may represent the Hebrew *nasa*, which combines the two meanings (Lev. x. 17; xxiv. 15; Isa. liii. 12). (2) The Son of God was absolutely separated from sin.

Ver. 6.—Every one that abideth in Christ *ipse facto* sinneth not; for, if he sins, he ceases to abide in him. Just in so far as he abides, he does not sin. Or it may mean that he who abides in Christ cannot deliberately and habitually sin. But then would not St. John have written, "He that abideth in Christ abideth not in sin"? But the main difficulty is in the second half. In what sense is it true that every one that sinneth hath not seen Christ? In the main two explanations are given. (1) The Greek perfect expresses the present and permanent result of a past action, and is often equivalent to a present. No doubt; and all would be easy if we had only to deal with *ἐγνώκε*, which means, "he hath come to know," equivalent to "he knoweth." But does *ἐώρακε* ever mean "he seeth," as Alford suggests as the best rendering for a version? If St. John simply means that whoever sins thereby ceases to see and know Christ, he would hardly express himself thus. (2) The fact of the man's sinning proves that his perception and knowledge have been imperfect, if not superficial, or even imaginary; just as the fact of Christians leaving the Church proves that they never were really members of it (ch. ii. 19). This explanation is preferable. In ver. 2 we were told that seeing God will make us like God; and similarly, to see and know Christ make us like Christ. Whoever is unlike Christ, to that extent has not seen nor come to know him. The best of us, it may be, have seen but the hem of his garment.

Ver. 7.—St. John repeats his declaration with emphasis and fresh considerations; hence the repetition of the tender address (ch. ii. 1), "Little children, let no one ever seduce you into the belief that character and practice can be separated. He that doeth righteousness is righteous; for a righteous man inevitably practises righteousness." There are always persons who endeavour to reconcile religion with moral laxity; and in St. John's day some Gnostics definitely taught that conduct was immaterial to the spiritual man, for no external acts could defile such. "The external acts," says St. John, "prove the man's spiritual character and origin. He that doeth righteousness is righteous and is of God: he that doeth sin is of the devil." Note the difference between "even as" in vers. 3 and 7. There *καθώς* introduces a pattern as a fresh motive for self-purification; here it introduces a comparison. Christ is righteous, and his character produces nothing but righteousness; so also is it with the righteous Christian.

Ver. 8.—The contrary position given to make the statement clear and emphatic. The devil (*ὁ διάβολος*) is the great accuser or

slanderer, as in Job i. and ii. (comp. John xiii. 2; Rev. ii. 10; xii. 9, 12; xx. 2, 10). The devil sinneth from the beginning (*ἀπ' ἀρχῆς*). From the beginning of what? From the beginning of sin. The devil was the first sinner, and has never ceased to sin. Other answers are: from the beginning (1) of the devil, (2) of the creation, (3) of human history. Some of these are scarcely in harmony with Scripture; none, perhaps, fit the context so well as the explanation adopted. If the devil committed the first sin, and has sinned unceasingly ever since, then whoever sins is akin to him, is morally his offspring (John viii. 44). There is the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the evil one, and man cannot find or make a third domain; if he is not in the one he is in the other. This verse, like John viii. 44, seems to be conclusive as to the personal existence of the devil. *Ἐκ τοῦ διαβόλου* balances *ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ*: if the one is a mere personification of a tendency, why not the other? Both should be personal or neither. "It is not true that St. John speaks so confidently of a devil because he was a Jew and was filled with Hebrew opinions. For once that the devil is introduced in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, he is spoken of twenty times in any Gospel or Epistle" (Maurice), and not least in the Gentile Luke. With the latter half of ver. 8. comp. ver. 5. Christ's act in removing our sins from us destroys the devil's works; for by the manifestation of the Light (John i. 5) the darkness is dispersed and destroyed. Our sins are the evil one's works: what is sin in us is his natural occupation. (For *λύνει* in the sense of unbinding or dissolving, and therefore destroying—a use specially frequent in St. John—comp. John ii. 19; v. 18; vii. 23; x. 35.) The *φάνερως* includes the whole work of Christ on earth.

Vers. 9—12.—Sin is absolutely incompatible with being born of God, as is shown by the presence or absence of brotherly love.

Ver. 9.—Having stated that every one that doeth sin is of the devil, St. John now states the opposite truth, but from the other side; not "every one that doeth no sin is of God," which hardly needs to be stated; but every one that is begotten of God doeth no sin, which is startling. Who, then, can be begotten of God? But the statement is similar to that in ver. 6, and is to be similarly understood. So far as any man sins, his regeneration is incomplete. If the new birth from God were perfect, sin would be morally impossible (*οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν*). The new principle of life abides and grows in him, and, under perfect conditions, it entirely prevents the old unregenerate nature from rebelling. Note that St. John does not say *οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν*, "cannot commit a

sin," but *ὁ δύνανται ἀμαρτάνειν*, "cannot be a sinner." An act is different from a state of sin. This is an ideal to which every Christian is bound to aspire—inability to sin. But to some extent this ideal is a fact in the case of every true Christian. There are sins which to a good man are by God's grace quite impossible. The meaning of *σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει* is uncertain: either (1) "His seed abideth in Him," i.e. those who are born of God abide in God; or (2) "his seed abideth in him," i.e. the new principle which he has received continues to operate in the man; or (3) "His seed abideth in him," i.e. God's quickening Gift continues to operate in the man. (For *σπέρμα αὐτοῦ*, in the sense of "those born of God," comp. Isa. liii. 10.) But this is the least probable of the three interpretations; in this sense St. John would probably have written *τέκνον*. Note the tense of the concluding verb, *γενένηται*, not *ἐγενήθη*: his birth from God is a fact which *still continues*, not one that is past and gone.

Ver. 10.—The question whether "in this" (*ἐν τούτῳ*) refers to what precedes or to what follows is here unimportant, for both are similar in meaning; and "in this" may refer to both. "By their fruits ye shall know them." The children of God do righteousness, and not sin; the children of the devil do sin, and not righteousness. Of course, moral parentage is meant in both cases. Nothing here lends any countenance to the view that the writer is a dualist and inculcates two principles of existence—God and the devil. All, whether good or bad, are God's creatures (John i. 3); but while all are his children by creation, some become his children spiritually also, while others become the children of Satan. St. John's "teaching about the devil is not at all agreeable to those who dwell exclusively on the sunny aspects of the world and of life, and would shut their eyes to what is dark and terrible. They like to hear of a Being who is all-gracious and loving; the vision of one who is the enemy of all that is gracious and loving shocks them—they wish to suppose that it belongs to the world's infancy, and that it disappears as we know more" (Maurice). The expression, "the children of the devil," must not be confounded with the Hebraistic expressions, "children of perdition," "children of darkness," "children of light," "son of death," "son of perdition," etc. As so often, St. John not only restates the case in a new form, but adds a new thought to it—he that loveth not his brother. This forms the link with the next section (vers. 13-24), on brotherly love. Of all failures in doing righteousness this is the most conspicuous—failing to love one's brother. And who

is my brother? The answer is the same as to the question, "And who is my neighbour?" Mankind at large. The meaning cannot be limited to the children of God. Even *τοὺς ἀδελφούς* (vers. 14, 16) does not exclude unbelievers, still less does *τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ*. This is confirmed: (1) By the fact that the opposite case (ver. 13) is the children of the world hating *Christians*; the true opposite of Christians loving Christians would be the children of the world hating *one another*. (2) By the cited example of Christ (ver. 16), who died for us when we were aliens from God. Of course, if the Christian must love all men, *a fortiori* he must love Christians.

Ver. 11.—Because the message (*ἀγγελία*: see on ch. i. 5) which ye heard from the beginning is this. Not merely in the beginning, but from the beginning: it was among the first announcements, and it had never ceased to be in force. Jerome, in his 'Commentary on Galatians' (vi. 10), tells us that when St. John became too infirm to preach, he used often to say no more than this, "Little children, love one another." His hearers at last wearied of it, and said, "Master, why dost thou always say this?" "It is the Lord's command," he replied; "and if this alone is done, it is enough."

Ver. 12.—The sentence is of an elliptical form, common in language. The full sense is, "Not that we should do even as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother." Cain's conduct typifies the attitude of the world towards Christians. *Σπάσειν* in the New Testament occurs only here and in Revelation. In the LXX. and the New Testament it seems to mean "slay" without necessarily implying the cutting the throat of a victim. That Cain's works were evil is not stated in Genesis, but is inferred from God's rejection of him. Compare carefully the remarkably parallel passage, Heb. xi. 4. The wicked envy the good the blessedness of their goodness, and try to destroy what they cannot share. The war between good and evil is one of extermination; but the wicked would destroy the righteous, while the righteous would destroy wickedness by converting the wicked.

Vers. 13-24.—Hate and death contrasted with love and life (vers. 13-15); generous love, which has its pattern in the self-sacrifice of Christ (vers. 16, 17); sincere love, which is the ground of our boldness toward God, who has commanded us to love (vers. 18-24).

Ver. 13.—Human nature is the same as of old. There is still a Cain, the world, hating its Abel, the Church. Therefore marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth

you. Here only does St. John use the address, "brethren," which is appropriate to the subject of brotherly love. Elsewhere his readers are "children" or "beloved." The "if" (εἰ with indicative) expresses no doubt as to the fact, but states it gently and conditionally.

Ver. 14.—We know that we have passed over out of death into life (John v. 24), because, etc. "We" is emphatic; whatever the world may feel about us, we have certain knowledge (not γινώσκουσιν, but ἡμεῖς οἶδαμεν). The love of the brethren is the cause, not of the passing over, but of our knowing it. It proves that we have passed. And this test every one can apply to himself: "Do I, or do I not, find the love of the brethren within me?" A Christian can no more live without love than a plant can live without growth. He that loveth not abideth in death: he has not made the passage over. There is no accusative after "loveth," τὸν ἀδελφόν being a gloss. The statement is quite general; absence of love implies an atmosphere of death.

Ver. 15.—As in ch. iv. 20, St. John passes at once from not loving to hating, treating the two as equivalent. He takes no account of the neutral ground of indifference. He that is not for his brother is against him. Indifference is hate quiescent, there being nothing to excite it. Love is the only security against hate. And as every one who does not love is potentially a hater, so every hater is potentially a murderer. A murderer is a hater who expresses his hatred in the most emphatic way. A hater who does not murder abstains for various reasons from this extreme way of expressing his hate. But the temper of the two men is the same; and it is obvious (οἴδατε, "ye know what needs no evidence") that every murderer is incapable of possessing eternal life. It is the murderous temper, not the act of homicide, that excludes from eternal life. St. John, of course, does not mean that murder is an unpardonable sin; but he shows that hate and death go together, as love and life, and that the two pairs are mutually exclusive. How can life and the desire to extinguish life be compatible? It is very forced to interpret ἀνθρωποκτόνος as either "destroyer of his own soul," or "destroyer of the hated man's soul," by provoking him to return hate for hate.

Ver. 16, 17.—The nature of love as shown by Christ, and its obligation on Christians. Love has been declared the criterion for distinguishing the children of God from the children of the devil. It remains to show what love is; and this is best seen in a concrete example. "The Eternal Word, incarnate and dying for the truth, inspires

St. John to guard it with apostolic chivalry; but also this revelation of the heart of God melts him into tenderness towards the race which Jesus has loved so well. To St. John a lack of love for men seems sheer dishonour to the love of Christ" (Liddon).

Ver. 16.—In this (ver. 10; ch. ii. 3) we have come to know (have acquired and possess the knowledge of) love (what love is), in that he laid down his life for us. This is better than "We have come to know love as consisting in this, that he laid down his life for us," which would have been ἐν τούτῳ οἶδαν. Cain is the type of hate; Christ, of love. Cain took his brother's life to benefit himself; Christ laid down his own life to benefit his enemies (see on John x. 12). This realized ideal of love we must imitate; ready to sacrifice ourselves, and even our lives, for the good of others. The effacement of another's rights and perhaps existence for one's own sake is the essence of hatred; the effacement of one's self for another's sake is the essence of love. Christ died for those who hated him; and the Christian must confront the hatred of the world with a love that is ready even to die for the haters. This shows that the "brethren" here and in ver. 14, though used primarily of Christians, does not exclude unbelievers; otherwise the parallel with Christ would be spoiled (see on ver. 10).

Ver. 17.—But (ἐπεὶ) if a man not only fails to do this, but even steadily contemplates (θεωρεῖ) another's distress, and forthwith (αἰσίστη) closes his heart against him, although he has the means of relieving him, how can he have any love for God? The meaning is not, "How can God love him?" as is plain from ch. iv. 20. But, possibly "love such as God has shown towards us" may be meant (ch. iv. 10). "The world's goods" (τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου) is literally "the world's means of life" (see on ch. ii. 16, and Trench on 'New Testament Synonyms,' for the difference between βίος and ζωή). (For τὰ σπλάγχνα as the seat of the affections, comp. Luke i. 78; 2 Cor. vi. 12; vii. 15; Phil. i. 8; ii. 1; Philem. 7, 12.) The ἀπ' αὐτοῦ is graphic; closes his heart and turns away from him (ch. ii. 28).

Ver. 18-24.—As in ch. ii. 28, St. John bursts out into personal exhortation (comp. ver. 13; ch. iv. 1, 7), based upon the preceding statements. He then restates the motive in a new form both positively and negatively.

Ver. 18.—Little children (τεκνία, the μωβ being spurious). This address, as in ch. ii. 28, introduces the summing up of the section. It may be doubted whether the absence of ἐν with the first pair (λόγῳ μὴδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ) and its presence with the second (ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ) indicates any marked

difference, as if *λόγῳ* expressed the instrument, and *ἐν ἔργῳ* the element or sphere. This introduces a false antithesis, like "Do not dig with a stick, but dig in the earth." (For the Hebrew *עַל* to express the instrument, comp. Rev. xiii. 10.) "Nor yet with the tongue" is not a tautological addition. One may love *in word* only, and yet the affectionate words may be quite sincere; and this is a common case. People say kind things which they mean at the moment, but afterwards they do not take the trouble to act kindly. But to love *with the tongue* only is far worse. This is to say kind things which one does not mean, and which one knows to be unreal. Deeds are needed to complete the kind word; truth is needed to correct the insincere tongue.

Ver. 19.—In this; or, hereby (*ἐν τούτῳ*), here clearly refers to what precedes; and the thought is similar to that in ver. 14. By sincere and active love we shall come to know (*γινώσκμεθα*) that we are children of the truth. "The truth" here is almost equivalent to "God;" and we seem to have here an echo of Christ's words to Pilate, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (comp. ch. ii. 21; John iii. 31; viii. 23, 47, etc.). The construction in what follows contains several doubtful points: (1) whether *πέλομεν* is co-ordinate with *γινώσκμεθα* or *ἐσμέν*; (2) if the former, whether *ἐν τούτῳ* goes on to *πέλομεν*, or is confined to *γινώσκμεθα*; (3) whether we should read *ὅτι ἔαν* or *ὅτι ἐάν*. In all three cases the first alternative is perhaps preferable: And hereby we shall persuade our heart before him (that we are of the truth, and therefore have nothing to fear), whereintoever our heart condemn us. But on the third point see Dr. Field's note in 'Otium Norvicense,' pars iii. Before him is very emphatic; it is in God's sight that the children of the truth are able to quiet their hearts, not merely in their own eyes. (For *πίσω* used absolutely, comp. Matt. xxviii. 14; Acts xii. 20; 2 Cor. v. 11.)

Ver. 20.—Our heart means our conscience, not the affections, which would be *τὰ σπλάγχνα* (ver. 17). If we are conscious of sincere and habitual love, this will calm us when conscience reproaches us (comp. ch. i. 9; ii. 1, 2). St. John never uses the more technical term *συνείδησις*, which occurs in the Acts and 1 Peter, and is very frequent in St. Paul. God is greater than our heart. It is asked whether this means that he is more merciful or more rigorous. Neither the one nor the other. It means that, although our conscience is not infallible, God is. Our hearts may be deceived; he cannot be. He knoweth all things. An awful thought for the impenitent, a blessed and encouraging thought for the penitent. He

knows our sins; but he also knows our temptations, our struggles, our sorrow, and our love.

Ver. 21.—Beloved (ch. ii. 7; iii. 2), there is a still more blessed possibility. If the consciousness of genuine love will sustain us before God when our heart reproaches us, much more may we have confidence towards him (ch. ii. 28) when it does not reproach us.

Ver. 22.—And (as a guarantee that this confidence is not baseless or misdirected) whatsoever we ask, we receive from him. Note the present tense: *λαμβάνομεν*, not *ληψόμεθα*. Whatever the child of God asks as such, he *ipso facto* obtains (John xv. 7). This is the ideal condition of things; for the child of God cannot ask what displeases his Father. And we are his children "because we keep his commandments." The *ὅτι* must not be connected too closely with *λαμβάνομεν*, as if our obedience were the cause of God's hearing our prayers. Our obedience shows that we are such as can pray efficaciously. (For the parallelism, comp. Exod. xv. 26; Isa. xxxviii. 3.)

Ver. 23.—And his commandment is this (comp. ver. 11), that we should believe the Name, etc. "Do not forget," St. John would say, "what the full scope of his commandment is. It is not exhausted by loving the brethren; we must also believe in his Son; and the one implies the other." What is the meaning of "believing the Name (*πιστεύειν τῷ ὀνόματι*)"? We can believe a document (John ii. 22; v. 47), or a statement (John v. 47; xii. 38), or a person (John x. 37, 38); but how can we believe a name? By believing those truths which the name implies: in the present case by believing that Jesus is the Saviour, is the Messiah, is the Son of God. To produce this belief and its consequence, eternal life, is the purpose of St. John's Gospel (John xx. 31); it is also the will of God (John vi. 40), and the command of his Son (John xiv. 1). This belief will inevitably produce as its fruit that we "love one another [present tense of what is habitual], even as Christ gave us commandment" (John xiii. 34; xv. 12, 17). Throughout the Epistle, and especially in this passage (vers. 22-24), the references to Christ's farewell discourses in the Gospel are frequent. Here the main ideas of those discourses are represented—obedience to the Divine commands, particularly as to faith and love; promised answer to prayer, abiding in God; the gift of the Spirit (see on ch. iv. 5).

Ver. 24.—We are again in doubt as to whether *αὐτοῦ* and *αὐτῷ* refer to God the Father or to Christ. The former seems better on account of ver. 22; but the latter may be right (John xiv. 15; xv. 5). Com-

pare the conclusion of the first main division (ch. ii. 24—28). In this (or, *hereby*) probably refers to what follows; the *ἐν* does not disprove this, in spite of the *ἐκ* which follows. St. John has sketched two constructions: "In this we know . . . *in that*" (*ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν . . . ὅτι*), as in ver. 16; and "From this we know . . . *from*" (*ἐκ τούτου γινώσκουμεν . . . ἕκ τού*); comp. ch. iv. 6. From the Spirit which he gave us. "He" is probably the Father (ch. xiv. 16, 17), and

the norist (*ἐδωκεν*) refers to the special occasion of Pentecost. Hitherto St. John has mentioned only the Father and the Son; now the Spirit also (alluded to in ch. ii. 20, 27) is introduced by name as a witness and test of the truth. The sentence forms the transition to the subject of the next section (ch. iv. 1—6), which is a sort of digression, the subject of love being mentioned in ver. 7. This verse is said to have been a favourite with Spinoza.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—"What manner of love!" *Connecting link:* The apostle has just spoken about being "born of God." This suggests the thought that, if *born of God*, then are we *children*! A relation so near and dear, a privilege so great, inspires him with a rapturous joy. He lingers exultingly on the thought, and calls on his fellow-believers to contemplate it as an amazing proof of the love of God. Whence our topic—*So great love an object for adoring contemplation.* There are some texts which actually oppress the preacher with their grandeur. This is certainly one of them. The utmost that we can do is to ask the reader to follow us as we endeavour to point out what it contains, and then to invite to its full and loving contemplation. This is our order of exposition. "Behold," etc.

I. LET US OPEN UP THE CONTENTS OF THIS GREAT LOVE OF GOD AS POINTED OUT IN THE TEXT. Need we ask, "What is love?" The question would have been needless were it not that human handling has so vitiated the New Testament teachings concerning it. Evidently here love is regarded *in action*. So looked at, love is righteousness and benevolence acting in harmony. Apart from righteousness, benevolence would be a maudlin sentimentalism. Righteousness without benevolence would seem rigid and frigid. Benevolence is the beauty of righteousness. Righteousness is the strength of benevolence. "Strength and beauty" are both in God; and, together, they make up *love*. Here we have: 1. *Love's origin.* "The Father." Here is love's fount, love's central fire. A self-kindled, self-sustaining love. Needing no pleading from without, but gushing forth spontaneously from the "righteous Father," from the very delight of loving! Yes, and loving, *as* the Father, all the rights of the Ruler being guarded, and his rectitude being demonstrated in a way which he appointed. This being indeed the very perfection of his love, that it is so manifested that we can say of it, "The righteousness thereof is like the great mountains." But we have here also: 2. *Love's objects.* "Us." The impression this makes on any one will depend on the opinion he has of himself. If he is convicted of sin, and has traced the hidden windings of evil in his own heart, it will ever be to him the marvel of marvels that the All-pure One could ever love *him*, and seek to purge him from guilt by the Divine process of loving! 3. *Love's freeness.* "Hath given to us (*δεδωκεν ἡμῖν*)."
Love not only exists for us, goes out towards us, but it is given to us, as a rich and priceless treasure. Confers on us the noblest gifts from its vast stores, and all freely (Hos. xiv. 4). 4. *Love's actual achievements.* "That we should be called children of God: and such we are." We were rebels. As subjects of the great Governor, we had revolted. And love has re-made us. We have been born a second time, and have thus become children in God's family. We are such. We are called such. It is not, indeed, as yet openly manifested. "Our life is hid with Christ in God." There is no outward visible sign by which the world can distinguish us. Nor, indeed, have they the spiritual perception to discern nor the judgment to appreciate the marks of God's own. Their wisdom fails to show them God. They did not know the Christ. They do not know us. And for the same reason in every case. But their ignorance does not alter the glorious fact. "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." 5. *Love's ultimate intentions.* "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," etc. It is not merely for the sake of what we are to-day that our Father

loves us so. See that baby-boy in his cradle. Say, over and above the instinctive fondness of parents for their children, are there not big hopes that gather round the little one's head? It is not *merely* for what he is to-day that he is loved like this; but for what he *is to be*! So with us. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." God's children are as yet so young, so immature; their evolution is as yet so incomplete, that none can tell, from what they are with all their imperfections attending them, what they will be when all the imperfections are removed and their growth is unchecked. Still, three data are before us—certain. (1) The Lord Jesus will yet be manifested¹ (Col. iii. 4, Revised Version). (2) Then we shall see him as he is. Not as he was when here in weakness and sorrow, but as he is in his glory, as King of men and Lord of worlds. (3) Seeing him as he is will complete our resemblance to him.² [This effect presupposes union to him and sympathy with him; for it will not be so with all (Rev. i. 7).] This beatific vision, when we shall see face to face, will teach us more of God's love at a glance than we can now gather from half a century of thought. We shall no longer get our thoughts of God at second-hand, through earthen vessels, but direct from the Son of God himself. But will the transformation effected on us be corporeal or spiritual? Both corporeal *and* spiritual. For the face of the glorified in the spiritual body will be a perfect index of the perfected spirit within. Even here Divine grace impresses itself on the features. God is, literally, "the health of our countenance."³ Much more when all drawbacks are removed. 6. *Such love that can and will effect all this is wonderful.* "What manner of love!" It is marvellous: (1) In its *purity*. We love only that which is worth loving. God loves the unworthy, in order that by love he may make them worth loving. (2) In its *methods* of giving—giving the noblest Gift at the greatest cost in order to win, and by winning to save. Had he terrified us, and so driven us from him, we had been ruined. But by being drawn to him, sin dies, and we live. (3) In its royal *enrichments*. First creating the new relationship of "child," and then giving the new-born child the shelter of a home, the endearments of tenderest care, and the wealth of the Father's kingdom—and all for ever! What manner of love is this?

II. SUCH LOVE IS WORTHY OF DEVOUT AND ABSORBING REGARD. "Behold!" "See!" By such a word had John's attention first been called to Jesus (John i. 29). By such a word would he now arrest ours and fasten it on Heaven's wondrous love, which had been the Object of his adoring gaze for more than half a century when he wrote these words. And still to each new-comer, as he reads this Epistle, the words address themselves, *Look at this sight!* There is no other object so gloriously enchanting. And no other object will so infinitely repay the longest and profoundest study. Then *look!* But: 1. *How?* (1) Penitently, (2) gratefully, (3) appropriatingly, (4) lovingly, (5) adoringly. 2. *When?* (1) When earth's glare bewitches you, that by the heavenly sight the world may lose its power to enthral. (2) When sin hangs heavy on the conscience, that you may receive the pardoning word. (3) When storms lower o'er your pathway, that Heaven's light may disperse the gloom. (4) When sickness weakens the frame, that you may rejoice in tribulation. (5) When visiting the sepulchre, that you may espy the region in which there is no death. (6) When entering the valley of the shadow of death, that it may be lit up with a heavenly glory. 3. *How long?* Not fitfully or occasionally, but continuously, let the sight be turned, not inwardly on your own dark, sinful self, but outwardly, on the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Then in the clear light of God's love many a perplexity will vanish; for love is the key, and the only key, to unlock the secrets of the universe. Then doubt and dread will give place to perfect peace, and in a rapturous appropriation you will feel and say and sing, "All is mine, since the love of God is mine." Look! look! look! "till the day break, and the shadows flee away," and you see "face to face."

¹ I have not thought it well to interrupt the working out of the theme by discussing the question whether we should translate the text "when it shall be manifested," or "when he shall be manifested." On this, see the Exposition. I would, however, observe that, whichever translation we accept, since *our* manifestation is to be concurrent with that of our Lord's, the meaning is practically the same.

² Howe's mighty treatise on 'The Blessedness of the Righteous' is full of rich, seraphic thought on this glorious theme.

³ See Rev. Joseph Cook's remarkable lecture on 'The Solar Light.'

Ver. 3.—*The hope: its purifying power.* *Connecting link:* The apostle has just pointed out the blessedness which gathers round the new relationship of children of God, both as to its present privilege and as to its future glory. And if any one should suggest that it is very questionable doctrine, to assert merely that the sight of Christ by-and-by will make them all that they ought to be, the anticipative reply is ready. That sight will but complete the resemblance which is even now being aimed at and approximated; and it will do this in every case, for even now the expectation of such an issue has a purifying power on all who cherish it. Whence our topic—*Purified by hope.*

I. THE CHILDREN OF GOD HAVE A DISTINCT AND SPECIFIC HOPE. This is frequently referred to by Paul (Rom. v. 5; Titus ii. 13; 2 Thess. ii. 16); also by Peter (1 Pet. i. 3); but only here by John. But with all three apostles the content of this hope is the same. It is, in fact, the possession of this hope which in the apostles' time marked off the Christian from the pagan and unbelieving world (cf. Eph. ii. 12; 1 Thess. iv. 13). And such is the case now. Never was it more strikingly so. Even those who are most positive as to the evolution of the race are absolutely hopeless as to the survival of the individual. But the Christian hope is both a personal and collective one. Its features, as indicated here, are twofold. 1. "*This hope.*" The Apostle Paul, by the use of the definite article (Rom. v. 5), marks it off just as distinctly. For the antecedent matter of "this," we must go back to the preceding verses, and note the three *data* there specified (see previous homily). 2. "*In him;*" rather, "upon him." The initial letter of the pronoun should be a capital, indicating that the Lord Jesus is he on whom the hope is set. He it is who is at once the central Object of the hope itself. He it is who has promised to fulfil it. His death and resurrection set the seal to its validity. He by his Spirit will consummate and crown it. The hope is set on Christ from beginning to end. These two features mark off the Christian hope from all vain and inferior ones.

II. THIS HOPE HAS IN EVERY CASE A PURIFYING POWER. This cannot be truly said concerning any other hope whatsoever. It is true of this only. He who cherishes it has the instinct of self-preservation within him; he will discipline and train his nature in doing, bearing, resisting, and thus will aim to "perfect holiness in the fear of God." And the good hope that he shall not fall short is a constant inspiration to him. There are three ways in which this may be set forth. 1. *It is necessarily so from the nature of the hope itself.* Hope is commonly (and truly) defined as "a compound of desire and expectation." But either element of the hope has special weight here. Desire after the beatific vision includes delight in purity; therefore he who cherishes it will aim at being pure. Expectation of the beatific vision is regulated by the Word of God. It declares, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and therefore he knows that, apart from holiness, hoping is impossible. Hence the conditions of the realization of the hope lead him to purify¹ himself. 2. *It is a part of God's gracious plan that it should be so.* (1) All in whom he begets this living hope he guards, guides, and trains towards its fulfilment. (2) The elation and joy which this hope creates are in themselves a blessed means of spiritual advancement. 3. *The fact that in this hope the believer is actually clinging to a living Saviour ensures it.* The charm of this hope is *Christ himself*. But the expectation of seeing him hereafter keeps us by his side now. And, abiding in him, we grow like him, and are preparing to stand before him at his coming.

APPLICATION. 1. Let us admire the grace of God in drawing men out of sin by the force of "this blessed hope." God does not terrify and drive, but loves and wins and saves. 2. Let us use the text as a touchstone. No pretence of hope avails apart from growth in purity. A man may, indeed, apart therefrom, have some hope, but it is not "*this hope.*" 3. To refuse to indulge such a hope is a grievous sin, since it throws doubt upon the love of God, by insinuating that he does not care enough for his creatures to prepare such good for them as the Word reveals. Let us not thus wrong our God. 4. In the presence of such solid grounds of hope as are disclosed in the gospel, how great a wrong is done to a man's own nature when his indifference or unbelief has reduced him to such a state of hopelessness that his highest achievement is that of submitting to the inevitable. We do not know, and have no intention of

¹ See a most valuable note in Canon Westcott, *in loc.*, on the difference between ἀγλις and καθαρῶς.

trying to discover, to what degree of acquiescence in this a man may attain. But it is absolutely certain that in such a case anything approximating, anything worthy to be compared with, the "joy unspeakable and full of glory" is absolutely impossible. The peace of God can never make the face radiant with heavenly brightness when once the light of hope is gone. When there is nothing to lighten the heart there can be nothing to brighten the face. 5. And when this catastrophe occurs in human nature, the spur to purity is gone. Abstractly, a ground and reason for purity may exist quite apart from any hope of immortality. This is possible. But in actual fact, take away the hope, and life's inspiration is gone! It becomes forthwith a mere question of time as to how soon the hopeless one will succumb to the maxim, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die!"

Vers. 4-12.—*Sinning in every way incompatible with the Christian life. Connecting link:* The apostle had just said that every one with the Christian hope would purify himself "as Christ the Lord is pure." As if to guard this absolutely universal statement, "every one," against the possibility of question, he goes on to illustrate the varied aspects of sin—in its bearing on law; as regards the Person and work of Christ; as related to the new life of the children of God; and with reference to the everlasting statute of the gospel. Thus giving an overwhelming force to the doctrine indicated by the topic before us. Topic—*Sinning impossible to the children of God.*¹ The apostle deals here, not with detailed sins, but with *sinning*; not with isolated acts (if, indeed, there can be any such), but with the continuous life of sinning. As *ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην* is "one who lives a life of righteousness," so *ὁ ποιῶν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν* is "one who lives a life of sin." Terrible thought (and yet how true to fact!) that of living a life which is *all sin*, without any righteousness in it at all! The man who lives for self-pleasing rather than for the sake of pleasing God—who consults his fancies, and not his duty; who cares only for himself, and not at all for his brother—is living in sin every day and all the day long, however glossy his external self may seem. It is to the manifold contrarities of such a life that the apostle here calls our attention. Let us look at such a life—

I. AS IT CONCERNS THE LAW OF GOD. "Sin is the transgression of law;" literally, "lawlessness." "It is," says Westcott, "the assertion of the selfish will against a paramount authority. He who sins breaks, not only by accident or in an isolated detail, but essentially, the 'Law' which he was created to fulfil"—of right government of self, of concern for our brother, of loyalty to God. Hence the spirit of the Law is broken in its entirety, whatever form the details of his life may assume.

II. AS IT CONCERNS THE CHRIST HIMSELF. (Ver. 5.) 1. *As to his Person.* "In him there is no sin." How black does a sinful, selfish life appear by the side of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ! 2. *As to his work.* "He was manifested to take away sins;" not only (as Paul shows in Rom. iii.) to demonstrate God's righteousness in forgiving sin, but also "to take away sins"² (Revised Version)—to remove them altogether. To this end his whole earthly manifestation was directed, from the manger to the cross. And in thus doing, he would destroy "the works of the devil," who "sinneth from the beginning" (cf. John xii. 31; Col. ii. 15; Heb. ii. 14, 15). Hence it is clear that one who is leading a sinful life is in constant opposition to the Person, will, and work of the Son of God!

III. AS IT CONCERNS THE NEW BIRTH AS A DIVINE PRODUCT. 1. Sinning is altogether *inconsistent with abiding in Christ* (ver. 6; cf. John xv. 5). 2. It is altogether *opposed to the true knowledge of Christ* (ver. 6). 3. It is *contrary to the features which always mark God's children* (ver. 10). God's children are re-born—born to a life of righteousness and love. Hence (ver. 9) whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for the

¹ May we be allowed here to remark, once for all, that each one of the divisions in a homily on a paragraph like this suggests a topic for separate discourse? But it would swell the Commentary beyond all reasonable limits were we to adopt such a plan. Besides, we hold it to be the design in this department to suggest rather than to expound—to exhibit the order of the lines on which the apostle's thoughts proceed, than to develop at large the thoughts themselves. Such development, with the application thereof, we leave for the pulpit.

² Not "our sins."

seed of another life is in him. 4. *It is impossible to a child of God.* "He cannot sin, because he is born of God." Impossibility of sinning is one mark of the new birth. "He cannot sin." Blessed inability! Cannot be sinning, or *living a life* out of harmony with God's will and Word. Cannot! Why? Because in the new product of God's Spirit the principle of righteousness is so active that a sinning life is entirely out of the question. Virtue is so strong that it expels its opposite. A true child of God *cannot* be in alienation of spirit from his Father in heaven, even for one moment. So an honest servant *cannot* steal, a faithful husband *cannot* be unfaithful. One passionately fond of accuracy *cannot* be systematically inaccurate. So, also a child of God *cannot* be opposed to his Father's will, simply because, *ex hypothesi*, the product of the new birth is a child who will will as his Father wills. Into errors of judgment he may fall, by sudden gusts of temptation he may be overtaken and so surprised into a fault; but from sin, from the sin of living alien to God, he was delivered once and for ever, when, by the change in his nature, he was born again! He was "renewed . . . after the image of him that created him."

IV. THE SINNING LIFE IS OPPOSED TO THE EVERLASTING STATUTE OF THE GOSPEL. So the apostle argues here. The sinning life is one of lawlessness, one of selfishness. Unlovingness and unrighteousness are not of God. He who drifts away from loyalty to God will soon drift away also from consideration to man. Disloyal self-will Godward, breeds selfish isolation manward. And this is contrary to the commandment that we heard "from the beginning," i.e. from the beginning of Divine revelation (Gen. ix. 9), or from the beginning of our Saviour's teaching (Matt. v. 44), or from the beginning of our Christian profession (Gal. vi. 10). Consequently, one who receives and obeys the gospel began to unlearn selfishness the moment he was won for God. He is bound by his Lord's precepts to do good unto all men.¹

INFERENCES AND APPLICATION. 1. *How very serious a matter sin is!* It is not a mere question of a few wrong deeds, but of a false bias of the will, which turns the entire life into a wrong channel. *E.g.* think of the prodigal son. During his guilty wanderings he may have been entirely faithful to the citizen who hired him, but he was sinning against his father all the while he was away from him. So the disloyal man. He may do acts that are right as towards A and B and C; but so long as he is disloyal to God, he is sinning against him all the while. 2. *How manifold are the forces employed against sin!* A Law to condemn it, a Saviour to redeem from it, a Spirit to destroy it, a gospel to testify against it, a whole family of new-born sons to be living witnesses of his deliverance from its power. 3. *How blessed and honourable to be a child of God,* and so to be numbered among the forces which God would bring to bear against sin! God's children are enlisted on his side, that they may be workers together with their Father in declaring eternal war against sin. Even under the Mosaic economy this principle was recognized. Jehovah called for the united voice of the people to join with him in branding sin with a curse (see homily on Deut. xxvii.). But then the more prominent force was a law without; now it is a life within. 4. *How distinctively Divine is the life of the true child of God!* and how clear and manifest a proof of the reality of redemption and of regeneration! Of the former, because he is redeemed out of the region of sin altogether; of the latter, because a new life, higher than nature knows, has been actually begotten in him, and is being sustained by the power of God. 5. *How sure the triumph of God's children!* They have to fight against the world's selfishness and sin, and in doing this they fight along with One who was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. The purport of that manifestation shall be realized; and when their Lord triumphs, his victory will be theirs. 6. *What a sorry outlook for those who are not the children of God!* What can they be thinking of to fight against so much? But ah! they do not think. They pause not to ask—What am I doing? How forlorn their prospect! Alien from God, rushing against his Law, neglecting his gospel, despising the Son of God: to what humiliation and destruction are they rushing on? Siding with the evil one, like him they must be cast down (Luke x. 18) and cast out (John xii. 31).

¹ A writer in the *Agnostic Annual* for 1884 declares that the morality of agnosticism is purer than that of Christianity, since the latter bids us strive merely after our own personal welfare! If the writer of that article has been trying to see how vast an inaccuracy he could pen, he has succeeded to perfection. No one could pen a greater.

Vers. 13-15.—*The world's hatred of Christians.* *Connecting link*: In setting forth the broad contrast between sin and righteousness, the apostle had taken occasion to refer to Cain as the earliest illustration of the wide gulf between the two. The violent contrast between him and his brother generated as violent an antipathy on his part towards him. And even now the contrast between sin and righteousness is just as wide as ever. From the very nature of the case they are an immeasurable distance asunder; so that it is not to be wondered at if a sinful world chafes under the silent and effective rebuke administered to it by the lives of holy men, and if in consequence thereof hatred is felt by men of the world towards the living Church of God. For our part, says the apostle, we know it is so, because we used to cherish it ourselves; and if now we love the brethren, it is because we have undergone so great a change that it is no less than passing from death unto life. And even though that hatred which we once felt may never have broken out into a murderous act, yet that hatred itself is the very germ out of which such an act would develop itself; and hence, in the eye of God, he that hateth his brother is a murderer; and you know, certainly and absolutely, that no man, desiring to kill his brother, has an eternal life abiding in him. The whole passage reminds us of John xv. 13-21, with which it should be compared. Topic—*The world's hatred of Christians no surprising fact.*

I. LET US LOOK AT THE CASE HERE SUPPOSED. "If the world hate you." Close analysis will yield us several distinct facts here. 1. There is a society of brethren in Christ. "You." There is evidently a fellowship of believers in Jesus, who, having passed from death unto life, naturally magnetized each other, and came together by the mutual attraction of the spiritual life they shared in common. 2. There is an outside world, composed of those who are of the earth, earthy, out of which these believers have been drawn, and from which they have become separated. While "the brethren" are among the living, the outer "world" is still among the dead.¹ 3. Those who had been gathered out of the world devoted themselves to testifying against its sin, and to the manifestation of another and a purer life. 4. This double condemnation of the world's sin—that of witness-bearing on behalf of One who came to take it away, and that of the silent condemnation of a holy life—roused the hostility of the world (cf. John xvi. 1, 2; xv. 18-25).

II. LET US INQUIRE IF THE CASE HERE SUPPOSED HAS ANY PRESENT-DAY PARALLEL. Does "the world" really hate Christians now? Is not the time past and gone for anything of the kind? Certainly there is a very great difference, on the surface at any rate, between "the world" as we know it and as the Apostle John knew it. And as certainly there is a vast difference between the Church life of our days and that of his. It is well, therefore, that we should set distinctly and clearly before us the thing as it exists under our own eye. How are we to apportion the two apparently contradictory propositions—(1) the world is now a great deal nearer to the Church than it was then; and (2) righteousness and unrighteousness are not a whit nearer each other now than they were then? Will not the following considerations, cumulatively weighed, set the matter in its true light? 1. There are some professors, and possibly some Churches, that there is no likelihood of the world's ever hating, since, though baptized into the Christian name, they are entirely worldly in spirit—they have but a name to live. They will never convert, nor startle, nor disturb the world. They will be deemed "highly respectable" and "inoffensive." They will never be hated. 2. A true Christian even, and a true Church, may be so lacking in outspoken testimony for God's truth, and in aggressive attacks on the world's sin, that they arouse no hostility whatever. And in such a case they will be allowed to pursue their course in peace. 3. Further, it is certainly the case that, with the advance of civilization, the old element of a *personal* hatred is very largely modified; to persecute any man for his religious faith, or for a holy Christian life, would not be tolerated now in any social circle where there is due regard for the laws of mutual courtesy. 4. Consequently, whatever dislike there may be in the world to the doctrines of the gospel, it will now show itself less towards men than towards systems. And when we come to this point, it is abundantly clear that hatred, and a virulent hatred, too, exists on the part of the world towards the doctrines maintained in the Church. The dislike will vary in detail

¹ See Mr. Drummond's striking chapter on "Classification" in 'Natural Law in the Spiritual World.'

according to the standpoint of the individual. The worldling will hate the demands for a life consecrated to Christ. The formalist will hate what he calls "Puritanism." The easy-going man will hate the call to strive to enter in at the strait gate. The rationalist will hate the doctrine of the atonement. The man of "broad thought" will hate the exclusive claims of the Saviour. The scientist will hate the suggestion that an Infinite Will rules all. The philosopher will scorn the doctrine of the Incarnation. The positivist will refuse to rise to the hyper-phenomenal. The agnostic will prefer his ignorance, because he hates to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. The free-thinker will hate to subject his thinking to the supreme laws of righteousness. In all these ways men "hate the doctrine of the cross." 5. Nevertheless, though the hatred ordinarily is more towards systems than men, yet, let any man move out of the common methods of easy-going Christianity, and set forth on a crusade for some Christian doctrine or against some antichristian heresy;—let him expose and condemn men's favourite sins,—and no one among men will be hated more intensely than he! Illustrations are ready to hand in abundance. Revivalists: dead Churches and dead ministers intensely hate living ones. Temperance reformers, etc. Those who expose the crying sins of covetousness, landlordism, land monopoly, etc. In a word, let but a man aim at bringing gospel doctrine to bear on needed social reform in *every* direction, the old-world greed will assert itself, and Faithful will have all the showmen in Vanity Fair wishing he were dead! 6. So that, practically, the whole matter may be summed up thus: The world, even if more refined in manner (as it most certainly is) than it was in John's time, yet is as self-willed, as selfish, as indisposed to the yoke of Christ as ever. If we are faithful in bearing testimony for God, we shall meet with our share of hatred. If we *were* more faithful, we should have the more hatred to endure. True; we have a large number of Christ's followers to speed us on, and so may present a larger front to the enemy; consequently, the hatred will be less felt by the individual—so many will share it with him. And it follows that, unless we make the world wince and writhe under our rebuke of its faithlessness towards God and its wrongs towards man, we are not truly representing *him* whose we are and whom we are pledged to serve.

Vers. 16—18.—*Love others, for God hath loved thee! Connecting link:* The great contrast has been presented between the love abiding in those who have passed from death unto life and the enmity abiding in the world. That hatred has been illustrated by a reference to Cain, and believers are told they must not be surprised if the murderous spirit still survives. The apostle then reverts to his favourite theme—love. He seems to say, "As for us, we have learnt a different lesson. We have come to know (*ἐγνώκα*) 'the love' [the words 'of God' are not in the Greek nor the Revised Version] the supreme love in the universe. The lesson it has taught us is that we ought to love as God loves. He [emphatic] laid down his life for us: we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Divine love has not merely been taught us merely in a book, or by teachers, but in the most stupendous act of self-sacrifice that was possible either in heaven or on earth. If, after this, any one can close up his heart against a needy brother, it is too clear that no love, either of God, or like to God's, dwells in him. Be it ours to show, as God has shown, that with us, love is not merely in word, but also in power. Topic—*The supreme love: its act and its lessons.*

LET US STUDY LOVE'S GREATEST ACT. "He (*ἐκεῖνος*) laid down his life for us." We have already had one study in God's love (homily on ver. 2). But the theme is exhaustless. The precise point here is that by what God has done for us we have come to learn the supreme love; such a love as outshines all else—a love which is not only unique as a model, but also as a creative power! Nine features thereof may here be suggested. 1. Love in its highest origin. God (cf. ch. iv. 10). 2. Love's manifestation. Through the Son. 3. Love's channel. The incarnate Son. 4. Love's method. "Laid down his life." 5. Love's meaning in its method. "A propitiation" (ch. ii. 1, 2; iv. 10); "A demonstration of righteousness" (Rom. iii. 20, 21); "An offering for sin" (Heb. ix. 26—28). 6. Love under strangest circumstances. "When we were yet sinners" (Rom. v. 8); "Ye who sometime were alienated," etc. (Col. i. 21; cf. Rom. v. 6). 7. Love's extent. "A propitiation for . . . the sins of the whole world" (ch. ii. 2); "He died for all" (2 Cor. v. 15). 8. Love's intent. To save from sin. To purify. To remove for ever the one stumbling-block and bar to human

progress. To see men perfect (cf. Eph. v. 25-28; Col. i. 26-28; Titus ii. 14). This—this is love; this is *the* love; herein is love. This is the supreme lesson taught us in Christ—that *the supreme energy is infinite, eternal, boundless, out-gushing love!* Mr. Herbert Spencer tells us that “amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty that we are ever in presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed” (*Nineteenth Century*, January, 1884). Where the agnostic ends, acknowledging that there is an Infinite Energy, though he knows not what it is, the gospel messenger begins, and says, “That Energy I declare unto you.” The Infinite Energy is a self-existing, self-outpouring love!—a love that makes the greatest possible sacrifice in order to redeem the lost!

II. LET US LEARN LOVE'S GREATEST LESSON. How much the lesson of love needed to be taught can only be learnt from the study of the period at which the Apostle John wrote.¹ The space at our disposal forbids our doing more than to refer the student to works touching thereon. This love of God for man is seen to have a fivefold effect. 1. *It teaches new truth about man.* (1) That man is very precious in the eye of God. (2) That the life of self-sacrifice on behalf of man is the noblest possible expenditure of spiritual energy. (3) That when so expended, it should be for the purpose (a) of removing obstructions to human advancement, whether (a) from within or (β) from without; and (b) of creating and sustaining such new forces as will raise him in the scale of being. (4) That to teach us all this, Heaven itself has led the way. The highest Being in the universe finds his highest glory in stooping to redeem and save! 2. *It creates a new duty*, viz. that of laying ourselves out for others. “And we ought,” etc. The vastly higher plane to which the revelation of Divine love lifted human nature, *ipso facto* made the claims of manhood on redeemed and sanctified man enormously greater than before. It warranted and even demanded the “enthusiasm of humanity.” The measure of self-devotion to others’ weal, indicated in the words, “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren,” is very far greater than the phrase just quoted implies. The Church of God has “left its first love;” a return to it would revolutionize and regenerate society. 3. *It becomes a new inspiration in man.* Of this the text, looked at historically, is a proof. Such precepts as it contains were never considered a part of human duty till God so loved the world. The apostles and the early Christians had learnt of God to love one another and to do good unto all men.² 4. *It at once led to the adoption of a new test of character.* E.g. take the case of a rich man and a poor one—of Dives and Lazarus. “Whoso hath this world’s good (*βίος*), and seeth his brother have need,” etc. In such a hard-hearted one it is perfectly clear the love of God does not dwell, i.e. either the love which is like God’s, or which he imparts, or which he commands, or of which he is the Object. For love to God is nothing if it be not loyal. He commands us to love our brethren. Therefore, if we do not, we cannot truly love God. 5. *It supplies a new and tender persuasive plea.* “Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” In every case our love is to become a practical power. If a man, out of passionate love for his Lord, spends his strength in defending the *doctrines* of the gospel, it is so far well. But in doing this, his work is but half-done. He is equally bound to devote himself to insisting on the *practice* of the gospel, and to inspire men to practical philanthropy as well as to penitence and faith. And while the former ages have been those in which Christian doctrines had (1) to be formulated, and (2) then to be defended, the great work for Christians and Churches in this age is *practically to apply them*,³ by exercising philanthropy in every needed form. Not by the lavish and indiscriminate distribution of alms, but by making people strong enough to do without them (cf. Acts iii. 6). And he will best carry out

¹ Cf. Dr. Uhlhorn’s ‘Christian Charity in the Ancient Church,’ the chapter entitled “A World without Love;” and also the Ven. Archdeacon Farrar’s ‘Early Days of Christianity,’ vol. i. ch. i.

² See Schmidt’s ‘Essai sur la civilisation de l’empire Romaine, et sa transformation par la Christianisme;’ also Mr. Bruce’s ‘Gesta Christi,’ and Dr. Storr’s invaluable volume on the ‘Historical Effects of Christianity.’ Schmidt’s work has recently been translated by Mrs. Thorpe; the translation is published by Isbister and Co.

³ See Dr. Fairbairn’s address as chairman of the Congregational Union, at Sheffield, on ‘Christianity in the Nineteenth Century’ (Hodder).

the "imitation of God" (Eph. v. 1) who takes some distinctive part in removing stumbling-blocks out of the people's way, and in leading them, by the grace of God, to repent of sin, to turn to God, and to live on the Lord Jesus for power to tread the right way. Let each one choose his own department of duty, and be faithful therein. There is variety enough for all. Some may work in the home, some in the school, some in the Church, some in the state; some on sacred lines, others on secular. But be it in the direction of removing a bane, or supplying a boon, by means whereof the people may be made happier, cleaner, purer, kinder, holier. In any or all of these a man may prove the love of God in him to be a practical force, yea, the restorative power of the world!

We confess we are jealous for the honour of our glorious faith. We see men by thousands deserting the Christian camp because they think Christianity has nothing to say to the temporal concerns of working men. We see secularists and others taking up such questions, and coming to the front as the working men's benefactors! and all because we Christians have so much more ground yet to occupy in working out and solving the social problems of the age.¹ Oh! let us to the fore at once in God's Name, and, inspired by everlasting love, let us show to men of every class and calling that while there is not a sin of man against man which the gospel does not condemn, neither is there a right of man which the gospel does not press on his behalf, when it summons us to be "imitators of him" who laid down his life to save our race.

Vers. 19—22.—*The privileges of Christian loyalty.* *Connecting link:* The *¶* *robry* with which our present paragraph begins is the connecting link between the material of this homily and that of the last. It connects the privileges here specified with the duties there enjoined. No verses of the Epistles of John lead us more into the very heart-work of religion than do these; nor are there any the construction of which is so complex, and the *exact* meaning thereof less easy to ascertain. We have no space to reproduce here the exegesis of the various clauses. [The reader will turn for that to the Exposition. Westcott's remarks thereon are finely discriminating and clear.] We do but give the results of our own anxious study. This we will do by a paraphrase of the four verses, the meaning of which, as we understand them, can be thus expressed: "By means of such a life of self-devotion to man for God's sake, we shall come to know that we are of the truth, and shall be able to cherish a calm persuasion of heart towards him in whose presence we habitually and consciously move. We may, indeed, often be condemned by our own hearts for constantly falling short of our ideal; still, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things, and can estimate the desire even when the execution is defective. Or if, as may be the case, we cannot reproach ourselves with any conscious divergence from his will, we can then open our lips freely in our addresses to God; and not only so, but he will open his hands freely to us, in answer to our prayers, knowing that it is our reverent care and study to obey his commands and to do habitually what will please him." Topic—*A life of studied loyalty to God is one of highest privilege.* The case supposed here is that a believer carries out his love to God by a self-abandoning devotion to his brother-man. He makes it his reverent concern to obey every precept, and, living as in the sight of God, habitually aims at being well-pleasing to him. Surely it is not surprising if such have some privileges and enjoyments that others know nothing of. Not that they are regarded as payments for any meritorious act; that is quite out of the question. They are privileges conferred on one who is stirred by the Spirit of God to a life of devoted and exact obedience to the Father's will. What are they? The apostle specifies six.

I. A SURE STEP. "We shall know that we are of the truth." It is not possible for the heart in loving loyalty to God to doubt if it be the right thing to follow God's commands. Many other points may be doubtful, but not this!

II. A RESTFUL HEART. "We shall assure our hearts before him." There will be a holy confidence of uprightness; and the believer knows well that God is not a hard Master. It is much easier to please God than to please the dearest friend on earth! "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him."

¹ See article, 'The Outcast Poor,' *Contemporary Review*, December, 1888; also a small but priceless volume by the Rev. Dr. Paton, M.A., on 'The Inner Mission of the Church,' 1887.

III. A CONFIDING EYE. *Ἐμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ*, "before him;" as in his sight. As a loving, trustful child aiming to please his father looks up with placid confidence to catch the glance of his father's eye, delighted to think of its loving vigilance, so the child of God lives as before the eye of his Father in heaven, happy beyond expression to think that that eye is ever upon him. He looks up to catch the Father's smile; the Father looks down to watch the child's upturned glance.

IV. A LOVING REFERENCE TO HIS FATHER WHEN A SENSE OF FAILURE BURDENS HIS SOUL. There will be times when the child's heart chides him that he has fallen so far below his own ideal and desire¹ (ver. 20). Well, his Father knows *how* far, better than the child does. But if the habitual set of the life is towards pleasing God, he can rely upon his father's love in any case of faultiness of detail, assured that he who said, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," will be the kindest possible Judge of the acts of an obedient child.²

"There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are so felt as up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given."

He would rather have his very faultiness estimated by God than by the kindest friend on earth. Very likely he will be reproaching himself that he has not wrought deeds more worthy of God; but even then he can say with infinite content, "Lord, thou knowest all things;" and in the perfect judgment of the All-seeing he is content lovingly to leave the estimate and the award.

V. A FREE TONGUE. It may be that his heart does *not* condemn him with a sense of conscious failure. He may be able to use Paul's words (1 Cor. iv. 4). In such a case he will have (*παρρησία*) freedom of speech towards God. He will be able to unburden his whole soul, *without restraint*, to his Father in heaven, and pour forth words that he would on no account whatever utter in a human ear. But what an infinite relief to be able to pour out the *whole* burden of one's soul to a Friend *who will never misunderstand us!* No such freedom of speech as this can we have elsewhere than before God; and only there when loyally living to please God.

VI. A FULL HAND. Free words to God; free gifts from God. Such is the order (ver. 22). "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him." Happy the man who can get everything he asks for! No, not necessarily. If he were to ask for a bane, thinking it would be a boon, it would be anything but a blessing to him to receive it. But the remarkable statement at the beginning of ver. 22 is qualified, or rather fenced round and guarded from abuse. *Of whom* is this true? The children of God, not of men indiscriminately. *Under what circumstances* is it true? When they keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight. *How, then*, does it become true? Obviously (1) because the same loyalty which marks their deeds will mark their prayers; (2) because their loyalty and love will make them wise to understand what the will of the Lord is; (3) because they only desire that God should give them what is in harmony with his will. Thus God educates his children in teaching them what to ask for, and then whatever they ask they receive. This, then, is the secret of the Lord. It is with those that fear him, and with those alone (cf. John xiv. 13; ch. v. 14; John xv. 7; Ps. xxxvii. 4; Ezek. xiv. 3—5. See homily on Deut. xxvi.). Let not the scoffer talk of the invalidity of prayer. *He*, at any rate, knows nothing at all about it. He only is sure to meet with responses to his prayer from whom God first receives the response of obedience to his commands (Isa. i. 15; Prov. xv. 8). Note: 1. There are vast privileges to be enjoyed by man. But God will not fling them away indiscriminately. 2. There is an infinite reasonableness in the connection between duty and privilege laid down in this text. 3. Although the salvation of each and all is freely bestowed on the ground of Divine grace alone, yet the fulness of that salvation, the measure of enjoyment therein, and the degree of freedom with which he can hold

¹ See a most touching illustration of this in Miss Ellice Hopkins's 'Work among Working Men,' ch. i. p. 15.

² Obviously the text, verbally, will allow of either of two constructions—one the more tender, the other the more severe. Regarding the text in its entirety, the more tender side is evidently intended.

fellowship with God, will depend on the exactitude and the measure of his loyalty (Matt. v. 19; 1 Cor. iii. 8).

Vers. 23, 24.—*Outward precept and inward life. Connecting link*: The word *ἐντολή* which marked the preceding verse, is caught up in this, and the life of obedience thereto, which had been shown to be the condition of freedom in fellowship with God and of success in prayer, is here declared to be the seal and fruit of the living Spirit, creating and sustaining an inward life corresponding to the outward rule. Topic—*The life enjoined by the command of Christ a seal of the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ*. The following order of thought is suggested.

I. THE PRECEPTS OF OUR LORD MAY BE SUMMED UP IN TWO. 1. *That we should believe in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ*. The title here given to Christ is “a compressed creed” (Westcott); comp. John i. 12. The man who believes in Christ is one to which the privilege of becoming a child of God belongs, as the apostle had taught in his Gospel (see also John vi. 28, 29). This faith in Christ is here regarded as the *basis* on which the second duty rests. 2. *That we should love one another*. The first includes the sum of religion Godward; the latter, the whole of practical Christianity manward. The second is in every way so obviously admirable that many contend for it who yet ignore the first. But it will be found, practically, that the two cannot be disjoined. Such love to men as Christ commands never has been, will be, or can be sustained apart from faith in Christ. No building can be put up without a foundation, however admirably its outline may be drawn on paper. The cross is love's inspiration as well as its model.

II. WHERE THERE IS HABITUAL OBEDIENCE TO BOTH COMMANDS, THERE IS A LIVING UNION BETWEEN THE SOUL AND GOD. (Ver. 24.) 1. *Man abides in God* by faith and fellowship. 2. *God abides in man* by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. iii. 16; Eph. ii. 22).

III. THIS FRUITFUL INDWELLING OF THE SPIRIT IS THE SEAL OF GOD'S LIFE IN THE SOUL. When by an inspiration not of man nor by man we are led to a life which is above and beyond nature, “we know that he abides in us.” The Spirit which he gave us when we believed (Eph. i. 13) is the seal to us of God's own life. His command used to be an outside letter, bidding us to live a life that was high above us. Now we have an inward force, inspiring a life that conforms to the letter! In a word, God's Spirit in the soul brings about, in actual life, what the precept enjoins. By the Word we were taught that such a life was the right one to lead. By the Spirit we are so inspired that we cannot lead any other! Note: 1. The Law without is a great gift. The Spirit within is a greater. It is a blessing to be shown the right way. It is a greater blessing to be disposed to walk therein. 2. As we all have the blessing of the Word, since we know there is a greater one obtainable, ought we not to seek for it? For observe: 3. The gift of the Holy Ghost, albeit it is the greatest possible blessing, is precisely that of which we may make most sure, when sought by fervent prayer. 4. Let those who have the Spirit of God seek for a richer fulness of his indwelling power.¹ The more of the Holy Ghost we have, the easier will it be to obey; and just as it is the penitent's duty to receive pardon from Christ by faith, even so it is the believer's duty to receive the Spirit from him by faith.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—“Behold what manner of love!” “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us,” etc.! The “behold” summons our attention to the kind of love which God has given to us. It is not the greatness of the love, but the “manner of love,” that we are called to contemplate. And the nature of this love is to be inferred from its expression; hence St. John says “that we should be called children of God.” God has bestowed his love upon us; not simply the gifts of it, or the proof of it, but itself. Yet of what kind it is can only be discovered from its manifestations. He has given to us not only streams of blessing, but the very fountain of blessing; yet we can know the nature of the fountain only from the streams which flow from it. Thus

¹ See some admirable remarks in Miss Ellice Hopkins's ‘Work among Working Men,’ p. 8.

let us meditate upon the love of the Divine Father to us as it is exhibited in the text.

I. LOVE OF IMMEASURABLE CONDESCENSION. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" The Creator gave his love to his creature whom he had created in his own likeness. He made him capable of fellowship with himself, and, looking upon him with complacency, pronounced him "very good." God gave his love to man. But our text does not refer to man as he was created by God, but as he was when marred by sin against him. The infinitely Holy bestowed his love upon the unholy, the sinful; the unspeakably Glorious, upon the deeply degraded. He did not give his love to the amiable, the attractive, the worthy, or the lovable. He did not bestow it upon those who were merely immeasurably beneath him, but upon those who were in active rebellion against him. "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." His love to us, then, was not that of complacency, but of compassion; not that of admiration, but of benevolence and pity. It was "love seeking not its own," but our well-being; not rejoicing over the good and beautiful, but seeking with deepest solicitude for the salvation of the unworthy and sinful.

II. LOVE WHICH EXALTS AND DIGNIFIES ITS OBJECTS. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God!" He himself calls us his children. Our Lord taught us to say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." He said, "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." But in what sense does he call us his children? Not as being his by creation, but by regeneration. The words immediately preceding the text place this beyond dispute: "Every one that doeth righteousness is begotten of him." He has created them anew. They are "born from above." They are made "partakers of the Divine nature." No new faculties or capacities are given to them; nor do they need them; for man lost none of them by sin. His powers were corrupted and perverted, but not destroyed. The true relation and harmony and direction of his faculties man lost by his sin: he lost holiness. Being begotten of God, he is changed from an attitude of distrust, suspicion, or aversion from God, to an attitude of love to him; and holy love is the life of the soul. "Every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God" (ch. iv. 7). They are "called children of God," then: 1. Because they are sharers in his life. In some humble measure they participate in that life of truth and righteousness, purity and love, which is his essentially and infinitely, and which flows from him to all his intelligent creatures who are in union with him. 2. Because they morally resemble him. Like him in their inward life, they are also in a measure like him in their outward action. As regards both their character and conduct, they bear some moral resemblance to him. He calls them his children because they are his children restored through Christ to his fatherly heart, animated with the Divine life of love, and growing in their conformity to his perfect character. How glorious is the love which thus blesses its objects!

III. LOVE WHICH INSPIRES ITS OBJECTS WITH THE MOST BLESSED ASSURANCE. "Called children of God: and such we are." True Christians are conscious that they are children of God. They have a cheering and strengthening conviction that they are accepted of him, not only as his subjects, but as his sons and daughters. "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God" (Rom. viii. 14—16); "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 4—6). We have this sacred testimony in our consciousness of the Spirit's presence and work within us. He imparts unto us the filial spirit, "whereby we cry, Abba, Father." He inspires within us holy desires and purposes, he restrains us from sin, he comforts us in sorrow, he strengthens us to produce the fruit of the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance." The presence of these things in our lives is a testimony that we are children of God. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

IV. LOVE WHICH ENNOBLES THE CHARACTER OF ITS OBJECTS ABOVE THE RECOGNITION OF THE UNCHRISTIAN WORLD. "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." "The world" is the same here as in ch. ii. 15. 1. *The unchristian world knew not the Divine Father.* "It knew him not." The "him" must be God the

Father. If it refer to Jesus Christ at all, it must be as the Revelation of the Father. Our Lord said to the Pharisees, "Ye know neither me nor my Father: if ye knew me, ye would know my Father also" (John viii. 19; xvi. 3; xvii. 25). 2. *The unchristian world knows not the children of the Divine Father.* "Therefore the world knoweth us not." Because they are his children and resemble him, they are enigmas to the world. By the love which he hath bestowed upon them they are so ennobled in their disposition and character, their principles and practice, that the unchristian world cannot understand them.

Behold, then, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us"! Believe it; contemplate it; admire it; reciprocate it.—W. J.

Vers. 2, 3.—*The present and the future of the good.* "Beloved, now are we children of God," etc. Here is—

I. A GLORIOUS FACT OF PRESENT EXPERIENCE. "Beloved, now are we children of God." 1. *As sharing in his life.*¹ 2. *As morally resembling him.* 3. *As possessing the filial spirit.*

II. A GRACIOUS MYSTERY AS TO OUR FUTURE CONDITION. "And it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." Ebrard: "While we are already God's children, we are nevertheless yet in the dark as to the nature of our future condition." 1. *The mode of our being in the future is at present a mystery to us.* We know that the soul exists consciously and at once after passing from our present mode of life. We infer this from such Scriptures as these: "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (Luke xxiii. 43); "We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 8); "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. . . . Having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better" (Phil. i. 21, 23). But how the soul exists when it has departed from the "natural body," or what is its mode of existence, we know not. At present the body is the organ and instrument of the soul. Does the soul after death require some vehicle of expression, some instrument of action? If so, of what kind will these be? Or will the soul be independent of such things? What is the clothing (2 Cor. v. 2—4) which awaits the soul when it passes from the earthly house of this tabernacle? Of these things we know nothing. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be." 2. *The exaltation of our being in the future is at present a mystery to us.* The glory of our future being and condition is hidden from us as yet. What developments of being await us, to what services God will appoint us, with what honours he will crown us in the hereafter,—of these things we are altogether ignorant. Presumptuous are they who speak of the details of the condition and circumstances and occupations of the children of God after death. They who knew something of these things and were recalled to this life maintained unbroken silence concerning them (Luke vii. 11—16; John xi. 38—44). Paul was caught up into Paradise, but he said that it was not lawful to utter what he heard there (2 Cor. xii. 1—4). Wisely and graciously God has left a veil over our future condition and circumstances. Mystery in these things is perhaps *inevitable*. Probably in our present condition we have no symbols by which the future glories could be revealed unto us. Our languages could not describe them. Music, as we have it, could not express them. Painting could not set them forth. Moreover, mystery in these things is *merciful*. We could not bear the revelation of the bright future, and continue in the faithful and patient performance of our duties in the present. There is one sense in which the children of God will ever say, "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be." Their progress will be interminable. The development of their being and blessedness will never come to an end.

III. A GRAND ASSURANCE AS TO OUR FUTURE CONDITION. "We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is." (It seems to us that the rendering should be, "if it shall be manifested."² But the chief points of the apostle's teaching are the same whether we translate, "if it" or "if he shall be manifested.") Here is an assurance: 1. *Of moral assimilation to God in Christ.* "We shall be like him." Like him in character and sympathies and aims.

¹ See this and the following points under this main division more fully stated in our homily on ver. 1.

² See Alford, *in loc.*; and Ebrard.

Like him too, in some respects, corporeally; for he "shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil. iii. 21). 2. *Of the vision of God in Christ.* "For we shall see him even as he is." Some measure of likeness to him is indispensable to our seeing him. Spiritual resemblance to him qualifies the soul to see him even as he is. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." But the truth here is that the vision of God in Christ will perfect the likeness of his children unto him. Ebrard: "The being like unto God will be effected by the beholding of God." The vision of God is transforming in its effect. After Moses had been with the Lord forty days and forty nights upon Mount Sinai, when he came down from the mount the skin of his face shone, and the people were afraid to come nigh him (Exod. xxxiv. 29—35). "We all, with unveiled face reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. iii. 18). By the operation of the same principle, when the children of God see him as he is they will become like unto him. How blessed and inspiring is this assurance! To see him and to be like him has been the dearest hope of the noblest souls. Thus David, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness," etc. (Ps. xviii. 15); and St. Paul, "Having the desire to depart and be with Christ;" and St. John, "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein; and his servants shall do him service; and they shall see his face." "We shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is."

IV. A SALUTARY INFLUENCE OF OUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE ON OUR CONDITION IN THE PRESENT. "And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself," etc. 1. *The character of this hope.* It is the assured expectation and the sincere desire of the vision of God in Christ, and of complete moral assimilation to him. 2. *The ground of this hope.* "This hope set on him." On what he has promised, and on what he is, his children base their great hope. "God is not a man, that he should lie," etc. (Numb. xxiii. 19); "In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal" (Titus i. 2). 3. *The influence of this hope.* "Purifieth himself, even as he is pure." It is clearly implied that, while in this world, the children of God need moral purification. They are not yet entirely freed from sin, and sin pollutes the soul. Their sanctification is not yet perfected. But the precious and assured hope which they cherish stimulates them to seek for perfect moral purity. To indulge in sin, or to cease to strive after holiness, would be virtually to renounce their hope. They endeavour to attain to a holiness like unto that of Christ—to be pure as he is pure. His purity is the pattern of theirs. So that we have here a test of Christian character. Does our religion exert a sanctifying power in our hearts and lives?

"O Living Will, that shalt endure
When all that seems shall suffer shock,
Rise in the spiritual rock,
Flow through our deeds and make them pure."
(Tennyson.)

W. J.

Vers. 4—6.—*Dissuasives from sin.* "Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the Law," etc. The apostle, having stated that the influence of the hope of the Christian stimulates him to seek for moral purity, proceeds to present forcible reasons against the commission of sin. Of these reasons we have three chief ones in the text, and these are repeated, with some additional particulars, in vers. 7—9.

I. SIN IS OPPOSED TO THE HOLY LAW OF GOD. "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness: and sin is lawlessness." 1. *Sin in its abstract nature.* "Sin is the transgression of the Law," or "lawlessness." This is said of sin in general: it is true of every sin, that it is a violation of the Law of God. This is opposed to several modern theories concerning sin. Some say that sin is a natural imperfection of the creature—the crude effort of untrained man for right conduct. Our text says that it is not imperfection, but transgression of a holy Law. And others charge all sin upon defective social arrangements: human society is not rightly organized, and because of this men err. But St. John charges sin upon the individual, and charges it as a disregard or a breach of Divine Law. And others apply the word "misdirection" to what the Bible

calls sin, and thus endeavour to get rid of guilt. But misdirection implies a misdirector; that misdirector is man. And sin is more than misdirection; it is the infraction of the holy Law and beautiful order of the Supreme. The sacred Scriptures everywhere assert this. The cherubim and the flaming sword of Eden (Gen. iii. 24), the awful voices of Sinai (Exod. xx.), and the mournful but glorious sacrifice of Calvary unite in declaring that sin is the transgression of the Law of God. And the voice of conscience confirms this testimony of Holy Writ. The unsophisticated and awakened conscience cries, "I acknowledge my transgression," etc. (Ps. li. 3, 4). 2. *Sin in its actual commission.* "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness." The expression seems to indicate the practice of sin—voluntariness, deliberateness, and activity in wrong-doing. It is the antithesis of the conduct of the child of God in purifying himself. It is not sin as an occasional or exceptional thing, but as a general thing. Persistent activity in doing evil is suggested by the form of expression. We are reminded by it of the expression of the royal and inspired poet, "the workers of iniquity"—persons who habitually practise sin, who work wickedness as though it were their business. Here, then, are reasons why we should not sin. (1) Sin is a violation of the Law of God; it is a rebellion against his will—the wise, the good, the Holy One. Therefore in itself it is an evil thing, a thing of great enormity. (2) Law carries with it the idea of penalty. It has its rewards for those who observe it; its punishments for those who transgress it. Hence our interests plead with us against the practice of sin.

II. SIN IS OPPOSED TO THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. The holy will of God the Father and the redemptive work of God the Son are both essentially antagonistic to iniquity. "Ye know that he was manifested to take away sins; and in him is no sin." 1. *The end of Christ's mission was the abolition of sin.* "He was manifested to take away sins. . . . To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." The bearing of our sins in his own body on the tree is not the fact here mentioned. It is involved; for "once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. ix. 26); but it is not brought out in this place. The manifestation denotes his incarnation, and his life and work in the flesh. His entire mission was opposed to sin. He became incarnate, he prayed and preached, he wrestled with temptation, and wrought mighty and gracious works, he suffered and died, he arose from the dead, and he ever lives, to take away sins. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." 2. *A great characteristic of Christ's Person was his freedom from sin.* "In him is no sin." He asserted his own sinlessness: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" "The prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in me." And this claim he consistently maintained. His enemies tacitly or openly confessed that they could find no sin in him. The Pharisees keenly watched him to discover some matter of accusation against him, but their watching was vain. And when they had preferred a false charge against him before Pilate, the Roman judge said, "I, having examined him before you, found no fault in this Man touching those things whereof ye accuse him;" "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous Man." Judas Iscariot had known Jesus intimately for three years, and after he had traitorously betrayed him, in intolerable anguish he cried, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood." And his friends, who had been closely and constantly associated with him for three years, invariably asserted the perfect moral purity of his character and conduct. The sinlessness of our Lord should check every inclination to sin in his disciples, and stimulate them to the pursuit of holiness. To commit sin is to run counter to our Saviour's personal character, and to the gracious spirit and grand aim of the redemption which he has wrought.

III. SIN IS OPPOSED TO THE DIVINE LIFE IN MAN. "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him." 1. *Participation in the Divine life precludes the practice of sin.* "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not." We abide in Christ by believing on him, loving him, communing with him, drawing our life from him (cf. John xv. 1—7).¹ That this part of our text cannot mean that sin is impossible to a Christian is evident from ch. i. 8—10; ii. 1, 2. But in so far as the child of God abides in Christ he is separated from sin. In the degree in which the Divine life is realized by him, in that degree he is unable to sin (cf. ver. 9). 2. *The practice of sin proves the absence of a true knowledge of Jesus Christ.* "Whoso-

¹ See our homily on ch. ii. 6.

ever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him." The sight and knowledge here spoken of are not merely intellectual, but spiritual; not theoretical, but experimental. And the "sinneth" does not denote sin as an occasional and exceptional thing, but as general and habitual. He who lives in the practice of sin thereby proclaims that he does not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

By all these reasons let Christians watch and pray that they sin not, and "follow after sanctification, without which no man shall see the Lord."—W. J.

Ver. 14.—*Love the evidence of life.* "We know that we have passed from death unto life," etc. To know our true character and condition in the sight of God is of the greatest importance. An earnest consideration of our text will help us to attain such knowledge. Notice—

I. THE GREAT CHANGE HERE SPOKEN OF. "We have passed out of death into life." Consider: 1. *The state from which the Christian has passed.* It is here spoken of as "death." The death is not physical, or intellectual, or social, but moral and spiritual. "Ye were dead through your trespasses and sins;" "alienated from the life of God." God is the Life of the soul. In union with him the soul lives; separated from him the soul dies. Sin separates from him. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God;" "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Sin is fatal to all that constitutes the life of the soul—to truth and trust, to reverence and love, etc. A state of sin is a state of death. 2. *The state upon which the Christian has entered.* He has "passed out of death into life." He is united to God by faith in Jesus Christ, and thus participates in the Divine life. He has passed over from the sphere of the darkness into that of the light; from the dreary realm of death into the blessed kingdom of life. "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John v. 24). "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (2 Cor. v. 17); "And you, being dead through your trespasses . . . he quickened together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses" (Col. ii. 13). This great and blessed change is effected (1) through the mediation of Jesus Christ (John vi. 40, 47; x. 10; xiv. 6); (2) by the agency of the Holy Spirit (John iii. 5, 6, 8); and (3) by the instrumentality of the sacred Word (Jas. i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 23).

II. THE EVIDENCE OF THIS GREAT CHANGE. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." There may be a reference in the term "brethren" to the common brotherhood of all men; but it seems to us that its chief meaning is the Christian brethren. The love spoken of is not simply natural affection, as the love of parent for child, child for parent, husband for wife, wife for husband, etc. Again, there may be certain social qualities in a Christian which are attractive to others, yet not distinctively Christian. He may be a useful man; in society he may be interesting and agreeable, and therefore he is admired and loved; but such love does not prove that they who exercise it "have passed out of death into life." Again, we may love Christians, not because they are Christians, but because they belong to our ecclesiastical party or share our theological opinions; but this affection is not to be taken as an evidence that we have experienced the great and saving change. The love of which St. John writes is a love of the brethren, not because they belong to us or to our party, but because they belong to the Lord Jesus. The affection which is a proof that we have passed from death unto life is a love of the brethren: 1. *Because of their relation to Christ and God.* They are one with Christ by faith and love. Through the Saviour they are children of the Divine Father. They are regarded by him with complacency. They are loved by him with the love of approbation. And they possess the filial spirit in relation to him (Rom. viii. 14-16). If we love God we shall love them, because they are his. "Whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" (ch. v. 1). And such love is an evidence "that we have passed out of death into life." 2. *Because of their resemblance to God in Christ.* Our Lord and Saviour is the Supreme Revelation of God the Father to our race; and his character, "as he lived upon earth," as Hooper has said, "is like a perfect, many-sided crystal. Whichever way you look at it, it is without flaw. Whichever way you turn it, some new beauty of colour is reflected from the rays of light shining through it. The character of the Christian is like a crystal too, but a small one, full of cracks and flaws, which break up and disfigure

the brilliant gleams reflected from the sunlight. . . . The Christian must be like Christ, or he is nothing; but it is a likeness with a vast distance between—the likeness of the infant to the strong man; the likeness of a feeble sapling to the full-grown giant oak." To love Christians because we discover in them this moral resemblance to God in Christ is an evidence "that we have passed out of death into life."

1. *If we have this holy, fraternal affection, let us draw from it the assurance which our text warrants.* "We know that we have passed," etc. 2. *Let us cultivate more and more of this Christian love.*—W. J.

Vers. 16—18.—*The exhibition and obligation of true love.* "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us," etc. Our subject naturally divides itself into two main branches.

I. THE EXHIBITION OF THE NATURE OF TRUE LOVE. "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us." "The meaning is not," as Ebrard says, "wherein we (subjectively) have perceived love, but in what (objectively) the nature of love consists."

1. *It is of the nature of love to make sacrifices.* Love is essentially communicative. It seeks to impart itself and its treasures to others. It does not ask—What shall I receive? but—What shall I give? It takes upon itself the burdens and sorrows of others. 2. *The greatest sacrifice is the surrender of life.* The strongest self-love in human nature is that of life. Man will perform any labours, confront any perils, make almost any sacrifice, to save his life. "All that a man hath will he give for his life." Therefore the surrender of life is the costliest sacrifice that even true love can offer. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;" "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us." 3. *But Christ sacrificed his life for his enemies.* "For us." That it was for sinners is not mentioned here; but it is elsewhere. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us," etc. (ch. iv. 10). "Christ died for the ungodly," etc. (Rom. v. 6—8). And the manner in which his life was sacrificed was most painful. He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The derision and degradation, the ignominy and anguish, associated with his great self-sacrifice were such that death itself was but a small portion of what he endured for us. Behold, then, in him who laid down his life for us what genuine love is.

II. THE OBLIGATION TO EXERCISE TRUE LOVE. "And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath the world's goods," etc. It is implied that all true love is one in its essential nature; the love in the heart of God and pure love in the heart of man are alike in kind; the love which we ought to exercise should resemble that of our Lord Jesus Christ. It should be like his, not in its degree, but in its character; not in its intensity and force, but in its kind. Like his in extent and degree our love can never be; for his is infinite, ours must ever be finite. "A pearl of dew will not hold the sun, but it may hold a spark of its light. A child, by the sea, trying to catch the waves as they dash in clouds of crystal spray upon the sand, cannot hold the ocean in a tiny shell, but he may hold a drop of the ocean water." So our love, though utterly unlike Christ's in its measure, may be like it in its essential nature—it may be as a spark from the infinite fire. Two forms of expression of genuine affection are here set forth as obligatory. 1. *Willingness to make the great sacrifice for our brethren.* "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." The principle, as we apprehend it, may be thus stated, that, when a greater good will be accomplished by the sacrifice of our life than by the saving of it, we should be willing to surrender it. We should have such love for the brethren as would inspire us to lay down our life for them, if it were necessary, and we could thereby effectually promote their salvation. Such was the love of St. Paul: "Yea, and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all." Love which would enable us to imperil our life if by so doing we may save others from death. Such love for our Lord and Saviour as would lead us to choose death rather than deny him. Such love for his cause as would impel us to sacrifice our comforts, our home, and even life itself, if thereby we may advance its interests and spread its triumphs. So St. Paul: "I hold not my life of any account, as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." And zeal in this cause is surely one of the highest forms of love

for our brethren. 2. *Readiness to relieve the needs of our brethren.* "But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need," etc. (ver. 17). True love expresses itself not only in great and heroic acts, but in little deeds of thoughtful kindness, in lowly ministries to the poor and needy. Our Lord not only gave his life for men, but he helped them in other ways. He fed the hungry thousands (Mark viii. 1—9). He vindicated the loving woman who, having anointed him with her costly perfume, was blamed for so doing (Matt. xxvi. 6—13). He prepared a meal for his hungry, weary, and discouraged disciples (John xxi. 4—13). We ought to imitate him in this respect. We shall not fail to do so if true love dwells in our hearts. If we do not help our needy brethren when it is in our power to do so, it is clear that a love like Christ's is not in us. Look at the case stated in the text. (1) Here is a brother requiring help—a "brother in need." (2) Here is another who has power to render the help which is needed. He "hath the world's goods"—the things needful for the sustenance of the bodily life. (3) The latter is aware of the need of the former. He "beholdeth his brother in need;" he has not only seen, but looked upon, considered, his needy brother. (4) Yet he does nothing to relieve the need; he bestows nothing out of his store to supply the wants of his brother; he closes his heart against him. (5) "How doth the love of God abide in him?" Whatever may be his professions, his conduct proves him destitute of Divine love.

"Little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and in truth." Let our love be not merely a profession, but a reality; not an empty sentiment, but a hearty service. Let the beneficence of our hand be joined with the benevolence of our heart. In the spirit of our Lord, let us give to our brethren, not only genuine sympathy, but generous self-sacrifice whenever it is needful so to do. —W. J.

Vers. 19—22.—*The judicial function of conscience.* "And hereby we know that we are of the truth," etc. Our text suggests the following observations.

I. THAT CONSCIENCE EXERCISES A JUDICIAL FUNCTION IN MAN. By "our heart" in the text St. John means, as Alford says, "the heart as the seat of the conscience, giving rise there to peace or to terror, according as it is at rest or in disquietude. . . . The heart here is the inward judge of the man." Many are the definitions of "conscience." "Man's conscience is the oracle of God." "Conscience is God's monitor in the soul of man." "The sense of right." "God's vicegerent in the soul." Dr. Whewell: "Conscience is the reason employed about questions of right and wrong, and accompanied with the sentiments of approbation and condemnation." The function of conscience is not to give the Law unto us, but to pronounce whether we have kept the Law or not. "It is the great business of conscience," says Archbishop Leighton, "to sit, and examine, and judge within; to hold courts in the soul; and it is of continual necessity that it be so." It is most important that we bear in mind that for us conscience is not an infallible guide in the ethics of conduct. Some of the darkest crimes that were ever committed have been sanctioned by conscience. Saul of Tarsus was conscientious in his fierce persecution of the early Christians. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts xxvi. 9—11). And in subsequent ages many a persecutor has resembled him in this respect while perpetrating the most revolting cruelties. That the judgment of conscience may invariably be true and perfect it must needs be regulated by the revealed will of God, and be inspired by the Holy Spirit. We should take the will of God in Christ Jesus for our law; and then let conscience, quickened by the Spirit of God, exercise its judicial function in condemning or approving us in our relation to that law.

II. THAT WHEN, IN THE EXERCISE OF ITS JUDICIAL FUNCTION, CONSCIENCE CONDEMNS US, MUCH MORE ARE WE CONDEMNED BY THE HOLY GOD. "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." To my mind these words suggest two important considerations. 1. *Our conscience is an imperfect judge, but God is absolutely and infinitely holy.* Conscience has undoubtedly suffered by reason of human sin. Its judgments are not always of the most exalted character. As a judge it is sometimes partial. Sometimes it allows what if it were perfectly pure it must condemn. But "God is greater than our heart." His righteousness is perfect. Sin in every form is utterly abhorrent to him. His holiness is without the slightest spot

or the faintest shadow. The greatness of his mercy towards the sinner does not lead him to excuse any sin. If our heart condemn us, how much more does he? If our conscience, which is but a faint and imperfect echo of his voice, condemn us, how much more does he? 2. *Conscience may not take cognizance of every sin, but God "knoweth all things."* There are sins which escape the vigilance of conscience. A man's secret sins may be of three classes: (1) those which are unknown to his fellow-men, but known to himself; (2) those which are not recognized as sins by himself, but are so viewed by his fellow-men; and (3) those which are not regarded as sins either by himself or his fellow-men. But no sins whatever are hidden from God. "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness," etc. (Job xxxiv. 21, 22); "He hath set our iniquities before him, our secret sins in the light of his countenance." If, then, our conscience with its imperfect information, condemn us, how much more must he who "knoweth all things"! "If conscience be as a thousand witnesses," says Dr. Arrowsmith, "the all-seeing God is as a thousand consciences."

III. THAT WHEN, IN THE EXERCISE OF ITS JUDICIAL FUNCTION, CONSCIENCE DOES NOT CONDEMN US, WE REGARD GOD WITH INSPIRING CONFIDENCE. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." Notice: 1. *Confidence in God as to its nature.* "Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him." It is the firm persuasion, the assurance, of the heart that we are his children, and that we may look to him to be to us and to do for us all that he has promised to be to and to do for his children. Or, if we view it as indicated by the twenty-first verse, it is the confidence that he does not condemn us, but that he accepts us now and will own us in the great day. How precious is this assurance! 2. *Confidence in God springing from the exercise of holy love and the approbation of conscience.* "Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." The "hereby" refers to what has gone before. He who loves neither in word nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth, may know that he is "of the truth," etc. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren;" "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light." Again, St. John speaks of this assurance towards God as springing from an approving conscience (ver. 21). Apart from the approbation of the inward monitor, we cannot look God-ward with confidence or with joy. 3. *Confidence in God inspiring the conviction that he will answer our prayers to him.* "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight." The keeping of his commandments is not meritorious; it does not give us a claim upon him for the blessings which we ask in prayer; but it is an indication of character which shows that the suppliant will ask only what is in accordance with his will. That we "do the things that are pleasing in his sight" is a guarantee that we shall desire only those things which he will be pleased to bestow upon us (cf. ch. v. 14, 15; Ps. xxxvii. 4). Having the assurance that we are his children and endeavouring to please him, we are persuaded that the wise and gracious Father will answer our prayers to him.—W. J.

Vers. 1—12.—*Righteousness and sin in relation to children of God.* I. **RIGHTEOUSNESS INSEPARABLE FROM BEING CHILDREN OF GOD.** 1. *Present inner nature.* (1) *As recognized by God.* "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are." The subject was started in the closing verse of the second chapter in the connecting of "doing righteousness" with being "begotten of him." The latter thought so arrests John, that he calls them to contemplate the great bestowal of love on them. It was love calculated to excite their admiration. It was love that proceeded from the Father. The fatherly love did not stop short of their receiving the title of "children of God;" and the title corresponds to the reality. God gives us community of nature with himself. "Partakers of the Divine nature" is the language which Peter employs. Our having God as our Father implies that we can enter into his thoughts, can enjoy his approval and love, can co-operate with him to the advancement of his ends. Beyond this it was impossible for love to go. Let us rejoice in the gifting of love, by which God openly gives us the title of his children, and does not give the title without the reality. (2) *As not recognized by the world.* "For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him

not." If we share the same nature with God, why are our circumstances so unlike our origin? The reason given is that "the world knoweth us not," i.e. cannot detect the Divine image in us. Our thoughts, our delights, our motives and ways of acting, are all a riddle to men of the world. That this reason holds good is confirmed by the fact that, when God appeared in Christ, the world knew *him* not. Instead of detecting his Divinity, when it was abundantly evidenced, to its utter condemnation, it took him to be an impostor. 2. *Future glory.* (1) *As concealed.* "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be." His heart warming toward his readers as recipients with him of fatherly love, he addresses them as "beloved." He reverts to the particular outgiving of that love, to mark it as the foundation of *present* blessedness. "Now [prominence being given to the thought of time] are we children of God." With the same nature as the Father, we revel in the Father's thoughts, we bask in the sunshine of the Father's love, we run the way of the Father's commandments. But what are we to say about our future state? To a certain extent that is concealed. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be." The conditions of life will be changed. The great change, as indicated at the close of this verse, is that we shall see God as he is. There will not be the present veil of his works between us and God; but the veil will be rent in twain for us. Now we know not very definitely, or experimentally, how we shall be adapted for this vision of God. We can only imperfectly realize both the conditions and the experience. (2) *As revealed.* "We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is." It seems better to translate, "if it shall be manifested." It is not yet made manifest what we shall be; but it is certain that one day—we know not how soon—it shall be made manifest. Though we cannot very definitely anticipate this disclosure, yet we know this about it—that we shall have *likeness to God*. This connects our future with our present. The main element in our present is that we are children of God. Our future is to be our full growth, the bringing out of the Divine features in us to their greatest distinctness. It may be doubted whether this assimilation is regarded here as the *result* of the vision of God as he is. Rather are we being transfigured at present; and when the transfiguration is completed then will be fulfilled the *condition* of the beatific vision. Though, then, much is dark about our future, we have this upon which our minds can work—that it is the consummation of what we have of likeness to God along with the direct vision of God. 3. *Action in view of the future.* "And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he [that One] is pure." The future glory is a matter of hope to us, arising out of our present consciousness of sonship, our present experience of assimilation to God. It is a hope that rests for its realization on God. It is for him to complete the assimilation, and, with that, to give us the direct vision of himself. But it has been said of God (ch. ii. 29) that he is *righteous*. What, then, is the duty of every one who has his hope set on a righteous God—the hope of being made like to him in righteousness? It is to address himself to the work of *self-purification*. This implies that he has yet sin cleaving to him. It does not imply that he is to look to himself for purification, but simply that it rests with himself to *use the appointed means*, viz. as these have already been set forth—trust in the cleansing efficacy of Christ's blood, confessing sins, taking advantage of the services of the Advocate. We may think of these as associated with the exercises of prayer and reading of Scripture, and with the struggle after purity in the daily life. We have great assistance in the work of self-purification in the fact that we have a Model of purity set before us in *that One*, viz. Christ. That was purity attained to in the use of means, and within humanity, and in the midst of the world's defilements; and therefore meaning the goal of purity for us, while giving us direction and stimulus toward that goal. It is purity which is viewed as in the present, a gain which has come down to him from his earthly life, inseparable from his being lost. Christ, at this moment, holds up before us an image of human purity, under the spell of which every one who hopes to get near to God should come.

II. SIN INCOMPATIBLE WITH BEING CHILDREN OF GOD. 1. *Sin in its essence.* "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness: and sin is lawlessness." Every one who hopes to behold God's face in righteousness *purifieth himself*. What is to be said of every one who, instead of purifying himself, *doeth sin*? He is in conflict with law, or the Divine order. God lays down certain rules for our life, appoints certain means

of purification. He who does not observe the rules, does not use the means, does not escape moral judgment or characterization. His whole doing takes the character of lawlessness: and sin, it is added, is lawlessness. Sin supposes a law which has authority over us, whether revealed simply in the conscience or in Christ; it is the fact of there being such a law that gives character to action. Righteousness has the approval of God, as being the observance of his Law; sin has the condemnation of God, as being the violation of his Law. 2. *Sin incompatible with the purpose of Christ's manifestation.* "And ye know that he [that One] was manifested to take away sins." Christ had not only been proclaimed, but had been received by his readers; he could therefore appeal to their consciousness. The manifestation (in the past) here referred to covers the whole of the earthly history of our Lord; and it is important to note that, though its culminating point was his death, yet it all had a bearing on the *taking away sins*. The language seems to go beyond the taking of our sins upon him as our Substitute, and the procuring of forgiveness for us. He was manifested to take away sins *out of our life*. It is manifest, then, how incompatible sin is with *God's thought*. He who was in the bosom of the Father was manifested in flesh, endured hardness in this world, brought his earthly life to a close by a death of unmitigated anguish; and all that he might take away our sins. And are we, instead of carrying out the Divine intention, and having our sins taken away, to clutch at them as what we cannot part with, thus putting self before God? 3. *Sin incompatible with Christ's sinlessness.* "And in him is no sin." The sinlessness (in keeping with ver. 3) is carried down to the present moment. He is sinless now in heaven. No sin has come down to him from the earthly manifestation. "By his sinlessness is meant that he was filled at every moment of his life with the spirit of obedience, and with a love to God which surrendered itself unconditionally to his will, and with those powers which flow from an uninterrupted communion with God. The consequence of this was, not only that no distraction caused by sin could find a place either in his inner or his outer life, but, more than this, everything was both willed by him and carried into execution that the will of God appointed." The worldly minded judge of Jesus, who was a man by no means very susceptible of what is high and noble, felt constrained solemnly to recognize the innocence of the persecuted Jesus. And Pilate's wife, who, we may suppose, was more impressible than he, was so deeply convinced of the purity and blamelessness of Christ, that the thought of her husband imbruing his hands in the blood of that righteous Man haunted her even in sleep, and gave her no rest. A Roman warrior who commanded the guard at the cross was so overpowered by the impression that the Crucified made upon him, that he broke forth in words of deepest reverence, "Truly this was a righteous Man, this was the Son of God." And the malefactor who was crucified along with him, moved by his dying look, was made strong to give his whole confidence to his Person, and to apprehend the joy of a better life. Long and confidential intercourse had given Judas the most intimate knowledge of his Master; hence, if he could have found anything reproachable in his life, he would without doubt have brought it forward, in order to quiet his conscience in the view of the consequences of his treachery, and to palliate his crime. Among his friends, John the Baptist started back at the thought of baptizing him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Peter was so impressed with the presence of holiness in the miraculous draught of fishes, that he fell at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." As for Jesus himself, he was conscious of freedom from sin: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" He claimed to be the Image and Reflection of perfect goodness: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." What, then, is the meaning to us of the sinlessness of Christ? It means that we are not to sin. Did he loathe sin, and reject it in every form? did he feel the attraction of all that was highest, and cleave to it with his whole being? and are we to feel the charm of sin, and take it unto us? are we to be insensible to the beauties of holiness, and put them away from us? 4. *Sin incompatible with communion with Christ.* "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him." "Abiding in Christ" is taken up from the close of the second chapter. It implies an entire surrender of ourselves to Christ. It is, in communion with Christ, getting into his thoughts and life. Whosoever finds his destiny in this sphere of things *sinneth not*; i.e. it is his principle not to sin. The principle is no doubt imperfectly carried out, and is accom-

panied with daily falls into sin, for which forgiving grace is needed; still, it is his principle not to sin. Whosoever sinneth, *i.e.* makes it his principle to sin, makes self the centre of his thoughts and life—*hath not seen him, neither knoweth him*. He hath not yet truly cast his eye on Christ, neither is he in the circle of his thoughts. *5. Same truth emphasized.* “My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he [that One] is righteous.” He addresses them as objects of his warm affection. His affection goes out to them as in danger. He cannot bear the thought of their being led astray. He has just been referring to *knowing*. That was a word which the Gnostic teachers used. *Gnostic* is literally “known.” Those teachers said in one form or another, that, if men *knew*, it did not matter what their conduct was. Let no man, whatever his seeming authority, whatever his plausibility, whatever his use of the name of Christ, lead them astray. None can be placed above the demand for rightness of conduct. The only way in which a man can be regarded as righteous in the sight of God is by *doing righteousness*, *i.e.* carrying right principles into his whole conduct. It was so with that One; nay, it is so with him still. Even in his glorified life he can be thought of as held by Divine restraints. And, if we would maintain communion with him, we must love Divine restraints too. *6. Sin connects with an evil source.* “He that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” Taking up him that *doeth sin*, *i.e.* acts without regard to Divine restraints, he advances to the thought of his spiritual *genesis*. He is blessed with no high origin. He is connected with the name that is most repellent. The devil, originally good, “stood not in the truth.” Appearing on the scene of human activity, he was the means of introducing sin into the world. That was *his* flagrant sin at the beginning; and he has not recoiled from his position. It is still his thought to baffle God, to destroy human happiness. This, then, is the spiritual parentage of him that doeth sin. God is not owned by him. He revels in such ungodly thoughts as Satan revels in, engages in such ungodly designs as Satan engages in. It is evident that he cannot have communion with Christ; for there is a deadly antagonism between Christ and *the works of the devil*. He was the Son of God, naturally zealous (so to think of it) for the Father’s honour. It was no matter of indifference to him to think of the fair creation as marred, of human happiness as destroyed. And in the depths of eternity he burned to retrieve our lost position, and to this end, in the fulness of time, he was manifested. He came to be a destroyer too, but not like Satan a destroyer of good things, but a destroyer of Satan’s works, *i.e.* all works that have this common bond that they are done against God, in disregard or defiance of his authority. If a man, then, is Satan’s worker, Christ has a controversy with him; he is the deadly antagonist of his works, he aims at their utter destruction. *7. Divine origin is shown in opposition to sin.* “Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God.” He starts here from the high origin. He takes a man who is begotten of God, and he uses the strong language regarding him that he doeth not sin, the reason given being that his seed, *i.e.* the principle of the Divine life, abideth in him. Nay, he uses the still stronger language that he cannot sin, the reason given being that it is of God and of no other that he is begotten. An animal (which is suggested) does not live, cannot live, but in accordance with the principle of life from which it has sprung, and which is being unfolded in it. So he who has received the Divine principle into his life, and is having it unfolded in him, is not as though he had only the seed of depravity in him. Though there is depravity remaining in him, coming out in sins for which he has to humble himself, yet it can be said that sin is utterly foreign to his life. A man can only have properly one principle in his life, and his principle is not, cannot be sin, because the Divine seed is there, and of God he is begotten.

III. TRANSITION TO A NEW SECTION. *1. Mark of brotherly love.* “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” So far as the principle of life is concerned, there are two, and only two, classes of men. We are either the children of God or the children of the devil. It becomes us to ask of ourselves to which class we belong. And, seeing Christ shall say of many who profess to have eaten and drunk in his presence, “I know not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity,”

we have need to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy. Let us not please ourselves with illusions, but let us keep close to reality. The apostle gives us a mark here by which we may be helped to classify ourselves. According to his manner, he catches up the former idea of doing righteousness, but only to fix upon its most glorious form. He is not the child of God that *loveth not his brother*. Loving our brother, then, is that by which we are marked off from the children of the devil. This is the mark which we are to be helped to apply. 2. *Commandment of brotherly love*. "For this is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." It was of importance to consider brotherly love, because it was contained in the first message of Christianity. Did it announce the blessed fact that God made infinite sacrifice for us? Translated into a *command* that was that we should love one another. We have the command, with all the Master's authority. This contains the principle which is to operate in our life in our relations to one another. 3. *Exemplification of the converse of brotherly love*. "Not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous." He goes back to the first manifestations of evil for his example. Cain was the child of the devil. It is said here that he was "of the evil one." He was under the influence of him who was evil affected toward men. Being evilly affected toward his brother, he slew him. "And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous." He disliked Abel's piety, not so much purely, as because it gave him a better standing with God. When evidence was given, in the most convincing manner, of what their relative standing was, Cain's dislike grew to hate and hot anger which could not be appeased.—R. F.

Vers. 13—24.—*The sign of brotherly love*. I. LOVE TO BE TRACED TO A SAVING CHANGE. 1. *Not to be expected in the world*. "Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you." Cain hated Abel; after the same fashion the world hates Christ's people. Our Lord, whom John here echoes, points to the fact of his being hated *before* his people, and then adds, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Abel's tragic end was conclusive evidence that he was not to be classed with Cain; so when the world hates us, there is this consolation, that we have evidence of not being classed with the world. 2. *Its presence the sign of a saving change*. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." Here again John echoes our Lord, who describes the saving change in the same language (John v. 24). The passage out of death into life is to be interpreted in accordance with being begotten of God and having his seed in us. It is not simply *justification*—a passage out of a state of condemnation into a state of acceptance. It is rather *regeneration*—a passage out of a dead, abnormal state of our thoughts, desires, volitions, into their living, normal state. This is a passage which must take place in the spiritual history of every one of us who would come forth into the light of God's countenance. It is not effected without Divine help, which is offered in the gospel. To every one to whom the gospel offer is made there is granted the assistance of the Spirit, that he may lay hold on Christ as his Saviour. With Christ there is a new principle introduced into our life, which now needs full manifestation for our perfect health and happiness. It is a matter, then, of the very greatest importance for us to know that we have made the passage out of death into life. We are not to take this for granted, but to be guided by evidence. The test given by our Lord is—hearing his Word, and believing him that sent him. John's interpretation of this is *loving the brethren*. We are to love those who are animated with the same Christian sentiment, not in the same way those who are animated with worldly sentiment. If we have the right feeling within the Christian circle, loving all who love Christ, then we may conclude that a saving change has taken place in us. 3. *Its absence the sign of continuance in an unsaved state*. "He that loveth not abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." The apostle singles out him who is not under the influence of love (without any specification of object), and says of him, that he abideth in death, *i.e.* has not made the passage—remains where he was. In confirming this, he assumes that want of love is equivalent to hatred of a brother. It is only where love is active that

hatred is effectually excluded. "Whosoever hateth his brother [there seems to be a limitation to the Christian circle] is a murderer." He has the feeling of the murderer, in so far as he is not sorry to see the happiness of his brother diminished. If he is a murderer to any extent, then—according to the old law—his life is forfeited. It cannot be said of him, as it can be said of him that loves, that he has eternal life abiding in him. His true life, that which has eternal elements in it, has not yet commenced.

II. LOVE IN ITS MANIFESTATION. 1. *Love in its highest manifestation.* "Hereby know we love, because he [that One] laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." The apostle has laid down love as the sign of a saving change; how are we to know what love is? He does not give any philosophical definition of it; he reaches his end better by pointing to its highest manifestation, viz. that One laying down his life for us. "I have power to lay it down," he said, "and I have power to take it again;" but he elected to lay it down. It was laying down that which was dearest to him, that which cost him an infinite pang to lay down. There was not a little truth in what Satan said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." It was only love that could overcome the greatest natural aversion to dying—a love stronger than death, a love burning with a flame that waters and floods could not quench. It was love going out toward us, that sought to be of infinite service to us. He did not grudge his life, that we might have life—the pardon of our sins, and the quickening of his Spirit through our whole nature. To point to this is better than to give any definition of love—it is love meeting a great necessity, solving the problem of sin, triumphing over the greatest difficulty that could arise under the moral government of God. There was rebellion against the Divine authority: how was it triumphed over? Not by a resort to force, which would have been easy, but by drawing upon the resources of love, even by that which was fitted to excite the astonishment of the universe—the Son of God becoming incarnate, and laying down his precious life, that the guilt of rebellion and all its evil consequences might be removed. So John needs not to give any definition of love in abstract terms; he needs only to say, "Hereby know we love." This is its absolute realization—a realization from which we are to derive instruction and inspiration. For what does it say to us? John puts it thus, "And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." As he represents those who hate as *murderers*, so he represents those who love as *martyrs*. If we take "laying down our lives" as actual martyrdom, then there is not an obligation to this under all circumstances. In the early times Christians had often to face martyrdom—it was a matter of obligation to them from which they could not free themselves, from which they sought not to free themselves, because they were under the spell of Christ's sacrifice for them. It is to the honour of our Christianity that they went forth even joyfully to meet death in whatever form it came to them. If opportunity offered, it would be our duty to do the same. But observe the spirit of our great exemplification of love. It was not self-immolation for its own sake, but rather self-immolation for the sake of being of service to us. He who, like Lacordaire, has himself bound to a literal cross is doing a *bold* thing, but a *mistaken* thing, for the reason that there is no proper connection between his act and service done. Carried out, it would turn Christianity into a religion of suicide. What keeps us right, while still preserving the spell of Christ's sacrifice, is that we allow our love to go as far in sacrifice as our doing service to others requires. 2. *An ordinary failure in love.* "But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" It is very exceptional where our duty is to lay down our lives for the brethren; it is generally a much simpler matter. Here is a Christian who has the *means of living* for this world beyond what he absolutely requires. He is not rich, let us say, but is in good health, and employed, and has an ordinary living. Here, on the other hand, is a brother *in need*, who is in bad health, or is unemployed, or is incapacitated by age for work. "The poor ye have always with you." What, then, is the duty of a Christian to a needy brother? Is he not guided to it even by his natural feelings? As he beholds his brother in need, his heart opens in compassion toward him; and he goes and lays down for him, not his life in this case, but a little out of his worldly store, which goes to lighten the burden of his brother's poverty. That is the Christian part. But let us suppose the converse. Here

is one who professes to be a Christian. Nature does not refuse him assistance. The spectacle of a brother's poverty opens his heart in compassion. But he selfishly *shuts* it—goes away, and finds prudential reasons for not making the little sacrifice that his feelings unchecked would lead him to make: have we not grounds, in this case, for doubting his Christianity? Of one who goes and lays down of his living for a needy brother we can think that he has the love of God abiding in him. Even in that little sacrifice he is acting in the same line in which God acted in making infinite sacrifice. But of one who cannot lay down, not his life, which is the highest test, but a little of his living, which is a very low test, what are we to think? What has he in common with that God whom he professes to love, of whose love the cross of Christ is the expression? 3. *The requisite of reality in love.* "My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth." With all affectionateness he would have them to attend to this lesson, calling them his little children, and including himself in what he inculcates. Love may very properly find expression in *word*. "Kind messages have a grand part to discharge in the system of utterances and acts by which the reign of love is maintained and advanced in so hard a world. As soon as we have passed beyond the limits of school into the real world, we find that it is sweet to be remembered with regard by friends at a distance—to learn that you have not faded out of their memory, like unfixed photographs in the sunshine; that you are sufficiently a distinct object of regard to be found worthy of a direct and affectionate salutation." It is very proper also to use the *tongue* in conveying love. The kindly feeling must be in the heart; but let the kindly expression also be on the tongue. There is nothing more beautiful in the picture of the virtuous woman drawn by King Lemuel than this touch: "In her tongue is the law of kindness." Let not the tongue be used as the vehicle of disagreeableness, of rancour; let love teach us how to use it. Kindliness of tone, especially when accompanied with the fitting word, does much to take away the hardness of life and the oppressive sense of isolation. But, when proper occasion arises, let us also love in *deed*. Withhold not from a needy brother when thou canst relieve him. Perform the act to which the kindly feeling prompts. Then only can we love *in truth*. Love that stops short of doing, that does not go beyond fine phrases, is characterized by unreality. To be true, it must penetrate into what is practical, however unromantic.

III. LOVE IN ITS BENEFICIAL RESULT. 1. *Assurance.* "Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him." The link of connection is truth as the sphere in which love moves. Let us go on loving, and we shall know that we are *of the truth*; i.e. have hold of eternal reality, so as to be steadied by it and wholly characterized by it. Knowing that we are of the truth, we shall *assure our heart before him*. It is of the utmost importance that we should have our heart assured as to our state and destiny. This can only be "before him;" for it is with him that we have to do—to whom we stand or fall. Does our heart tell us that we stand in a right relationship to him? We may have experience of sin, as we have already been taught, and yet stand in a right relationship to him. God's people are those who are being gradually cleansed from sin in the blood of Christ and in connection with confession of sins. Their titles, then, are not affected by remains of sin, if there is a new life operating in them, showing itself especially in the activity of brotherly love. The following course of thought cannot be ascertained with certainty. The difficulty is caused by the introduction of "for" before "God is greater." For its omission there is one very good authority of the fifth century; but the weight of authority is for its introduction. If we take the more authoritative reading, we have not a clear sense; on the other hand, if we take the less authoritative reading, we have a clear and excellent sense. It seems to be a case (very rare, indeed) in which the authority of manuscripts must yield to the authority of consistent thought. The way of getting over the difficulty in the Revised Version is far from satisfactory. It seems to teach that, if we only love, then, whereinsoever our heart condemn us, we may pacify it by the thought that God is greater than our hearts, especially in his omniscience—which is a latitudinarian sentiment. In the old version there is a distinction drawn between the case of *our heart condemning us* and the case of *our heart not condemning us*. (1) *Misery of a heart that condemns.* "Whereinsoever our heart condemn us; because ['For if our heart condemn us'] God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

Having started the thought of assurance, John emphasizes it by putting forward the calamitousness of its opposite. If our heart condemn us, *i.e.* if, from the presence of unloving feelings and from other evidences, we do not have good ground for thinking that we have yet come into a covenant relationship to God, then our case is bad. We have not only self-condemnation—conscience turned against ourselves—but we have something worse. God is greater than our heart in this sense, that he has made it with its power of judgment upon ourselves. Conscience is only his legate; we must think of the great God himself pronouncing judgment upon us, and his judgment is more efficient than ours. We have but a limited knowledge even of ourselves. If with that limited knowledge our judgment is condemnatory, what must the judgment of God be? He has more to proceed upon; for he *knoweth all things*—things that have faded from our mind, things in the depths of our heart beyond our own power of clear discernment. This clear condemnation of ourselves, involving the weightier and more terrible condemnation of God, is not to be taken as equivalent to want of assurance, which only goes thus far—that the evidences do not warrant a clear judgment in our favour. This want of assurance, which not a few Christians have, is a painful state, which should stimulate to a laying firm hold upon Christ, in whom all our interests are secured. (2) *Bliss of a heart that does not condemn.* “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God.” In view of his now stating their case and his own case, he calls them “beloved.” We look into our hearts, and, with an honest desire to know the truth, we cannot come to the conclusion that we stand in an uncovenanted relationship to God. With the traces that there are of sin, there would seem to be also traces of a work of grace going on in the heart. This may not amount to *full assurance*; but, in so far as it is present, we do not need to look up to God with fear. We are conscious of having the justifying judgment of God, of being children of God; and we can look up with holy boldness to our Father. 2. *Privilege of being heard.* “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight.” One form which our boldness takes is *asking*. We are full of wants; and it is natural for us, in the consciousness of our sonship, to express our wants to our Father. We go upon the ground of our covenant relationship in pleading. “Preserve my soul; for I am *holy*: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.” “Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?” We ask not always with the full knowledge of what we really need, but with the reservation that respect may be had by God to our real need. And whatsoever we thus ask, we receive of him. He constantly blesses us out of his boundless stores. There is a ladder of communication between us and heaven, upon which the angels of God ascend and descend. We are heard, not apart from *obedience*. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” We must be conscious of an honest intention to bring our life into agreement with our prayers. It is only when we keep *his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight*, that we have that boldness in asking which God rewards. *Added explanation.* “And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment.” He would leave no doubt as to what he means. The commandment is one in two parts. The *first* part of the commandment is that we *believe in the Name of his Son Jesus Christ*. This may be said to be his full Name. He was the *historical Jesus*, who stood in an essential relationship to God as *his Son*, and was *sent forth to do his saving work*. That is the blessed import of the Name here given to our Lord. His nature has thus been declared; and what we are *commanded* to do is to *trust* in the Name. We are, as sinners, to trust in the Name of him who has gloriously wrought out salvation for us. And what a Name to trust in! Not the name of one who can love a little, and can have no saving merit to transfer; but the Name of him who manifested the infinite desire of God for our salvation, and, in labour and in hiding of the Father’s face, acquired infinite merit for transference to us. The *second* part of the commandment follows on the first. It is *loving one another*, and the *manner* is added (as commanded by Christ)—which is loving one another as he has loved us (John xv. 12). He in whom we trust commands in accordance with his own nature, commands in accordance with his own example. We cannot trust in him and not love; and thus there is virtually one commandment. 3. *Privilege of communion.* “And he that keepeth his command-

ments abideth in him, and he in him." The apostle here recurs to the key-note of the Epistle. When, trusting in Christ, we love one another, we keep the way clear for communion with God. *Transitio to a new section.* "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us." The pledge of communion is possession of the Spirit, which is unfolded in the following paragraph.—R. F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1.—ch. v. 12.—(2) *The source of sonship.* Possession of the Spirit.

Ver. 1.—6.—Confession of the Incarnation is the assurance that the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of truth, is working in us, and not the spirit of error. The passage seems clearly to teach that there are two rival influences contending for power over the spirits of men. We must test men's spirits to see whether they are organs of the Spirit of truth or of the spirit of error.

Ver. 1.—Beloved (as in ch. ii. 28 and iii. 18, the apostle again breaks out with a personal appeal into an earnest exhortation suggested by the statement just made), **prove the spirits** (*δοκιμάσετε τὰ πνεύματα*). "The spirits" are principles and tendencies in religion: these need to be tested, for earnestness and fervour are no guarantee of truth. And to test these principles is the duty of the individual Christian as well as of the Church in its official capacity. Just as every Athenian was subjected to an examination (*δοκιμασία*) as to his origin and character before he could hold office, so the spirit of every religious teacher must be examined before his teaching can be accepted. This is no useless precaution; because, as Christ has come forth (*ἐξεληλυθε*) from God (John xvi. 28; comp. John viii. 42; xiii. 3; xvi. 27), many false prophets have come forth (*ἐξεληλύθασι*) from the spirit of error. But perhaps "have gone forth into the world" means no more than "have displayed themselves" *in publicum prodierunt*. There is probably no reference to the false teachers having "gone forth from us" (ch. ii. 19). Besides Cerinthus and other Gnostics, there were the Nicolaitanes, astrologers, professors of magic, and dealers in charms, some of which seem to have had their origin in Ephesus, for they were known as "Ephesian letters." Apollonius of Tyana was eagerly welcomed at Ephesus, and it is not impossible that his visit took place during St. John's lifetime.

Ver. 2.—This verse contains the main subject of the section. To confess the Incarnation is to prove that one draws one's inspiration from God through his Spirit. **Know ye**; or, *recognize ye* (*γινώσκετε*), may be either imperative, in harmony with "believe"

and "prove" (ver. 1), or indicative, in harmony with "we know" (ch. iii. 16, [19,] 24).

Ver. 3.—**Every spirit** (not so much the personal teacher as the principle or tendency of the doctrine) **which confesseth not Jesus.** This is the true reading, the words *Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα* being a spurious addition from ver. 1. As so often, St. John states the case both negatively and positively for emphasis. There is an ancient variant reading of much interest, probably of Latin origin, which can be traced back to the second century, being known to Tertullian and Irenæus. For *μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν* it gives *ἀρεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν*, *solvit Jesum*. This corruption of the text was evidently aimed at those who distinguished the man Jesus from the Divine Christ, and thus "dissolved" his Personality. The Greek manuscripts are quite unanimous against the reading. Is not of God; and therefore is of the evil one (see on ch. iii. 10). Those professedly Christian teachers are ever among the most dangerous who treat the Divinity of Jesus Christ as more or less of an open question, or as a matter of indifference. *Τὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου* probably means "the spirit of antichrist," understanding *πνεῦμα* from the preceding clause rather than (quite vaguely) "the characteristic of antichrist" (see on ch. ii. 18, to which passage, however, *ἀκηκόατε* does not refer, but to Christian teaching in general). And now it is in the world already. This is an independent statement; St. John does not say that they had heard this previously.

Ver. 4.—**Ye are of God.** The *ὁμοίς* is in emphatic opposition to the false teachers (comp. ch. ii. 20). They are on one side, and the apostle's readers on the other, and it is from this standpoint that they are to "prove the spirits." St. John knows nothing of any neutral position from which the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error can be criticized "with absolute impartiality." "He that is not with me is against me." This assumed neutral position is already within the domain of error. **Ye have overcome them.** "Them" means the false teachers; but in what sense have St. John's "little children" overcome them? He may be speaking by anticipation; confident of the victory, he writes of it as an accomplished

fuct (comp. John xvi. 33). But it is better to take the statement literally. By refusing to listen to the false teachers (ch. x. 8) the sheep have conquered them: the seducers have "gone out" (ch. ii. 19), unable to hold their own within the fold. Nor is this wonderful: the one side have God with them, the other Satan. 'Ο ἐν τῇ κόσμῳ here is equivalent to δ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου (Luke xii. 31). Just as God is in believers and they in God, so the world is in the evil one (ch. v. 19) and the evil one in it.

Ver. 5.—The source of their character and their teaching is the world; from it they derive their inspiration; and of course the world listens to them. Once again (see on ch. iii. 23) we have an echo of Christ's last discourses: "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own" (John xv. 19).

Ver. 6.—The opposite case stated again, but not in the same form as in ver. 4. The "we" here is not the same as the "ye" there, with the mere addition of the writer. "We" here seems to mean the apostles. If it is considered "broad enough to include all who have truly received Christ by faith," it leaves no one to be the hearers. "He that knoweth God heareth us" will mean that we hear ourselves, if "us" means all believers. But St. John's meaning seems rather to be that he who *acquires knowledge* (δ γινώσκων) of God is ready to listen to further apostolic instruction. From this (ἐκ τούτου) need not be confined to ver. 6; it may apply to the whole passage. For the Spirit of truth, comp. John xiv. 17; xv. 26; xvi. 13.

Vers. 7.—21.—God is Love, and love is the surest test of birth from God. From ch. iii. 11, 12 St. John renews his exhortations to love, this time at greater length and in closer connexion with the other great subject of this second half of the Epistle, the birth from God.

Ver. 7.—Beloved (see on ver. 1) The address is specially suitable where the subject is love. As before, we must not look for the chief purport of the section in the exhortation with which it opens. Just as "prove the spirits" is subordinate to "every spirit which confesseth," etc., so "let us love one another" is subordinate to "God is Love." (For the history and meaning of the specially Christian term ἀγάπη, see Trench's 'Synonyms of New Testament'.)

Ver. 8.—In giving the opposite, St. John again varies the thought, this time very remarkably. Instead of "love is of God" (ver. 7), we have "God is Love"—a far deeper thought; and instead of "knoweth not God," we have "knew not God," or, as we should say in English, "hath not known"

or "never knew God." The man's not loving his brother shows that in no real sense has he ever in the past known God: he is of the world (ch. iii. 1), not of God. We must beware of watering down "God is Love" into "God is loving," or even "God of all beings is the most loving." Love is not a mere attribute of God; like light, it is his very nature. As "God is Light" sums up the Being of God intellectually considered, so "God is Love" sums up the same on the moral side. Only when this strong meaning is given to the statement does St. John's argument hold, that "he that loveth not knoweth not God." A man who has no idea of any one of the attributes of God, as order, or beauty, or power, or justice, has an *imperfect* knowledge of God. But he who has no idea of love has no knowledge of God, for love is himself. God alone loves in the fullest and highest sense of the word; for he alone loves with perfect disinterestedness. It is love which alone can explain creation. Why should a Being perfectly blessed in himself create other beings, but to bestow a blessing upon them?

Ver. 9.—The verse is very similar to ch. iii. 16, "in this" referring to what follows, and introducing a concrete and crucial example of love. Beware of the inadequate and misleading rendering "towards us" for ἐν ἡμῖν. It means in us, and belongs to "manifested," as John ix. 4 plainly shows. We must not connect together "the love of God in us," still less "the love of God toward us," as one idea. "In us" means "in our case," and the whole may be paraphrased: "A transcendent manifestation of the love of God has been made in regard to us, in that he hath sent," etc. The verse might serve as a summary of St. John's Gospel. The word μονογενής as applied to Christ is peculiar to St. John; it and ἵστωμεν are the key-words of the passage. "This is love indeed; it is his only Son whom he has sent, and he has sent him to give us life." Note the double article—"his Son, yes, his Only Begotten."

Ver. 10.—Let no man think that any higher manifestation of love than this can be found. It is not in any love of man to his Maker, but in his Maker's love to him, that the real nature of love can be perceived. Note the change from perfect to aorist; ἀπέσταλκεν in ver. 9 expresses the permanent results of the mission; ἀπέστειλεν here states the mission as an accomplished fact complete in itself. (For ἰλασμός, see on ch. ii. 2.)

Ver. 11.—Beloved introduces a solemn exhortation, as in vers. 1, 7. The "if" implies no uncertainty (see on ch. v. 9); it puts the fact more gently, but not more doubtfully, than "since." The "so" (οὕτως)

covers both the quality and the quantity of the love. *Kai* belongs solely to *ἡμεῖς*: "we also on our part ought to love one another." We should have expected as the apodosis, "we also ought to love God." But this link in the thought the apostle omits as self-evident, and passes on to state what necessarily follows from it. In ver. 12 he shows how loving God involves loving one's fellow-men (comp. ch. ii. 5 for a similar passage over an intermediate link).

Ver. 12.—No one hath ever yet beheld God. *Θεὸν* stands first for emphasis, and without the article, as meaning the Divine Being rather than the Father in particular: "With regard to God—no one hath ever yet beheld him" (*τεθεωρατα*, stronger than *εἰδωκεν*). Why does St. John introduce this statement here? Not, of course, as implying that to love an invisible Being is impossible; but that the only security for genuine and lasting love in such a case is to love that which visibly represents him. Seeing that God is invisible, his abiding in us can be shown only by his essential characteristic being exhibited in us, i.e. by our showing similar self-sacrificing love. *Ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ* can scarcely mean God's love for us; for how can our loving one another make his love perfect? Nor yet vaguely, "the relation of love between us and God," but, as in ch. ii. 5, our love for him. Our love towards God is perfected and brought to maturity by the exercise of love towards our brethren in him.

Ver. 13.—Almost identical with ch. iii. 24. In vrs. 1-7 the apostle says that confession of the Incarnation proves possession of the Spirit; and in ver. 12 that love of the brethren proves the indwelling of God. He now (ver. 13) goes on to say that possession of the Spirit proves the indwelling of God; and (ver. 15) that confession of the Incarnation proves the same. So that these four facts—confession of the Incarnation, possession of the Spirit, love of our fellow-men, and indwelling of God—mutually involve one another. St. John does not say, "He has given us his Spirit," but "of his Spirit (*ἐκ τοῦ Πνεύματος αὐτοῦ*)."
It is impossible for us to receive more than a portion; the fulness of the Spirit is possessed by Christ alone. In John i. 16 we have a similar use of *ἐκ* (comp. John xii. 3).

Ver. 14.—And we have beheld, and do bear witness. The emphatic *ἡμεῖς* clearly means "we apostles;" and "beheld" (*τεθεωμεθα*) implies contemplation with bodily eyes, as in ver. 12. The invisible God can be only "invisibly seen" by the pure heart. But the incarnate Son has been visibly contemplated; and to bear witness of this fact was the very office of an apostle (John xv. 27; Acts i. 8). The language of this

verse, as of ch. i. 1, 3, would be strained and rather unreal in one who had not seen the Christ in the flesh. Note that *συνῆρα* has no article, and is not in mere apposition, but is a second predicate: "The Father *hath* sent [see on ver. 10] the Son as Saviour," i.e. to be such. "The world," as commonly in St. John's writings, is specially the unregenerate among the human race.

Ver. 15.—Whosoever confesseth (*ὁς ἀνδρολογῇσιν*). This rendering seems preferable to "whosoever shall confess" or "shall have confessed." The exact meaning is, "Whosoever has once for all taken up the position of confessing." Ver. 14 gave the case of the apostles; this gives that of those who accept their witness. In the next verse we have that of both together.

Ver. 16.—And we have come to know and believe. Both perfects are virtually presents, expressing the present continuance of a condition begun in the past: "We know and continue to believe." Experience and faith are intimately connected; and sometimes the one precedes, sometimes the other (John vi. 69). As in ver. 9, *ἐν ἡμῖν* should be rendered in us, not "to us" or "toward us;" and here also the interpretation, "in our case," is certainly possible, and perhaps safer. But the meaning may be that the object of our knowledge and faith is that portion of his own love which God has *in us*. It is "in us," and is exercised towards him and our brethren, but in reality it is his—it is himself abiding *in us*. In either case love is the object of our faith. Thus love is not only the true note of the Church (John xiii. 35), it is also the Church's creed. The second half of the verse restates the main proposition of this section with a view to further development.

Ver. 17.—This verse raises various questions which can scarcely be answered with certainty. Does "herein" (*ἐν τούτῳ*) look back to ver. 16? or forwards to "that" (*ὅσα*)? or forwards to "because" (*ὅτι*)? Again, does "with us" (*μεθ' ἡμῶν*) belong to "is made perfect" (*τετελειώται*)? or to "love" (*ἡ ἀγάπη*)? John xv. 8 inclines us to refer "herein" to "that" (*ὅσα*); and "with us" or "among us" goes better with the verb than with the subject: "Herein has love reached its perfection among us Christians, i.e. in the Church, that we have confidence in the day of judgment." This is the perfection of love, to have no fear. The *ὅτι* introduces the reason for this confidence: its basis is *our likeness to Christ*, especially in being united to the Father (John xvii. 21, 23, 26). Compare "even as he is pure" (ch. iii. 3), and "even as he is righteous" (ch. iii. 7): *καθὼς ἐκεῖνος* in all three cases.

Ver. 18.—Love implies attraction, fear

repulsion; therefore fear exists not in love. Love here means the *principle* of love in general; it must not be limited to God's love to us, or our love to God, or our love of the brethren. Love and fear coexist only where love is not yet perfect. Perfect love will absolutely exclude fear as surely as perfect union excludes all separation. It is self-interested love that fears; pure and unselfish love has no fear. Yet nothing but perfect love must be allowed to cast out fear. Otherwise this text might be made an excuse for taking the most unwarrantable liberties with Almighty God. To cease to fear without attaining to perfect love is to be irreverent and presumptuous. Hence the apostle is once more pointing out an ideal to which Christians must aspire, but to which no one attains in this life. There is a fear, as Bede points out, which prepares the way for love, and which comes only to depart again when its work is done. Because fear hath punishment. *Κόλασις* must not be rendered indefinitely "suffering" or "torment" (Matt. xxv. 46; Ezek. xliii. 11; Wisd. xi. 14; 2 Macc. iv. 38). But *κόλασις ἔχει* does not mean "deserves" or "will receive punishment," but quite literally "has it." It is the day of judgment and fear in reference to that day that is under consideration; and fear of punishment is in itself punishment by anticipation. Note the *ἀλλά* and the *δέ*, introducing a contrary and then a contrast back again: "There is no fear in love; nay, perfect love casteth out fear: but he that habitually feareth [present participle] is not made perfect in love." The dread of punishment may deter men from sin; but it cannot lead them to righteousness. For that we need either the sense of duty or the feeling of love.

Ver. 19.—We love. The *αὐτόν* is spurious, and is not to be understood: the love is again quite general. "We have this prin-

ciple of love." To take *ἀγαπῶμεν* as subjunctive in the sense "let us love" is less forcible. St. John states as a fact what ought to be a fact. "We Christians do not fear, but love. Yet this is no credit to us. After God's love in giving his Son for us it would be monstrous not to love."

Ver. 20.—Ebrard and others make a new section begin here; but vers. 21, 22 are in intimate connexion with what precedes. What is this love of which the apostle has been speaking? Is it the love of God or of our fellow-men? Both; love of our brethren is organically bound up with love of God. To love God and hate one's brother is impossible. Sight, though not necessary to affection, aids it; and it is therefore easier to love men than God. If a man fails in the easier, will he succeed in the harder? Moreover, to hate one's brother is to hate God. "Whoso rejecteth you rejecteth me, and whoso rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me." Note the negative, *μή* not *οὐ*. St. John has no definite person in view as *ὁ οὐκ ἀγαπῶν*, but any one who may happen to be of such a character, *ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν*. As before, *ὁ μὴ ἀγαπῶν* and *ὁ μισῶν* are treated as equivalent; there is no neutral term between "love" and "hate."

Ver. 21.—That he who loveth God love his brother also. This is the great commandment, on which hang all the Law and the prophets (Matt. xxii. 37, 39; Luke x. 27; John xiii. 34), and, whatever we may think of the relation between seeing and loving, there is the Divine command to love, not only the invisible God, but the visible brother in whom the invisible God dwells. Sight may hinder as well as help; it is hard to love what is squalid and hideous. In such cases let us remember the Divine command; let us remember the Divinity which even the most debased humanity contains.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Tests of true or false prophets.* Connecting link: The apostle had just declared that, in a life of obedience to and of like spirit with God, we had a twofold seal—firstly, that we are of the truth; and secondly, that God abideth in us. But it was not to be supposed that all this would remain unimpugned from without, however clear it might be to the spirit within. At the same time, we are not to be easily moved from our ground. But should any attempt to seduce us from the faith, we are to apply to such a very searching test. Hence our topic—*Teachers of novelties to be severely tested.* For many an age there have been and will be two classes of men—one, desirous of uttering any new fancy that seizes them, or of disputing any accepted faith which they themselves are not disposed to embrace; and another, equally ready to listen to any novelty in doctrine which may at any time be propounded to them. Even in the age when the Apostle John wrote this letter, "many false prophets" had "gone out into the world." And it is a great blessing for us that the aged apostle took occasion from that fact (1) to administer a caution against a too ready acceptance of any new prophet, and (2) to supply a test, at once exclusive and inclusive, which might serve the Churches for all time.

I. THE RIGHT OF "TRYING THE SPIRITS" BELONGS TO EVERY CHRISTIAN, AND IS INALIENABLE. A Christian is under no obligation to let any new prophet gain his acceptance without severely testing him. 1. The Lord Jesus Christ himself had never called for a blind acceptance of his claims. He courted inquiry. He repelled objectors by statements of infinite dignity and power. He appealed to their reason, their candour, and their sense of right. One assertion indeed he made and maintained—that he was the Son of God and the King of men. This was the sole charge which led him to the cross. For the first part of the assertion he was condemned by the Sanhedrin, as if he were against Moses; for the second by the Roman power, as if he were the rival of Cæsar. But no fewer than six different lines did he suggest on which the proof of his claims might be tried. (1) His character (John viii. 46). (2) His works (John xiv. 10, 11). (3) Prophecy (Luke xxiv. 27). (4) Testimony (John viii. 17, 18). (5) His resurrection (John ii. 19). (6) The promise of the Holy Ghost (Acts i. 4). 2. In receiving the Lord Jesus, believers, whether Jew or Gentile, had found their very strongest prepossessions in an opposite direction overborne by the accumulated force of the evidence that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (John xx. 30, 31). 3. The reception of Christ as a living and reigning Saviour had been followed by a new and regenerated social life. 4. Consequently, it could never be right to consent to imperil all this at the bidding of any new prophet that might arise, until they had submitted that prophet to a scrutiny as severe and as searching as their own Lord and Master had invited when he called for the adhesion of their hearts. The reason was satisfied when the Christ was accepted; and if any further claims arise the reason must still assert its right to examine them, and to be equally satisfied on them before accepting them. So in every age. New critics must be criticized.

II. THERE IS ONE UNIFORM TEST TO WHICH THE "SPIRITS" ARE TO BE BROUGHT. Note here: 1. The point to be tested—"whether they are of God." 2. The one point which will be the test of that—Do they or do they not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh? *i.e.* Do they in all their teachings maintain the honour of our Lord Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, the Saviour of the world, the Christ, the Lord and King of men? *Yes or no!* It is a plain issue. And it is manifestly reasonable to compel men to try the whole question at issue, as to the truth or otherwise of any new prophet on a point so distinct and so sharply defined. For: (1) It is *the* point. For if the Lord Jesus is all that he claimed to be, Christianity stands. If he be not, it falls with a crash. (2) The claims of Christ are so vast that they stand absolutely alone. (3) Some point of invalidity in them must be shown before those claims can be displaced. (4) This never has been, never will be, never can be done. (5) Hence any "spirit" that would relegate Christ to an inferior place, is to be rejected forthwith.

III. APPLYING THIS TEST, WE HAVE THE EXTENT AND THE LIMIT OF THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD. 1. If he confesses the glory of Christ as the incarnate Son, he is "of God." He may not "follow with us;" he may be uncertain and inaccurate on minor points. He may come in no line of succession, and have felt the imposition of no priestly hand; still, if he avows "the Christ," he is "of God." 2. If he disavows the Christ, he is "not of God," however plausible his pretensions or captivating his words. Without the Christ, no Christian truth stands. "In him all things consist" (see Greek); Col. i. 11.

There may indeed be—there are—demurs against drawing the division so sharply as *yes or no*—true or false; and against the applicability of a like test to every age. *E.g.* it is objected: 1. It may surely be contended that, through prepossession on the part of the sacred writers, embellishments may have gathered round the history of a true Jesus, without insinuating that either it or he was absolutely false. We reply: The theory of prepossession will not hold; for the supreme testimony of all the New Testament is to the resurrection of Christ: as for the Jew, it was most violently contrary to all his prepossessions that the one whom his own nation hanged on a tree should have risen from the dead; and as for the Gentile, it was equally contrary to his prepossessions to believe in a resurrection at all! It is objected: 2. We admire Christ extremely; we honour him as the Prince of teachers. In fact, no praise of him can be excessive, if he be but put on the merely human platform. We reply: That intermediate position cannot consistently be held. So strongly was this felt at the outset, that the watchword of the pagan camp was, "Jesus Christ is anathema;" that of the

Christian camp, "Jesus Christ is Lord." There is no halting-place between the two. It is asked: 3. Is there, then, to be no progress in the course of the ages? is all other science to advance and Christian knowledge remain stationary, so that in the nineteenth century the same test of truth applies as at the first? We reply: Yes; there is to be progress *in* the truth, but not *from* it. Jesus Christ is what he is. He is what he claims to be. A thousand millions of ages cannot alter that fact. Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Hence at any point of time, however distant, whoever withholds from him his due, cannot be "of God." Note: 1. The "trying the spirits," as prophets and teachers, is not by any means to be confounded with an attempt to decide or to sit in judgment upon their spiritual position individually, as in the sight of God. To their own Master they stand or fall. We judge their teachings, not them. 2. At the same time, any one who comes to teach with a view of displacing Jesus from the throne of our hearts, must be prepared to undergo a scrutinizing ordeal. We can criticize as well as he, and we will. 3. In repelling attacks on the Christian faith, our wisdom lies in (1) setting minor matters in due relation to the rest, and then (2) remaining calmly in our stronghold, compelling an onset *there*, if any be ventured on at all. 4. Our attitude, perpetually, must be this: "We know we have a Saviour, who has saved us, who is saving others by us, and who is perpetually proving what he is by causing the lame to walk, the blind to see, and the dead to live; and you must displace these facts before you attempt to disturb our faith."

Vers. 1—6.—*The power of trying the spirits.* In the preceding homily we laid stress on the duty here indicated of "trying the spirits," and also on the test with which we are furnished for applying to them through all time. We moreover there referred almost exclusively to them as *ψευδοπροφῆται* rather than as *πνεύματα*. But a close study of *all* the clauses in these six verses will disclose to us teachings of great vividness and power concerning the false prophets themselves—the point from whence they started, the mission on which they are sent, the region to which they are bound, and the spirit with which they are inspired. In fact, the apostle views their embassy and action as a part of the great mystery of "antichrist," which had been foretold, which had actually made its appearance, and which would have to be fought against and overcome. It is the right and the duty of Christians to "try the spirits" (as we have seen). But they are not left to go to this warfare at their own charges, or without being adequately empowered. To them the right belongs, to them the duty attaches, because to them the power is given. Let us see how, in the paragraph before us, this is shown. Topic—*The power of trying the spirits a Divine bestowment.*

I. THOUGH SPIRITS ARE VISIBLE AS SUCH, THEY MAY EMBODY THEMSELVES IN THE FORM OF PROPHETS. Indeed, it is only as "prophets" bring messages of truth or of falsehood—messages which belong to the spiritual realm—that we have any special concern with them; i.e. as we regard them and their message as above and beyond the sphere of the phenomenal, and as representing the noumenal (cf. 1 Kings xxii. 20—24; 2 Pet. i. 21; ii. 1; 1 Tim. iv. 1). Note: It is by clearly apprehending the teachings of the Word of God concerning the spiritual world that we shall best be guarded against the prying and unholy pretensions of a spurious spiritualism (see homily on Deut. xviii.).

II. THE INRUSH OF FALSE PROPHETS FROM TIME TO TIME IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTICHRIST. "This is that [*spirit*] of antichrist" (ver. 3); see homily on ch. ii. 18. "This is that whole power and principle of the antichrist" ('Speaker's Commentary,' *in loc.*, where see also a valuable historical note on ver. 1).

III. THESE FALSE PROPHETS ARE COME FROM AFAR ON A MISSION TO THIS WORLD. The apostle says of them, they "are gone out into the world"—"on a mission of evil from their dark home" (Westcott). This world is regarded as the sphere in which they are to propagate their negations. This is but one of the many forms in which Scripture sets forth the mysterious conflict between good and evil, of which this world is at once the theatre and the witness. The struggle is between (1) the serpent and Eve; (2) Christ and the tempter; (3) Christ and the world; (4) the tempter and the individual; (5) error and truth; (6) the Church and the world; (7) the Church and the evil one; (8) the antichristian embassy and the body of believers.

IV. THIS ANTICHRISTIAN MISSION TO EARTH IS INSPIRED BY A SPIRIT OF ERROR. And the apostle shows us here, as before (see homily on ch. ii. 18, *ut supra*), that it is

the business of this embassy to deny the truth. The first lie was, "Ye shall not surely die." The supreme lie of antichrist now is, "Jesus is *not* the Son of God." Wherever that lie flourishes, no saving truth can live. The forms in which it is now put are legion!

V. THESE ERROR-INSPIRED SPIRITS OWE THEIR INSPIRATION TO A PERSONAL LEADER. *Yer. 4, δ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ.* The apostle sets forth here the personality of the evil one, as the one animating leader of the false prophets, just as vividly as our Lord set forth the personality of the devil as the father of lies. Difficult as the doctrine undoubtedly is, it is far less so than any theory of moral evil which represents it as having its seat in no one, and nowhere (cf. 2 Cor. iv. 4; Eph. ii. 2; John viii. 44). The fact is, neither the beginnings nor the endings of sin are shown us in the word. We only know what lies within the *revealed* termini.

VI. GREAT AS IS THE POWER OF EVIL WHICH IS IN THE WORLD, THERE IS A GREATER POWER IN BELIEVERS. *Μεῖζον ἐστὶν δ ἐν ὑμῖν.* Satan is mighty, but there is a Mightier. The strong one has been vanquished by a Stronger (Matt. xii. 28, 29; iv. 11; John xvi. 33; Col. ii. 15; John xii. 31). The evil one proved no match for Jesus Christ the Righteous when he sought to prevail against him in the desert. By the cross Satan was dethroned and Christ enthroned. And not all the band of hell-taught emissaries with which the world and the Church may be plagued for a while will ever overthrow the Spirit, the army, and the saving work of Christ. "God will bruise Satan under our feet shortly."

VII. THIS GREATER POWER IS "OF GOD." The Divine Spirit may take possession of the human spirit. He does. The life of God in the soul of man is the great secret of personal religion. As bearing on our present theme, there are four ways in which God's Spirit may influence man's. 1. By what has been called "preventive grace;" where the Spirit of God goes beforehand, and predisposes him to hear God's Word. Our Lord spake of this, in words which have never yet been sufficiently laid hold of by the Church (John viii. 47). 2. By regenerating grace. When a man is born of God, that wicked one toucheth him not. 3. By the unction from above (ch. ii. 20; see homily on ch. ii. 20, 27). This imparts spiritual discernment. 4. By the ardour and courage of a holy combativeness (Eph. vi. 10—17).

VIII. WHERESOEVER THIS DIVINE POWER IS GIVEN, THE POWER OF ANTICHRIST IS GONE. *Νενικήκατε αὐτοὺς.* "Them." All of them. "Ye *have* overcome them." You have already gained the victory! Your Lord's triumph is yours. On those who have in them the Spirit of God, antichrist can have no hold. So Paul (1 Cor. xii. 3). All depends on men being filled with the Spirit. If a man *has not* the Spirit of God, he will not say, "Jesus is Lord." If a man *has* the Spirit of God, he will not say, "Jesus is anathema." Against antichrist he will have an effectual guard. How will this be? Thus, by the teaching and power of the Spirit, he will be enabled (1) to perceive, (2) to receive, and (3) to hold fast *the truth*. He will be enabled (1) to detect, (2) to expose, (3) to combat, and (4) to overcome *the error*.

Note: 1. It is an unspeakable mercy to have the Spirit dwelling within us; by virtue of his unction, light, and might we shall have an inward and effective guard against the heresies of this and of every age. The possession of spiritual religion will be, as the late Rev. J. A. James expressed it, the surest preservative against the snares of infidelity and the seductions of a false philosophy. 2. It is by means of the conflict that the believer is himself confirmed in the truth. We do not envy the man who shrinks from open conflict against error on the behalf of Christian truth. Such timidity argues either little faith in the power of the truth, or else small trust in the power of his Saviour. Let him in Christ's strength go forth to war, and when he is more than conqueror through him who loved him, he will have learnt a lesson of priceless worth in the power of Christ and the impotence of antichrist!

Vers. 7—12.—*Love.* *Connecting link:* The apostle here seems to begin a new paragraph; yet it is one by no means disconnected from that which precedes. If antichrist plies its seductive arts without, it is for those who are "of God" to cleave closer together; knit by the bonds of a holy love, which is of itself born of him who is love. *Topic—Love's fount, channel, stream, and outlet.* We have more than once had occasion to remark that both the matter and the style of the Apostle John are peculiarly

his own. The matter, for it gathers round a few key-words—"light," "life," "love." The style, for it is not like Paul's, cumulative; it is rather radiative. We have no specimens of prolonged and closely connective argument; but a series of rich and beautiful teachings throughout a paragraph, on one of his key-words. Here the key-word is—love. Respecting it we have eight distinct assertions.¹

I. GOD IS LOVE. In John iv. 24 we have "God is Spirit." In ch. i. 5 "God is Light." Here "God is Love." The first indicates the substance of the Divine nature—personal, conscious, intelligent Spirit. The second declares the perfection of that nature in knowledge and in purity. The third shows the benevolence of the Divine nature in its regard for those who are the creatures of his power and the subjects of his grace. These three words contain more information about God than all the sacred books of the East put together. They are a revelation. We are taught how to think about God, and if we keep within the lines marked out by these three words, we cannot go far wrong. Note: This light thrown on God's nature gives us the clue to the meaning of his works and ways in nature, providence, and grace. The three spheres give us the triple unfolding of infinite love, and *nothing else*.

II. THAT LOVE HAS BEEN MANIFESTED TO OUR RACE. (Vers. 9, 10.) *Through whom?* "His only begotten Son." *How?* "A Propitiation." *For what?* "For our sins." *With what intent?* That we might live through him. No true life of peace, joy, and fellowship with God was possible for us until sin was put away. No one could do this but One in and of the race, yet over it—One who by his humanity could represent earth, and who yet as the eternal Son could represent the Father; he alone could take this place, and by offering himself to the Father, for us, on account of our sin, he revealed how sin burdened the heart of God, and gave by his own sacrifice such an expression to man of the Divine holiness and rectitude, that, on the ground thereof, the infinitely Pure One might receive the penitent lovingly to his embrace, yet make no compromise with sin.²

III. SUCH A PROPITIATION REVEALS A LOVE ALTOGETHER UNIQUE. (Vers. 9, 10.) "In this," etc. "Herein is love;" as if it were seen nowhere else. All other love fades away in comparison herewith. This will appear as we study: 1. *Its origin*. God's own love, self originated and sustained, unbought, spontaneous. 2. *Its method*. The bestowment of the greatest possible gift, and that as a sacrifice. 3. *Its objects*. He loved us sinners, traitors, alienated ones. 4. *Its extent*. "The whole world;" i.e. all the race on the globe through all time! 5. *Its intent*. That we might live. That all who believe might be made heirs of glory.

IV. SUCH A LOVE, SO MANIFESTED, CREATES A NEW DUTY OF LOVE ON OUR PART.³ (Ver. 11.) Nothing ever threw so much light on the value of man in God's eye as the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on his behalf. Nothing else ever disclosed what God meant to do with us. But, it once being shown how great are the possibilities opening up to man through Christ, all the relations between man and man come to be invested with new meaning; and the self-evidencing force of the appeal of ver. 11 ought to be irresistibly felt.

V. GOD'S AMAZING LOVE TO MAN IS ATTENDED WITH A NEW CREATIVE POWER. (Ver. 7.) "Every one that loveth is born of God."⁴ "It should never be forgotten," says Trench, "that ἀγάπη is a word born within the bosom of revealed religion; it occurs in the LXX., but there is no example of its use in any heathen writer whatever." The pure and holy parental love, the love of children as we understand it, the fondest and purest affections of husband and wife, are the birth of Christianity, i.e. of Divine love as revealed in Christ. Men cannot know how truly and how largely this is the case till they examine into the state of the pagan world at the time of Christ. The apostle himself declares, "We love, because he first loved us."

¹ See footnote to homily on ch. iii. 4—12.

² See homilies on ch. ii. 1, 2; iii. 1, 2.

³ See homilies on ch. iii. 16—18; ii. 7—11.

⁴ See homily on ch. ii. 29. Also the late Dean Stanley's 'Commentary' on 1 Cor. xiii., and Archbishop Trench's 'New Testament Synonyms,' *sub verb.* ἀγάπη. The chapter on "A World without Love," in Dr. Uhlhorn's 'Christian Charity in the Ancient Church,' is deserving of careful study, as also Brace's 'Gesta Christi;' and the Ven. Archdeacon Farrar's 'Early Christian Life,' vol. i. ch. i.

VI. WHEN BEING BORN OF GOD, WE LOVE LIKE HIM, WE ARE BROUGHT INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM. (Vers. 12, 13.) When God hath given us of his own Spirit of love, so that we in our measure come to love like God, then we know that "we dwell in him, and he in us." There is a loving and abiding intercommunion. We, being in full sympathy with God, must needs yearn to pour forth ourselves to others, as God hath given himself to us. And this outgoing of ourselves to our brother is a sure pledge of God being in us, and we in him.¹

VII. IN PROPORTION AS THIS IS THE CASE, WE KNOW GOD. (Ver. 12.) The first and second clauses of this verse are very closely connected together. "No man hath seen God at any time, [but] if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us;" and so we come to know God, though no one hath ever seen him. We know him through love whom we cannot behold by the sight (cf. Matt. v. 8). Only love can possibly read love. A cold heart can never understand a warm one, but one warm heart can read another. So we come to know God through learning from him to love as he loves. And the more complete our devotion to man for God's sake, the fuller and richer will be our knowledge of God's infinite love.

VIII. THE HEART THAT LOVETH NOT CANNOT KNOW GOD. (Ver. 8.) The love of God is so vast that it embraceth "a great multitude which no man can number." It is so minute that it yearns for "one sinner" to repent. It is so active that it sent its noblest embassy to invite the wanderers to return. It is so tender that it would not that "one of these little ones should perish." *How can a man who does not love understand all that?* It is not that God closes his heart against the man; it is the man that steals his heart against God. And until the warmth of Divine love melts the thick-ribbed ice of his frozen soul, no stream of love will ever flow from him to gladden and fertilize a world.

Note: See what it is will estrange a man for ever from his God, and will shut him up in hopeless ignorance of God—*unlovingness*; simply this. Objection: But are you not reasoning in a circle? You say man does not love till God's love kindles his, and yet that he cannot know God till he loves! Which is first? Surely here is a vicious circle. No; not at all. God's love goes out first. That love is manifested in the work of Christ. When we were yet sinners Christ died for us. "He that would be warm must keep near the fire," said Matthew Henry. Even so, let the cold frozen heart stay near the cross, till, feeling the warmth of love there, it is set aglow. Then, being set aglow by learning of the love of God, he will at once begin to understand the God of love!

Ver. 13.²—*God-likeness the seal of a Divine indwelling. Connecting link:* This verse is closely allied to the verse preceding. Though no one has at any time seen God, yet God is within us if his love is reproduced in us by the new birth of the Holy Ghost. Hence our present topic—*Conformity to God the proof that God is the Life of our lives.*³ There is in some respects a considerable resemblance between this verse and ch. iii. 24. But the student desiring to be exact in his unfolding of the writer's words will note (1) that the complexion of words is much modified by their connection; and (2) that often as the apostle seems to use approximately the same words, yet what seems at first sight to be but a very slight variation will, when he catches the precise hue of each clause, start him on a distinctly different line of thought and teaching. Here, set in relation to the context, the apostle's teaching manifestly is this—In possessing, and in being possessed by, a spirit of love, we are conscious of a life that is from God himself, who is Love.

I. HERE IS A FACT ASSERTED. "He hath given us of his Spirit." Both the Gospel and the Epistles of John are Trinitarian. The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, all are there, each fulfilling his own part in the saving work. The Father the Origin, the Son the Channel, the Spirit the Agent, in the redemptive economy. The Father sends the Son. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Father plans the redeeming work. The Son carries it out objectively for man. The Spirit applies

¹ See a beautiful quotation from Augustine in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' *in loco*.

² See homily on ch. iii. 23, 24.

³ "Though God is invisible, he yet is not only very near to us, but may be in us, the Life of our lives" (Westcott).

It subjectively in man. It is the last-named act which is specified here. 1. *The Spirit of God comes within man, freely.* "Given." The gift of the Spirit within is as gratuitous on God's part as the gift of his dear Son. He is bestowed by the Son, as the Gift of the Father's love (Luke xi. 13; John i. 33; xiv. 16, 17). 2. *The Spirit of God, when within us, controls us.* We are "led by the Spirit;" we "live in the Spirit;" we "walk in the Spirit;" and the entire direction of the new life is in his gracious hands. 3. *The Spirit of God, by controlling us, transforms us.* We come to love as God loves. We come to be, in our measure, as the governing force of our spirits is. And since that is love, we love; we catch the holy impulse of the self-sacrificing zeal; and yearn to lay ourselves out for those around us.

II. THIS TRANSFORMATION TO THE DIVINE LIKENESS IS THE PROOF AND SEAL OF A DIVINE INDWELLING. This may be set in two ways. 1. *Positively.* (1) This dwelling of God in the heart is what is promised (John xiv. 23). (2) This is the conscious experience (Rom. v. 5). (3) This is the actual power (Gal. ii. 20). The living on another, drawing our life, joy, love, might, *all* from another, is as real to us as the air we breathe. And if we have any likeness to God, it is to God himself we owe it, and by fellowship with him it is nourished and increased. 2. *Negatively.* 'This life of love cannot be attributed to any other cause; for: (1) It is not natural to us. (2) We did not get it from man. (a) Not from the world; for there man turneth "every one to his own way." (b) Not from the Church; for no one has power to impart the grace of love. (3) We never caught sight of such love till it was shown us in Christ. (4) Even then we never shared it till he who died for us breathed the new life within. Oh, if we have come to love like God, it can only be through the gracious indwelling of the God of love!

III. THE FACT, SO ACCOUNTED FOR, HAS IN IT MANIFOLD TEACHINGS. 1. For the *unregenerate*. They should learn what it is they need. Life, life within them! 2. For the *inconsistent professors*. They want reality, not a sham life. 3. For those *who do not know where they are in religion*. Let them not waste time in "feeling their pulse;" let them open their hearts to receive God; they will soon know their state then. 4. For those *seeking after the evidences of Christianity*. They will find them in men filled with the Spirit of God. 5. For the *students of history*. They will find a new world of love, slowly yet surely forming, under the power of the cross and of the Spirit of our God.

Ver. 14.—*The historic basis of the Christian testimony.* *Connecting link:* The mutual indwelling of God in us and of our spirits in God is the result of a Divine revelation of love made to us on God's part, and of the reception of that love on our part. That love, which has been and is still the object of our adoring contemplation, and to speak it out among the people is the business of our lives. "We have seen," etc. We may be permitted here to quote in full a note of unusual value from the 'Speaker's Commentary' upon this verse: "'We have seen with adoring wonder, and the impression of the sight abides with us (*ρεθευμεθα*), and are bearing witness (*μαρτυρομεν*), that the Father hath sent [perfect] the Son as the Saviour of the world.' One of the numerous *loops* that bind the Epistle to the Gospel" (comp. John i. 32, 34; ch. i. 1—3; John xix. 35).

I. THE RECORD BEFORE US IS THAT OF THOSE WHO WERE EYE-WITNESSES OF THE FACTS OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST. (John i. 16; xix. 35.) In this Epistle (and in the Gospel by the same apostle) we have the history of our Lord's life given us by one who had followed with him, and who understood the meaning of that life at least as well as any other of the apostles. But we note—

II. THAT THE EYE-WITNESSES OF THE EXTERNAL FACTS OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST LOOKED ALSO BENEATH THE SURFACE, AND BEHELD THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FACTS. Four distinct and leading features thereof are given here. 1. That Jesus Christ was "the Son" of God. Not merely a Son. Not a Son merely in the same sense that others may become. But the only begotten Son; of the same nature with the Father. 2. That he was "sent" by the Father. 3. That he was sent to save—to save from sin. 4. That his mission was for the race. "The Saviour of the world."

III. THAT TO BEAR WITNESS TO THESE FACTS WAS THE GREAT BUSINESS OF THEIR LIVES. "We do testify." They lived for this. They suffered for this. If need be,

they were prepared to die for it. To assert it over and over again they gave up all that earth calls dear; they encountered opposition and fiery persecution; they counted not their lives dear unto them. So that their testimony was of such a kind *as could not possibly be false*. We say this, well weighing our words, and fully assured that the scientific value of the testimony to the facts of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection cannot be overestimated, and that it is a question which demands more careful study from the unbeliever than many will consent to give to it. The testimony stands thus: 1. It rests on a clear and distinct historical basis. 2. It is given by men who were eye-witnesses of the main facts they relate. 3. The meaning of the facts was directly opposed to their national expectations and prepossessions, and such as they could only have been induced to give when all their prejudices were overborne by a Power from on high. 4. In such a life and work, so full of Divine meaning, there was a message presented to the people for them to believe (John xx. 31). The reception of the message was intended to lead up to a living faith in Jesus as the Saviour of the lost (comp. John iv. 42). 5. Such faith in Jesus would ensure the privileges of sonship (John i. 12). With sonship would come fellowship, with fellowship knowledge of God. In this knowledge would be the eternal life (ch. v. 9—12).

IV. TO HAVE SUCH TESTIMONY BEFORE US INVOLVES US IN GREAT RESPONSIBILITY. Such a testimony, so given, with *such a purpose*, cannot leave us where it found us. We are responsible to God for the use we make of such a message as this. We are bound (1) to hear devoutly and thoughtfully; (2) to receive it believingly and lovingly; (3) to use it (*a*) for the purpose of being saved by him who has come that he might save, and (*b*) for the purpose of joining in the witness-bearing, and so co-operating with Jesus in saving others. His name is called "Jesus," for he saves his people from their sins.

Vers. 15, 16.—*Divine love a home for the soul, and a force within it. Connecting link:* There is a connection between the several verses on which we are now dwelling (vers. 7—19). But it is not so much a connection of thoughts that follow consecutively one from another, as a connection such as exists between glowing sparks that follow one after another, from the same mass, when struck upon the same anvil, by the same hammer, wielded by the same arm. The apostle gives us here a startlingly beautiful succession of truths concerning love—Divine love—revealed in Christ, and laying hold of men. Obviously, in vers. 15, 16 there are two statements concerning believers generally—"Whosoever shall confess," etc.; "He that dwelleth in love," etc. There is also one statement concerning the apostle and his fellow-workers—"We have known," etc. Let us take these in their order.¹

I. HERE ARE TWO GENERAL STATEMENTS, CONCERNING A BLESSED CONDITION AND THOSE TO WHOM IT BELONGS. 1. *Here is a supremely happy condition.* It is twofold. (1) The soul full of God. "God dwelleth in him" (cf. John vi. 56; xiv. 23; Col. i. 27; Gal. ii. 20; 2 Cor. xiii. 5; Rom. viii. 9; Eph. ii. 22; v. 18; Rev. iii. 20). In some passage the Dweller in the heart is spoken of as "Christ," sometimes as "the Spirit," sometimes as "the Father with the Son," sometimes as "God by the Spirit." In all cases the meaning is that there is a Divine Energy within the man, quickening, inspiring, and controlling him—a new directing and strengthening force, leading on to all holy action, to patient endurance, to final victory. Man moves not upward and heavenward by a self-elicited force, but soars thither by a Divine power imparted and sustained from above! (2) The soul at home in God. "He dwelleth in God." God is not only a new life in him, but a new home for him, in which he abides, and from which he cannot be dislodged. His wanderings are over. He has a settled rest, an everlasting home. It is in the Father's house, nay, in the Father's heart, the heart of boundless love. He is seated now in "the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Happy, happy home! It is heaven. It will never break up. No foe can invade it. Sin shall not mar it. Death cannot disturb it. Oh, to have found already a home like this! It is well worth our while to ask to whom it belongs. (Note: The two indwellings complete each other. God dwelling in the soul ensures the soul continuously dwelling in its true home; and the soul, being always at home, has entire repose, leaving all its force free for happy, holy service.) 2. *To whom does this twofold blessedness belong?*

¹ See footnote to homily on ch. iii. 4—12.

There are here two statements in reply to this question. The apostle says, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God" is thus blessed; and that "he that dwelleth in love" is so also. We must elucidate this by offering, first, a word or two on each phrase, and then by showing the connection that exists between them. (1) The twofold indwelling is realized by him who "dwells in love," i.e. whose whole being is, as it were, bathed in an atmosphere of love; who lives, moves, thinks, acts, in that sphere, and never out of it. Such a one "dwells in God," etc. The definite article (*ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ*) should be noticed here, as defining the love. Following, too, on the phrase, *ὁ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν*, its force is equivalent to "God is love, and he that lives and moves in that love of God has his abiding home in the God of love." (2) The twofold indwelling is realized also by him who "confesses that Jesus is the Son of God." This sentence probably is suggested by ver. 14, indicating that the continuous witness-bearing for Christ caused them to realize more fully than ever their heavenly privilege, a privilege which the apostle seems to say, "Every confessor will share with us." It is very remarkable, however, that the apostle should attribute a like blessedness to such apparently different (but not contradictory) conditions. The reciprocal indwelling is realized by him who lives and moves in love, and also by him who openly and continuously avows a certain "dogma" (to use a common mode of expression). The former is clear enough. Not so, perhaps, the latter. But what if the two should be concurrent? (not *coincident*, as the writer in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' by a strange oversight of logic, remarks). They are concurrent. Thus (a) that "Jesus is the Son of God," and as such the Revealer of love, is the message addressed to faith. (b) Faith receives him, and with him the love which he reveals. (c) Confession constantly rings out the faith, and by so doing vastly increases faith's realizing power. (d) This, through the energy of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. xii. 3), makes the love of God in Christ so real to the faithful confessor, that he actually dwells in love, and so reaches the state specified as "dwelling in love" (ver. 16). Thus the two conditions differ only as the *terminus a quo* from the *terminus ad quem*. Confession is the former; dwelling in love is the latter. Note: This is verified by the *order* of the phrases being in the one case, "God dwelleth in him, and he in God;" and in the other, "dwelleth in God, and God in him."

II. THE APOSTLE MAKES A SPECIFIC APPLICATION OF THIS TO HIMSELF AND HIS FELLOW-BELIEVERS. He has not been writing at random, nor has he been moving in a region so transcendental that experience cannot verify it. *He* can verify it from his own experience. Those to whom he is writing can verify it from theirs. The difference between the Authorized Version and the Revised Version should be noted here: "We have known and believed the love that God hath in us (*ἐν ἡμῖν*)."
 "Not 'toward us' or 'to us,' as if it were *εἰς ἡμᾶς*. The miserable marginal rendering in the Revised Version should also be carefully avoided: "*in our case*" (!). The believer has gone much further than to know the love of God to him. He knows it *in* him, as a reviving, cheering, glowing, inspiring, life-giving power. It is *in* him as the "living water springing up into everlasting life." The following order of thought might develop this. Divine love is: 1. A *manifestation* amongst us, *ἐν ἡμῖν* (ver. 9). 2. An *impartation* realized in us (Rom. v. 5). 3. A *reciprocated* love, as ours has been called forth thereby (ver. 19). 4. A *transforming* love, causing us to love as God loves (ver. 12). 5. A *self-consummating* love, fulfilling its own ends in and through us, and causing its outworking to be perfected in us, as its newly opened channel, through which it is flowing on to the boundless ocean of everlasting life and glory (*ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτοῦ τετελειωμένη ἐστίν ἐν ἡμῖν*). Who, who is equal to the adequate unfolding of thoughts so sublime? In writing this homily we feel as if human words were an intrusion; and such they are, if irrelevant or superfluous. But if they are such as we aim to make them—illustrative of the thoughts in the text—then the gracious Spirit will deign to own them, however far they fall short of what the writer's largest wishes could desire. With three queries for the conscience and the heart we close. (1) Who can adequately extol the greatness of the Divine condescension, in choosing us as vehicles through which his love may be conveyed, and so taught to others? (2) Who can but wonder at the dignity conferred on man, in making him the means of manifesting such a love? (3) Who would not open his heart to God that he may dwell therein and sanctify it, having expelled the sin which would have corrupted and destroyed it?

Vers. 17, 18.—*Love's holdness in the day of judgment.* *Connecting link:* The apostle had been speaking of God's love being perfected in us. He now glances forward to the outlook of believers, as bounded by the *παροῦσα* and the *κρίσις*, and in so doing he shows that, as love attains its perfection, all dread which might otherwise attend on the prospect is removed; so that the believer may have *παρρησία* even on the judgment-day. As, however, in these verses there is some room for differences of interpretation, we must first state what appears to us to be the meaning of some of its clauses, since the entire structure of this homily depends thereon. 1. "Herein is the love made perfect with us." "The love," i.e. God's love which (ver. 12) is perfecting itself in the soul that loves. "With us." With whom? "With us, as believers, one towards another?" or "with believers and God?" We adopt the latter view—God's own love consummating itself in working through believers; and their love consummating itself also in laying hold of God's. "It is difficult not to feel that there is some subtle reference to the idea of *God with us*."¹ "Love is not simply perfected in man by an act of Divine power, but in fulfilling this issue God works with man" (Westcott). 2. "Because as he is, so are we in this world." In what sense are believers in the world as Christ is? or rather, what is the sense in which it is so intended here by the apostle? Is it not this—we are looking forward to the day of judgment as the consummation of our hope, and the Redeemer is working in the world with a view to the day of judgment as the consummation of his mediatorial work? In this view we are confirmed by a remark of Canon Westcott: "'This world' as distinguished from 'the world' emphasizes the idea of transitoriness." Just so, Christ, in his redeeming work, and we in our believing hope, are working with the same goal in view—"the day of judgment." This world is but a passing phase of things. 3. "Fear hath punishment [Authorized Version, 'torment']." There is nothing here to suggest that "fear" has any disciplinary effect in inducing love. The apostle views it simply as the ever-attendant penalty of unlovingness. He whose nature is out of harmony with God's *must* dread him everywhere and always. Spirits in league with evil will seek rest in vain. They will tremble. But in the perfecting of love all this is done away.

I. THE PRESENT PERIOD IS BUT A TRANSITION ONE. This is the day in which our Lord Jesus is carrying on his saving work in the world, and his educating process in the Church; and all with a view to "the great day." Believers, too, are only in the preliminary period of their training, and hence they too believe and hope and love with a view to "the great day." As their Lord is, so are they in this passing world, looking to and preparing for what lies above and beyond it. Hence such passages as these: Matt. xxv.; Mark xiii. 35—37; Luke xiii. 24, 25; xviii. 8; xxi. 36; John xiv. 3; Acts ii. 20, 21; Rom. xiv. 9—12; 1 Cor. iv. 5; 2 Cor. v. 10; Phil. i. 6, 10; Col. i. 28; 1 Thess. v. 23; 2 Tim. i. 12.

II. THE DAY TO WHICH WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD IS "THE DAY OF JUDGMENT." It is the day of the Lord, when he shall be manifested. It may be as lengthened a period as the present one, which is "the day of salvation." As the day of judgment, it will close the probation of the race; while for those who are looking for our Lord it will bring in the salvation which is ready to be revealed at the last time. In the word "judgment," however, much more is included than at first sight appears. "Judgment" is indeed a rectification, an adjustment; but then what that may mean in detail depends on the person or thing to be judged. If, e.g., any one is unlawfully bound, judgment would be *liberation*. If any one be deprived of a right, his judgment would mean *restoration*. If unjustly accused, *vindication*. If misunderstood or misinterpreted, *manifestation*. If good and evil are mixed up together, judgment would be *separation*; and as the result, for the bad *condemnation*, and for the righteous *glorification*. Judgment is, in fact, the restitution of all things, not necessarily in the sense attributed to that phrase by advocates of universal restoration, but in a far higher sense, even that of rendering to every man according as his work shall be (cf. Acts xvii. 31).

III. IF THAT DAY BE DREADED ON OUR PART, IT IS EVIDENT THERE IS SOME DEFICIENCY IN OUR LOVE. That ought so solemn as the final destinies of a race can be contemplated without a feeling of awe—an awe that is sometimes overwhelming—is not desirable, even were it possible. Reverence, indeed, forbids it otherwise. But this holy, reverent awe must not be confounded with the servile dread referred to in the

¹ So 'Speaker's Commentary,' *in loc.*; but is the reference "subtle"?

text: *εβλαβεία* (II. b. xii. 28) is very different from *φόβος*. The fear which is inconsistent with perfect love is the fear of the slave dreading the lash, or the culprit dreading the verdict. But if the love of God is within us, sweetly subduing us with its tenderness, and if through that love sin is pardoned and destroyed, why, there is no lash to dread, there is no adverse verdict to fear (John v. 24, Revised Version); for in such a case, to see the Judge upon the throne will be to look upon the face of an infinite Vindicator and Friend, in whose love we have lived here, and the enjoyment of whose love is the highest heaven for ever! And so far as the judgment will bear on others, the man of love will be more than content with the decisions of the Son of God and Son of man, and will desire nothing more than that the entire race should be dealt with by Christ as he sees fit. Evidently, if this be not our state of mind, there must be deficiency in love in exactly the same degree as there is any restless fear.

IV. CONSEQUENTLY, OUR GREAT CONCERN SHOULD BE TO BE PERFECTED IN LOVE. We may take this in either or both of two ways. 1. Let it be our concern that God's own love may be so richly communicated to us as to transform us to his likeness. 2. Let it be our concern to have so clear an apprehension and knowledge of God, that we shall see in him and in all his attributes only pure and perfect love. In the former case there can be nothing to dread *for ourselves*. In the latter case we shall dread nothing *in him*. *Φόβος* has no door of entrance whatever.

V. WHEN PERFECTED IN LOVE WE SHALL HAVE *παρρησία* IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT. "Confidence," "boldness," "freedom of speech" (cf. ch. ii. 38; iii. 21, Greek). Dread seals the lips. Love opens them (Luke xxi. 36; Rom. xiv. 12; Mark vi. 30). The "salvation" which will serve then is not an artificial plucking out of a burning ruin, irrespectively of character; it is being made perfect by Divine grace, even as our Father in heaven is perfect.

VI. CONSEQUENTLY, as the apostle of love shows us here, EACH OF US MUST FACE THE SOLEMN QUESTION—What will the judgment-day bring to me—"boldness" or "punishment"? One or the other must be.¹ Which? There may be an attempt to lessen the weight of these thoughts by objections or pleas; e.g. it may be said: 1. The "punishment" is corrective. We suggest three replies. (1) If it be, is that any reason for being content with needing correction, when we ought to be awaiting honour? (2) It is folly to urge the plea, unless men are very sure of its accuracy. But are they? (3) 1 Cor. xi. 32 is totally against any such plea. Or it may be said: 2. There is no knowing when the judgment may come (cf. Ezek. xii. 27). But men forget that the judgment is but the manifestation of that which is going on now and ever. A spirit out of harmony with God must be ill at ease always and everywhere. Fear *hath* torment, *now*; and can never be separated from it, any more than a man can flee from his own shadow (Job xv. 21—35).

Ver. 19.—*Creed and life: the relation between them.* *Connecting link:* The apostle had shown that only as love is perfected in us can we be free from the fear which has torment, and so have boldness in the day of judgment. The verse before us declares that, as matter of fact, this love is being inwrought, and the sole cause thereof is that God first loved. "We love, because he first loved us." The verse is one of peculiar beauty and value. "It is the sanctuary of my soul," said an aged Christian to the writer, referring to this text. And well it may be. We propose its homiletic exposition here, as a verse which sets forth with striking, yea, almost startling, clearness the relation between creed and life. Often have we been pained by the statement, "Religion is not a creed, but a life." There is enough truth in those words to make them attractive, and enough error to make them deceptive. Let us rather say, "Religion is *not only* a creed, *but also* a life," and then we shall be nearer the truth. Following the words of our text, observe—

I. IN RELIGION THERE IS A CREED. "He first loved us." Here, in these four short words, is the first creed of the Christian Church—a creed which it had before even the New Testament existed; and through all the Christian centuries, with all their perplexing entanglements and sharp controversies, these words have run like a golden

¹ Canon Westcott aptly quotes what he rightly calls one of Bengel's "unmatched epigrams:" "Varius hominum status: sine timore et amore; cum timore, sine amore; cum timore et amore; sine timore, cum amore."

thread through the faith of the Church. "He first loved us." What is love? It is righteousness and benevolence acting in harmony. Now, here is love's origin. He first loved. That is, God loved. Note: The word "love" is current coin throughout the universe of God, and means *with him* what it means *with us*. (For an opening up of the wonders of God's love, see homily on vers. 7—12.)

* "All my life I still have found,
And I will forget it never—
Every sorrow hath its bound,
And no cross endures for ever.
After all the winter's snows
Comes sweet summer back again.
Patient souls ne'er wait in vain:
Joy is given for all their woes.
All things else must have their day;
God's love only lasts for aye."

But that does last—the constant wealth, life, and joy of believers. This, this is their creed; not held, indeed, as a dead dogma, but as a living and inspiring faith through the energy of the Spirit of God.

II. IN RELIGION THERE IS A LIFE. "We love." Although we hold fast to the principle that the word "love" means the same as applied to God and to us, yet we cannot shake off a sense, even painful, of the wide contrast in degree. "*God loves... we love.*" That is from sunlight to rushlight in a moment. They are both lights, it is true; but *what a space between them!* Again, God's love is a self-kindled fire. Our hearts are like fuel in a grate, needing the spark from without ere it will burn. Still, in our measure "we love." But what? whom? 1. We love God. He is our love's supreme Object. 2. We love each other as fellow-believers. 3. We love man as man. If this is the word in which our Christian life is summed up, three additional matters should be noted ere we pass on to the next main division. (1) Almost every Christian grace which can be named is love in some form or other. Repentance is love grieving. Faith is love leaning. Hope is love anticipating. Courage is love daring, etc. (2) So that we see a man has just as much religion as he has love, *and no more*. (3) And, further, if more energy is wanted in any one of the graces, let a man love more, and every grace will be the stronger. "Yes," it may be said, "that is true enough. But how are we to love more?" Let us now look into the Christian philosophy of loving.

III. IN RELIGION THERE IS A LIFE BECAUSE THERE IS A CREED. *We love because he loved. God first loved. Even so. There is the spark, and there only, which kindles ours.* We may set this truth on several grounds. 1. *We set it on the ground of philosophy.* We do not believe it possible for any created being to learn to love except through being loved. We do not believe any angel in heaven would have ever come to love God had he not known that God was love. Nor could we. 2. *We set it on the ground of history.* Take: (1) Paganism. We read of the pagans dreading their gods, seeking to propitiate them, being very much obliged to their gods for giving them a good harvest, and such like; but nowhere do we read of a pagan *loving* his god. Why? Because they never dreamt of a god who loved them. And as to love to man, the heathen world, even at its best, was a world without love. (2) Judaism. The command of Moses was that the Hebrew should love God. But—a God who did not care for them? By no means. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, who brought thee up," etc. Their love was called for as a response to God's. (3) Christianity. What evoked, nay, what created, the ardent love of the first Christians? What has sustained the impassioned preachers, missionaries, and philanthropists ever since? Love, Divine love; nothing but that. The truth, "by his stripes we were healed," has more power to create love than all the moralists in the world could call forth. Take the cross away, and humanity would revert to a glacial age. 3. *We set it on the ground of experience.* What first moved us to love? What moves us still? What revives us when we are sluggish? Is it not this—

"Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
Which before the cross I spend?"

It is this—it is this which kindles us to a flame. If we love, it is *because* he first loved us.

APPLICATION. 1. It is quite intelligible how some men should come to hate what they call dogma. If a man accepts a form of sound words, and is dead withal, he must not be surprised if his words are thought to be "an empty sound." Can anything be more unutterably offensive than a bundle of dead creeds avowed by dead men? Men *ought* to hate them. But if a man says, "My religion is this—'I love God and man because God loves me;'" and if he shows it while he says it, men will not despise him or his doctrine either. He will redeem dogma from discredit by inspiring it with life. 2. Whoever expects a living Church without a creed, expects an impossibility. If we let go our faith, we put out our fire. If any Church lets go its hold on the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, its life will not be worth twenty years' purchase. 3. If God *first* loves, then we should consent to let God's love be first. What is the use of trying to work ourselves into favour with God? The very effort is sin. If God did not love us out of the promptings of his own nature, nothing that we can ever do would be good enough to induce him to love. 4. If God first loves us, and seeks "the love of poor souls," how ungrateful and unjust will it be on our part if we do not love in return! 5. Here is a glorious object on which we may set our gaze—*Divine love*. Yea, it is a staff on which we can lean, a pillow on which we may repose; nay, more, it is a vast and gorgeous cathedral in which we can worship and adore; it is the soul's home and joy and rest. Here is "the simplicity which is in Christ." Here are theology, religion, and philosophy in one sentence. Theology: God loves. Religion: we love. Philosophy: we love because he loves. Here is that which is simple enough for the child, yet so grand that not the wisest philosopher as such has found, or ever will find, aught worthy to be compared with it.

Vers. 20, 21.—*Love to man the expression of love to God.* *Connecting link:* The apostle has just declared that the love which pervades believers is owing to God's love to them. He now advances to another and, indeed, to the final step in this paragraph on love, in which he sets forth more powerfully than ever the truth which he has thrice before (ch. iii. 10, 17; iv. 8) indicated, that love to God and love to man are inseparably connected together; that if any man declares that he loves God, while yet he is unconcerned about his brother, "he is a liar;" for adds the apostle, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen." Hence our topic—*Love to God and love to man inseparable*. Three lines of remark are suggested by the verses before us.

I. HERE IS A DIFFICULTY WHICH WE WILL ENDEAVOUR TO REMOVE. What, indeed, may seem a difficulty to A may not prove so to B, and *vice versâ*. To some, at any rate, there lies a difficulty here. The apostle says, "He that loveth not his brother *whom he hath seen*," etc.; as if it were so much easier and simpler to do that, and as if his meaning were, "If he cannot do the easier, he cannot do the harder; if he does not love him who is nearest, he cannot love him who is further removed; if he does not love one whom he sees, he cannot love one whom he cannot see," etc. On this Canon Westcott remarks, "It is necessarily easier to love that which is like ourselves than that which we cannot grasp in finite form." True, on the supposition that our brother possessed all moral and spiritual excellences, and that his kindness towards us were at all the counterpart of the love of God; then it would obviously be easier to love the nearer than the more remote. But supposing (as is too often the case) that our "brother" is the reverse of lovable—is hard, cruel, selfish, lustful, bitter; it is *very much harder* to love him with all his visible vices than to love God with all his glorious perfections, unseen though he is. Is it true in such a case, if a man love not a vicious brother he *cannot* love an unseen Being who is Love? We answer, Undoubtedly; for: (1) We are not right if we set the question *only* thus—Whether is easier *per se*? but—Is it possible, looking at the matter all round? (2) The question is not that of the love indicated by the word *φίλος*, but rather that of *ἀγαπή*. (3) Seeing that God *commands* us to love our brother (ver. 21), and that love to God is nothing if it be not loyalty, then if we do not *in such a case* love (*ἀγαπή*) our brother, it is certain that we cannot be loving God. (Note the change of rendering in the Revised Version and a corresponding change in the Greek.)

II. HERE IS A STATEMENT WHICH IT BEHOVES US CAREFULLY TO PONDER, viz. that

¹ See homilies thereon.

God's command to love our brother is so emphatically *the* command of the gospel that, if it is neglected, God is not loved at all, however profuse the verbal declaration of love may be. "My love must go forth towards those whom I see, as God saw me when he first loved me. And my love must be what his love is—no idle sentiment or barren sympathy, but a love that seeks them, and bears long with them, and waits and longs and prays for their salvation; a love that gives freely and without upbraiding; a love self-sacrificing, self-denying; a love that will lay down life itself to save them. And when they become by grace what by grace I am, I must love them as God loves me, for what I see in them; yes, and in spite of what I see in them,¹ too." The love of God is that we keep his commandments (ch. v. 3); but his command is that we love as he loved us. The *only* being, however, whom we *can* love with such a love is our brother, whom God has placed before us; one whom we have seen. "And the title 'brother' brings out the idea of that which is God-like in man to which love can be directed. He, therefore, who fails to recognize God as he reveals himself through Christ in man (Matt. xxv. 40) cannot love God. He has refused the help which God has provided for the expression of love in action" (Westcott, 'Commentary,' *in loc.*). Let us, then, formulate the statement of the text thus: 1. The love which has God for its supreme Object is an element pervading the whole being, and radiating towards surrounding objects. It is not a capricious sentimentalism; it is a love which is not only towards God, but from him, and like his own. 2. I am to love compassionately and with a view to redeem another, as God has loved me. But the only being whom I can *thus* love is he who is before me—my brother. 3. It is a command from God that my love to him, the great Unseen, should be shown in this way—by loving the brother who is seen. 4. Therefore there is *no other way* of practising love to God than this—loving the seen brother; i.e. not simply our natural brother in the home, nor even our redeemed brother in the Church, but our fallen, sinking, perishing brethren in the "wide, wide world."

III. HERE IS, CONSEQUENTLY, A DUTY SPECIFIED, WHICH WE ARE BOUND TO DISCHARGE. "That he who loveth God love his brother also." And, lest we should be content with vague generalities, we are supplied elsewhere with two other specific directions to the working of this love—in ch. iii. 18 and in ch. iii. 16. According to the first, our love to man ought to be an intensely practical one. According to the second, we should be such enthusiasts therein as to be willing to lay down our lives for the brethren. Now, if any one earnestly desired to fulfil all this in his own life, he would go very far towards succeeding if he adopted and carried out the following principles of action: 1. "I will, by God's help, for God's sake, lay out myself to be the helper of mankind in any way in which I can advance their interests; and this plan in life shall take precedence of my own ease, comfort, and wealth; desiring to carry out the apostolic motto, 'As poor, yet making many rich.'" 2. The most truly Christ-like way to help others is to lead them to gain the power of so helping themselves that they no more may need another's aid, but may become themselves, in their turn, helpers of others (Acts iii. 6). That is not true love which so doles out charities as to keep the recipients in a perpetual state of dependence, if by wiser methods they could be raised above it. 3. In pursuing this method diligent inquiry must be made as to what evils afflict the people and retard their progress. We must ascertain whether they come from within or from without, and, in either case, what they are and how they come. 4. These causes of ill being ascertained, they must be traced to their source; whether health, or wealth, or morals, or religion be imperilled: whether they are traceable to the covetousness, greed, and love of power on the part of men in the higher ranks, or to lack of self-respect, of aim, of hope, of faith, and of a sense of right in the lower ranks. 5. Some specific external ills require an equally specific and special remedy, such as sanitary ills, overcrowding, etc. 6. In every case Christian philosophy requires that we attack the evils at their root, which is *sin*, however varied the forms in which it may rear its head. 7. Hence the supreme work of the Christian philanthropist who would lay himself out to help his brother man is *to bring the love of God in Christ to bear upon his heart and conscience*. In God's love the desolate soul (1) finds a home; (2) learns its own worth; (3) begins to love others; (4) lives to help others. And thus—thus, in letting God's love in us work out effectively, Christian people have the one and only cure for all the ills of our race. In this direction much more remains to be done than Christians have

¹ Dr. Candlish, 'Commentary,' on 1 John, vol. ii. pp. 165, 166.

ever yet attempted. May God make us loving and wise enough to work with him in blessing our age and race!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 4.—*The victory of the Christian over antichristian teachers.* “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them,” etc. Very suggestive are the words with which our text begins, “Ye are of God.” As having communion with him; as heartily holding and confessing the truth which unites with him (ver. 2); as having been born of him, and being his offspring morally and spiritually, they were of God. The text suggests the following observations.

I. THAT CHRISTIANS ARE EXPOSED TO THE ASSAULTS OF HERETICAL TEACHERS. It was so in St. John's time. There were those that denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, maintaining that his human body was apparent, not real. And others held, with Cerinthus, “that the *Æon* Christ had entered into the man Jesus at his baptism, and remained with him until the commencement of his sufferings; but denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh” (Ebrard). Christians are still assailed by the teachers of grave errors, many of which relate to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THAT CHRISTIANS MAY OVERCOME THE ASSAULTS OF HERETICAL TEACHERS. St. John's readers had done so. “Ye have overcome them.” By their fidelity to the truth they had obliged the teachers of error to retreat (cf. ch. ii. 14, 19). And their complete and final victory the apostle looks upon as an assured certainty. The false prophets were probably plausible, persuasive, and influential; but they were not irresistible. They had been repulsed; they would be completely vanquished. We are not bound to accept any teaching that is offered to us. If we please, we may refuse to read the questionable book or to hear the teacher of whom we stand in doubt. Or we may read the book and hear the teacher, and then test their teaching by that of our Lord and his apostles, and accept or reject it according to its agreement or disagreement with the Divine standard. “Despise not prophesyings; prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

III. THAT CHRISTIANS MAY OVERCOME THE ASSAULTS OF HERETICAL TEACHERS BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITHIN THEM. “Ye have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” He that was in the Christians is God; he that was in the world is Satan, “the prince of this world.” 1. *God dwells in his people.* (1) By his Word. The author whose works have been sympathetically and diligently studied may be said to be in the student. The student knows the views and opinions, the thoughts and theories, the principles and convictions, of his favourite author, and sympathizes with them. The godly soul knows God in his Word (Ps. i. 2; cxix. 97); and by means of his Word is filled with his thoughts, feelings, and principles. (2) By the faith which they exercise in him. Their faith in him is not mere intellectual assent, but spiritual conviction, which makes his existence and presence real unto them. (3) By their love to him (cf. vers. 12, 13, 16; John xiv. 23). There is no real spiritual indwelling apart from love. (4) By his Spirit (cf. ver. 13; John xiv. 16, 17). 2. *God is greater than Satan.* “Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” (1) God is independent, but Satan is dependent. Satan cannot do anything except by permission of the Most High (cf. Job i. 12; ii. 6). But as for God, “he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (2) God is infinite, but Satan is finite. However great the power of the evil one may be, it is limited. His intelligence is limited, his agencies and instruments are limited, and the duration of his power is limited (Rev. xx. 1—3). But God is infinite in intelligence, in wisdom, in power, in duration, in perfection. (3) God is the God of truth, but Satan is the father of lies (John viii. 44). Truth is a permanent and victorious force; falsehood is transient, feeble, and doomed to extinction. The power of the prince of this world is based upon lies, and, for that reason, its overthrow is certain. But the power of God is the power of truth and holiness, and is therefore destined to continue and grow eternally. (4) “God is love,” but Satan is malignant.

However persistent and strong hatred may be, it is not persistent, patient, or powerful as love. In love God dwells in his people for their salvation; but Satan dwells in the world for the destruction of the worldly. And the loving, saving Spirit is immeasurably greater and mightier than the hating, destroying spirit. 3. *God's presence within his people is the secret of their victory over heretical teachers.* "Ye have overcome them: because greater is he," etc. This Presence in the soul imparts power for spiritual conflict and conquest. The most effective safeguard against error in religious faith and union is not the subtle and strong intellect, but the devout and godly spirit and the upright life. "The meek will he guide in judgment," etc.; "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him," etc. (Ps. xxv. 9, 14); "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching," etc. (John vii. 17). In the conflicts of the spiritual life the mightiest weapons are not logical, but devotional. In this sphere the greatest victories are often won upon our knees. The consciousness of God's presence within us is the inspiration for the achievement of the sublimest conquests.—W. J.

VERS. 9—11.—*The supreme manifestation of love.* "In this was manifested the love of God toward us," etc. Our text does not speak of the only manifestation of the Divine love. In many things is the love of God manifested to us—in the beauty, the utility, and the fertility of our world; in the exquisite structure of our souls and bodies; in the apt relations of the outer world to our nature. Nor does our text mention the manifestation to angelic beings of the love of God. But St. John sets forth the richest and most glorious exhibition in regard to us of the love of God. We see here several aspects of the Divine love.

I. IN ITS GREAT ORIGIN. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." 1. *God's love to man originated entirely with himself.* This love in its beginning was all on God's part, and none on ours. We did not love him. There was nothing in us to awaken his love to us. We were not beautiful, or amiable, or meritorious, or good. "But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It was our sin and suffering and deep need that called forth his compassion toward us; and ere he could love us with the love of complacency, he loved us with the love of tender and Divine pity. 2. *God is the Fountain of all love.* Love flows from the essential nature of the Divine Being. "Love is of God . . . God is Love" (vers. 7, 8). As light and heat from the sun, so all true love everywhere flows from him, or took its rise from him. And seeing that he is love, that love is of his essence, the flowing forth of his love to us is the giving of himself to us. But the love of God was manifested in our case—

II. IN THE GREAT MESSENGER WHICH HE SENT UNTO US. "Herein was the love of God manifested in us [or, 'in our case'], that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." Notice: 1. *The pre-existence of Jesus Christ.* This is clearly implied in the expression, "God hath sent his Son into the world" (cf. John xvii. 4, 5; iii. 17, 34). 2. *The endearing relation of Jesus Christ to God the Father.* He is "his only begotten Son." The word "Son" alone would suggest that their relation is one of deep affection; but other terms are added, which intensify and strengthen this idea. The Father speaks of him as "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. iii. 17). St. Paul writes of him as "God's own Son" (Rom. viii. 3). And St. John styles him "the Only Begotten of the Father. . . the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father" (John i. 14, 18); "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (John iii. 35). And our Saviour said, "Father, thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii. 24). It is impossible for us to comprehend this ineffable and infinite love subsisting between the Father and his only Son, or the deep and unutterable joy of their communion. In sending such a Messenger to our world, what a revelation we have of the love of God! 3. *The subordination of Jesus Christ to God the Father in the work of redemption.* "God sent his only begotten Son into the world." "As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world" (John xvii. 18). The Divine Son cheerfully became a servant that his Father's authority might be vinnicated, and his Father's glory be promoted in the redemption of the human race (cf. Phil. ii. 6—8).

III. IN THE BLESSING WHICH HE DESIGNS FOR US. "That we might live through him." Notice: 1. *The condition in which the love of God finds man.* "Dead by

reason of trespasses and sins." There is a resemblance between a dead body and the state into which the soul is brought by sin. In both there is the absence of vision, of hearing, of sensibility, and of activity. 2. *The condition into which the love of God aims to bring man.* "That we might live through him." His design is to quicken men into spiritual life—the life of true thought, pure affection, righteous and unselfish activity, and reverent worship. This life is eternal in its nature. It is not perishable or decaying, but enduring and progressive. And it is blessed. Life in the text comprises salvation in all its glorious fullness. How clear is the manifestation to us of the Divine love in this!

IV. IN THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS BLESSING IS OBTAINED FOR US. "He sent his Son to be the Propitiation for our sins." The best commentary on Christ the Propitiation that we know, is that found in the words of St. Paul, in Rom. iii. 24—26. Two remarks only do we offer concerning the propitiation. 1. *It was not anything offered to God to render him willing to bless and save us.* 2. *It was designed to remove obstructions to the free flowing forth of the mercy of God to man.*¹ How splendid the expression of the love of God in sending his Son, only and well-beloved, to be the Propitiation for our sins!

V. IN THE EXAMPLE WHICH IT PRESENTS TO US. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." The obligation to copy the Divine example in this respect is grounded upon our relation to him as his children. Because we are "begotten of God" (ver. 7) we should seek to resemble him. The argument of the Apostle Paul is similar: "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love," etc. (Eph. v. 1, 2). If we are "partakers of the Divine nature," we should imitate the Divine example. 1. *In relation to mankind in general.* "I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven," etc. (Matt. v. 44, 45). He loved us with the love of compassion before he could love us with the love of complacency. Let us imitate him in this respect in our relation to those who are yet in their sins. 2. *In relation to the Christian brotherhood in particular.* (Cf. ch. iii. 10—18.) Let us evince our relation to the Father, who is infinite Love, by our unfeigned love to our Christian brethren. Let the supreme manifestation in regard to us of his love thus produce its appropriate effect in us.—W. J.

Ver. 14.—*The great mission of Christ.* "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son," etc. The mission of Jesus Christ appears here in a threefold relation.

I. IN ITS RELATION TO THE WORLD. "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Notice. 1. *The world's need of a Saviour.* It was in a morally lost and undone condition. It was perishing by reason of its sins. Take the world of St. John's day, or of our own day, in confirmation of this. 2. *The world's inability to provide for itself a Saviour.* Many times and in various ways it has made the attempt, but it has always failed. Schemes of political organization, or liberal education, or social amelioration, or even moral reformation, do not reach the central depths of the need of our race. Man needs salvation, redemption. 3. *The Son of God came to the world as its Saviour.* "The Saviour of the world." The expression "the world" is to be understood in its plain, natural meaning (cf. ch. ii. 2; John iii. 16). He saves men from sin by the influence of his life and work upon earth, of his sacrificial death, his glorious resurrection, and his effectual intercession. How *benevolent* is this mission! He might have come to judge, condemn, and destroy our rebellious race. But "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." How *stupendous* is this mission! Creation is a great and glorious work. The Divine agency in upholding the universe, and presiding over its vast and infinitely diversified affairs, baffles our every attempt to comprehend it. The immensity of its extent, the minuteness of its attention, the infinity of its wisdom, the almightiness of its power, immeasurably transcend our utmost thought. But the salvation of lost men is God's greatest and most glorious work. In the Divine Son accomplishing his redemptive mission we have the clearest and fullest manifestation of God.

II. IN ITS RELATION TO THE FATHER. "The Father hath sent the Son to be the

¹ For additional remarks on these points, see our homily on ch. ii. 1, 2.

Saviour of the world." 1. *The Saviour is the Son of the Father.* Frequently is this relationship expressed in the sacred Scriptures, and in a way which indicates its ineffable sacredness and dearness (see Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5; John i. 14, 18; xvii. 24; Rom. viii. 3; and ver. 9).¹ 2. *The Saviour is the Sent of the Father.* "The Father hath sent the Son." This is affirmed again and again in the writings of St. John (John iii. 17, 34; vii. 16; x. 36; xvi. 5; xvii. 3, 4, 5, 18, 21, 23, 25). Being thus sent by the Father, the Son's mission as a Saviour is Divine in its authority. He claimed this himself: "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment," etc. (John xii. 49, 50). The apostles made the same claim on his behalf (see Acts ii. 22; x. 38).

III. IN ITS RELATION TO THE APOSTLES. "And we have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent," etc. 1. *Their knowledge of the Saviour.* St. John, writing of himself and his fellow-apostles, says, "We have beheld," etc. They had seen their Lord in the exercise of his miraculous powers, and in wondrous glory on the Mount of Transfiguration; they had beheld the perfect purity and beauty of his daily life; they had seen him dead upon the cross, and his sacred body laid in its rocky sepulchre; they had afterwards repeatedly seen him living; and they beheld him as "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." 2. *Their testimony concerning the Saviour.* "We have beheld and bear witness that the Father," etc. They testified to the facts which we have already noticed: (1) That Jesus Christ was the Son of God. (2) That he was the Sent of God. (3) That he was sent of God as the Saviour of the world. Their Lord had appointed them to be witnesses for him (John xv. 27; Acts i. 8). And this may fairly be said to be the sum of their testimony: "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." And it is beyond reasonable question that their testimony is "worthy of all acceptance."

Thus we have seen that the great mission of Jesus Christ (1) meets man's deepest need; (2) rests upon the supreme authority; and (3) is attested by competent and trustworthy witnesses. Therefore let us believe their testimony, and turn heartily to the Son of God as our Saviour.—W. J.

Ver. 16.—*The love of God.* "God is Love." "God is." To this almost all peoples assent. The belief in a Supreme Being is nearly coextensive with the human race. Very different are the attributes ascribed to him and the names applied to him; but as to the fact of his existence well-nigh all are agreed. But what is God? Many and various are the answers to this inquiry. To some he is unintelligent and irresistible Fate. To others, Nature. To others, the beautiful Order and stupendous Forces of nature. To others, "the Something, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness." To others, "an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed." To others, the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign of the universe. But what saith the Supreme concerning himself? "God is Light;" "God is Love." A complete apprehension of what God is, is unattainable by us. The finite cannot comprehend the Infinite. "God is Love;" we can understand that. But God is infinite. Combine the two statements. "God is Infinite Love." Here we are lost. The highest and mightiest of created beings cannot comprehend the infinite love. The knowledge which holy spirits have of God will go on increasing for ever; but at no period in the everlasting future will any one be able fully to know him. Yet as to his being and character we may each attain such a knowledge as will enable us to confide in him, and to enter upon the blessed and unending career of moral assimilation to him. Though we cannot comprehend him who is Infinite Love, yet through Christ we may apprehend him, trust him, love him, commune with him, and become one with him. "God is Love." Let us consider—

I. THE MANIFESTATION OF THIS GLORIOUS TRUTH. 1. *In creation.* The machine is a revelation of the mechanist; the building, of the architect; the painting, of the painter; the poem, of the poet. So the universe is an embodiment of the ideas of the Divine mind, a revelation of the thought and feeling of the Creator. A careful survey of God's work will lead to the conclusion that "God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." Paley states the argument with clearness and force: "Contrivance proves design; and the predominant tendency of the contrivance

¹ See our homily on vers. 9—11 on this point.

indicates the disposition of the designer. The world abounds with contrivances; and all the contrivances which we are acquainted with are directed to beneficial purposes. . . . We never discover a train of contrivance to bring about an evil purpose. No anatomist ever discovered a system of organization calculated to produce pain and disease; or, in explaining the parts of the human body, ever said, 'This is to irritate, this to inflame, this duct is to convey the gravel to the kidneys, this gland to secrete the humour which forms the gout.' Viewed from this standpoint, the universe appears to be a grand outflow of the love of God, a convincing witness of his delight in promoting the well-being and the gladness of his creatures. The seasons of the year supply evidence of this truth. Spring, with its gradual unfolding of young life and verdant beauty, its quickening and joy-giving influence, is a revelation of God's tenderness and grace. Summer, with its rich light and heat, its abounding life and glory, is a revelation of the inexhaustible beauty and glory and munificence of God. Autumn, with its maturity and mellowness and plenty, proclaims the fidelity and bountifulness of God. But what shall we say of winter, with its storms and tempests, its sombre clouds and stern colds? Even this—that it is not without its beauties, and in its bleak and trying months nature is silently and secretly preparing the beauties of the coming spring, the glories of summer, and the bounties of autumn. Rightly regarded, even winter testifies that "God is Love." But man, with guilty conscience, and a dread of God, and viewing him only through the distorted medium of his own sinful soul, fails to read the revelation of him in nature correctly. And even if he should do so, there arises the inquiry—Is God love in his relation to the sinful? To this, nature has no satisfactory response. Creation may have been a sufficient revelation of God for unfallen men, but for sinful men it is very insufficient. 2. *In the Bible.* The Bible is the revelation of God in his relation to man as a sinner. And this revelation reaches its clearest, fullest, and most influential development in Jesus Christ the Son of God. (1) In the Bible, God appears as the Giver of every good, the Fountain of all blessings. "He giveth us richly all things to enjoy." "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," etc. Material, mental, and spiritual good we derive from him. Restoration to the lost, pardon to the guilty, sanctification to the sinful, glory to the degraded, he gives. Through Christ he bestows all good here, and eternal and glorious life hereafter to all who believe in him. (2) God confers these blessings upon those who are entirely undeserving of them. It is not to his loyal subjects alone that these gifts are bestowed, but also to rebels against his authority. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good," etc. Not only are we undeserving; we are *ill* deserving; we have merited his wrath; yet he imparts to us the gifts of his love. (3) In order to bestow these gifts upon us, he gave us a Gift of greater value than all the others. "He gave his only begotten Son." This Gift immeasurably transcends all the others. Without this they would not have reached us. They flow to us through the mediation of Jesus. (4) And Jesus was given, not to those who waited to receive and honour him, but to those who despised and rejected him. He was given to labour and suffer and die for men, in order that they might have life and joy (cf. vers. 9, 10; Rom. v. 8; John iii. 16). "God so loved the world, that he gave," etc. Who can declare the sweep and intensity of that little adverb "so"? It indicates an infinity of love, a shoreless, bottomless ocean of love. "Love, Divine love, Divine love giving, Divine love giving its only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth—not 'payeth,' not 'worketh,' not 'putteth out some external strength,' but 'believeth'—should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Dr. Joseph Parker). Great as was the love between the Father and the Son, the Father "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." All the love of the Saviour's life was the love of God. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." In all the life of our Lord I read our text, and in his death it is proclaimed with an almost irresistible fulness and force that "God is Love."

II. THE VINDICATION OF THIS GLORIOUS TRUTH. The terrible presence of sin and suffering in the world tends to make men doubt the love of God. If God is love, how is it that there is so much evil amongst men? If he is omniscient, he must have foreseen it; and, foreseeing it, if he is omnipotent, he might have prevented it. Why did he not do so? Why does he allow it to remain? 1. In relation to the existence of sin, or moral evil, amongst us, observe this—the *moral consciousness of men ever charges*

sin upon themselves, not upon God. The weak and depraved reason of man may be so perverted as to charge or implicate the Almighty with the origin and presence of sin; but the heart and conscience never do so. Conscience brings the guilt home to the sin-doer, and under its influence he cries, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," etc. Remorse, penitence, prayer for pardon, efforts to repair wrongs which have been done,—all these prove that man feels himself, and not God, to be chargeable with sin. And in relation to the origin of evil, whatever dark suggestions may be presented to our mind, we always feel that it cannot be of God, but is against him. The presence of evil he permitted and still permits; but it did not originate with him. All his works and ways are utterly opposed to sin. His material creation, his universal providence, his moral laws, and the redemptive mission of his Son, are all resolutely set against evil. He is not darkness, but light; not malignity, but love. 2. *Suffering, or natural evil, as it is sometimes called, is the result of sin, or moral evil.* Whence come war and slavery, distress and poverty, pain and sorrow, disease and "the bitterness of death"? If men would "cease to do evil, and learn to do well," suffering would disappear from our world almost entirely. 3. *Much of our suffering is self-inflicted.* We violate the laws of God's universe, and we suffer in consequence. "Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him." This is an arrangement of love. 4. *The sufferings of the world are small when compared with its enjoyments.* Pain is the exception, not the rule, in human life. The joy that is in the world is far greater than the sorrow. The sufferings of our race are only like one dark and stormy day in a whole year of smiling and joyous sunshine. 5. *The suffering that is in the world is often the means of goodness and joy.* In itself evil is and ever must be evil; in itself suffering is ever painful and bitter. But through the goodness of God evil is not an end, but is often used and overruled for the promotion of good. "All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous: yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness." Severe suffering is like a great thunderstorm which sweeps over a country, and, by its flashing flames and awful booms and pelting rain, fills the minds of men with terror; but it passes away, and leaves the air purer and the heavens brighter. Therefore "let us rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh patience," etc. (Rom. v. 3—5; also viii. 18, 28; 2 Cor. iv. 16—18; Jas. i. 2, 3, 12). "You must cut the diamond," said Thomas Jones, "to understand its value, and to behold the play of its tremulous colours when the sun-rays fall upon its surface. Thus do afflictions bring to light what was latent in the heart. The strongest faith, the intensest love, the profoundest gratitude, and the sublimest moral and spiritual power have been manifested, not by men in the clear day of their prosperity, but by the children of affliction in the dark night of sorrow." Thus even suffering and trial, when received and borne in a right spirit, witness to this glorious truth, that "God is Love."—W. J.

Vers. 17, 18.—*The victory of love over fear.* "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment," etc. Our text authorizes the following observations.

I. **THAT A GREAT DAY OF JUDGMENT AWAITS US IN THE FUTURE.** St. John speaks of "the day of judgment." The evidence for the coming of such a day is various and strong. 1. *The administration of moral government in this world requires it.* In this present state the distribution of good and evil, of prosperity and adversity, among men is not in harmony with their respective characters. We find St. Paul in prison, and Nero on the throne; the infamous Jeffreys on the bench, the sainted Baxter at the bar. This aspect of the Divine government occasioned sore perplexity to Asaph (Ps. lxxiii. 2—14), and from that perplexity he obtained deliverance by the recollection of the truth that a time of judgment and retribution awaits our race in the future (Ps. lxxiii. 16—20). 2. *Conscience anticipates the coming of such a day.* The "dread of something after death" has been felt by most men at some time or other. The voice within testifies to the solemn truth that after death cometh judgment. 3. *The Bible declares the coming of such a day.* (See Eccles. xi. 9; xii. 14; Matt. xii. 36; xxv. 31—46; Acts xvii. 31; Rom. ii. 16; xiv. 10, 12; 2 Cor. v. 10; Jude 14, 15; Rev. xx. 11—13.)

II. **THAT THE SOLEMN TRANSACTIONS OF THAT DAY ARE FITTED TO AWAKEN HUMAN FEARS.** Very clearly is this implied in the text. The awakened conscience cries,

"Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for before thee no man living is righteous." Two things in connection with the day of judgment are likely to lead to fear. 1. *The consciousness of our sins.* No human being can stand before the great tribunal and plead "Not guilty." In relation to man we may be guiltless; that is possible. But in relation to the holy God and his perfect Law, we have each sinned, and brought ourselves into condemnation, and merited punishment. Hence the prospect of the day of judgment may well awaken our fear. 2. *The omniscience and holiness of the Judge.* He knows our every sin. Even our sinful thoughts and feelings are manifest unto him. He has set our iniquities before him, our secret sins in the light of his countenance (Ps. xc. 8). And he cannot excuse any sin. Sin is the abominable thing which he hates (Jer. xlv. 4). He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity" (Hab. i. 13). Who, then, can stand before him in that day?

III. *PERFECT LOVE WILL BANISH SUCH FEARS AND INSPIRE HOLY CONFIDENCE.* "Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment," etc. "Love" here is not merely our love to God, or our love to our neighbour, but the principle of love, or, as Ebrard expresses it, "the love which subsists between God and us; thus that simple relation of love of which the apostle had spoken in ver. 12, and just now again in ver. 16." And its being perfected cannot mean that it is so fully developed as to be incapable of further increase or improvement. In that sense love will never be altogether "made perfect with us." One meaning of "to be made perfect" is "to attain its end." And one of the designs of God is that love should inspire us with holy boldness in the day of judgment. "The confidence," says Alford, "which we shall have in that day, and which we have even now by anticipation of that day, is the perfection of our love; grounded on the consideration which follows;" viz. "Because as he is, even so are we in this world." 1. *Perfect love expels servile fear.* There is a reverent fear which increases as our love increases. "O fear the Lord, ye his saints," etc. (Ps. xxxiv. 9); "Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord," etc. (Ps. cxv. 11, 13). But servile fear, the fear which hath torment, is incompatible with holy love. "There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear," etc. What countless fears agitate the hearts of those who are not in sympathy with God! Some men are dreading secular poverty; others, painful and lingering illness; others, death; others, judgment; others, God himself. Such fears agitate and distress souls; they have torment. Perfect love will expel each and all of these tormentors. It clothes our life and its experiences in new aspects, by enabling us to regard them in a different spirit. This love is of God; it proceeds from him and returns to him, and it cannot dread him or his appointments in relation to us. In this way it banishes from the heart the dread of death and of the judgment. 2. *Perfect love inspires holy confidence.* It will impart "boldness in the day of judgment." Holy love is a most courageous thing. "Love is strong as death. . . . Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Since this relation of love subsists between God and us, and since God is what he is, viz. "love" (ver. 16) and "light" (ch. i. 5), we can do no other than trust him, and even now look forward with confidence to the day of judgment. Perfect love not only expels servile fear, but inspires victorious trust in God.

IV. *THE CONFIDENCE WHICH PERFECT LOVE INSPIRES IS WELL-GROUNDED.* "Because as he is, even so are we in this world." "God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him;" and in a measure he is like unto God. Moreover, love is a transforming principle and power; and they who abide in love are ever growing into more complete likeness to God in Christ; and for this reason they may be well assured that in the day of judgment they will be accepted of him. If we are in this relation of holy love, we have communion with our Lord and Saviour, he dwells in us, we dwell in him, and we may rejoice in the assurance that, because we morally resemble him, he will not condemn us in that day.—W. J.

Ver. 19.—*God's love and ours.* "We love, because he first loved us."

I. *GOD LOVES.* He is not an impassive, unemotional, passionless Being. From all eternity there was a tender, infinite, ineffable love between the Father and the Son. When the Scriptures represent God as having a heart, as pitying, sorrowing, repenting, loving, hating, there is a true meaning in the representations. If we take the corre-

spending emotion in ourselves, purge it from evil, elevate and sublime it as much as possible, then we have that which in its character resembles the emotion which is predicated of God. God truly loves.

II. GOD LOVES MAN. He loves not only his equal Son, or the Holy Spirit, or great and good angels, but man—weak, frail, and sinful. Yes, “sinful;” for he loves man *as man*; not merely the pure and lovable, but the sinful and morally deformed. If God loved only those whose hearts had some love toward him, he would love none; for all are estranged from him by sin. But “he first loved us.” “In this was manifested the love of God towards us,” etc. (vers. 9, 10); “For when we were yet without strength, in due season Christ died for the ungodly,” etc. (Rom. v. 6—8); “God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses,” etc. (Eph. ii. 4, 5); “God so loved the world,” etc.

III. GOD’S LOVE TO MAN IS THE ORIGINATING CAUSE OF MAN’S LOVE. “We love, because he first loved us.” “The love of God to us is the source of all our love.” The flowers that slumber in the earth during winter do not start forth in spring and woo the sun’s warm return; but the sun comes bathing their beds with light and warmth until they feel his genial influence and respond thereto. So is it with God’s love and ours. “Love begets love;” and so God’s love to us begets love in us. It follows from this that our love, in its character, though not in its degree, must resemble that of God. There is something in us which has an affinity to his love, and therefore responds to it. We were made in his image, and thus our love is like unto his. Every form or expression of human love finds its archetype and its perfect expression in God. Take the love of a *father* for his child. A noble thing is a father’s love. It is, however, perfect only in God. “A Father of the fatherless is God in his holy habitation;” “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him;” “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us,” etc. A *mother’s* love is one of the most holy and beautiful things in the universe; but it is perfect only in God. “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?” etc. (Isa. xlix. 15, 16); “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.” A *husband’s* love is perfect only in God. “Thy Maker is thine Husband; the Lord of hosts is his name.” His fidelity is steadfast, his protection is constant and adequate, etc. The love of *friends* is found in perfection only in God. “The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend;” “Abraham was called the friend of God.” Jesus Christ, the Revealer of God, is the “Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” The love of a *child* for its parents also finds perfect expression in the Divine nature. Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as the Son of Mary is the perfect pattern of such affection. Thus every aspect of true human love is beautiful, sacred, Divine. God has them all in all perfection in himself. He has manifested them, and still manifests them to us. Our Lord Jesus is the completest, brightest manifestation of love. Behold it in him. Condescension, labour, humiliation, patient submission, and uttermost self-sacrifice for sinners. Can you conceive any manifestation of love more complete, more sublime, more Divine? The personal realization of a love such as this must beget love in us. Its nature or ours must be changed ere it can be otherwise. If you love him not, you are really not fully persuaded that he loves you. Behold in Jesus Christ the love of God towards you. Did he not love you? Is he not love? Then, why not love him? Gratitude should constrain you to do so. Some can adopt the language of the text as their own: “We love, because he first loved us.” And others have advanced to love him because of what he is in himself. Let us endeavour to love him more and know him more, to know him more and love him more, and so become increasingly like unto him.—W. J.

Vers. 1—6.—*The spirit of truth and the spirit of error.* I. NEED FOR TESTING. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” Again, at the thought of danger, his heart warms toward his readers as his *beloved*. It is necessary to bear in mind the circumstances in which they were placed. They had the *help of true prophets*. The apostolic age had not come to an end. John was still living; and there were others who had inspired utterance. They had that for which some minds still crave—

infallible guidance on the spot. But they were not placed beyond danger, as minds never are in this world. Many false prophets had gone out into the world, and were in their neighbourhood, as they are in all neighbourhoods where Christ's truth is published and finding acceptance. The false prophets are Satan's counterpoise to the true prophets, and, as the true prophets were really under Divine inspiration, the false prophets claimed to be under Divine inspiration too. For that lie best succeeds which is made to bear the closest resemblance to the truth that is active. Christianity was at that time wonderfully active in many places. How was it to be counteracted? We can understand that forming the subject of evil counsel. One way was to incorporate Judaism with Christianity. Another way was to incorporate Gentile philosophy with Christianity, to which the name of Gnosticism is given. The general drift of Gnosticism is to substitute, for the plain facts of the gospel, philosophic myths. Cerinthus, who was a contemporary of John in proconsular Asia, is described by Neander as "the intermediate link between the Judaizing and the Gnostic sects." "As a Judaizer, Cerinthus held, with the Ebionites, that Jesus was only the son of Joseph and Mary, born in the natural way. As a Gnostic, he maintained that the Christ first descended, in the form of a dove, on the carpenter's son at his baptism; that he revealed to him the unknown Father, and worked miracles through him; and that at length he took his flight, and left him, so that Jesus alone suffered and rose, while the Christ remained impassible." There is reason for believing that this was the particular danger, or something not unlike it, which beset the circle or circles to which John writes in this Epistle. There therefore arose a necessity for discriminating between the true prophets and the false prophets, that the one class might be followed and the others shunned. How was this necessity to be met? Only by the action of the Christians themselves. The duty of *discrimination* is here laid upon them. For this they were not specially inspired; but they had the ordinary assistance of the Holy Spirit. Observe the language in which the duty is described. "Believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." They were not enjoined to sit in judgment upon the prophets as individuals, but in respect of their *prophetic teachings*, which they claimed to have received from God. There were spirits of God to whom afterward is attributed the confessing of Christ; and there were spirits not of God to whom afterward is attributed the refusal to confess Christ, the organs of the latter being the false prophets. How are we to understand this *plurality* of spirits? Are we to think of the spirits of the prophets as *objectified*? or are we to think of spirits as connected with separate movements, finding their organs in prophets true or false? The latter view is not excluded by the language; but we know very little of the sphere in question. The practical thing is that there are true teachers and false teachers, between whom a discrimination has to be made. The Christian ministry should be in the service of truth; but it would be vain to think that the teaching from every Christian pulpit is true. There are times when many go forth from our theological halls with rationalistic tendencies. What are Christian people to do? They are not to believe every spirit. Whoever the Christian teacher is, the influence resting upon him and giving character to his utterances must be tested, to see whether it is of God. There are teachers rising up from time to time of commanding ability. They are, or seem to be, burdened with a message for their age. Their influence extends beyond the readers of their books or listeners to their orations. It is soon to be found in novels, in magazines, in newspapers, in conversation. What are Christian people to do. They are to discriminate, they are not to believe every spirit; they are to satisfy themselves that the influence present in the teaching is of God before they yield themselves to it. If they are not satisfied, then they must do what they can to make themselves impervious to, or vigorously to counteract, the influence. For very much depends on what teaching we receive through all channels, it being either for our spiritual advancement or for our spiritual deterioration.

II. THE TEST TO BE APPLIED. "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God." 1. *Positive*. "Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." Teaching is to be judged in relation to Christ. It is due to Christ that there should be an *open declaration* in his favour. The object of confession is (strictly) *Jesus Christ come in the flesh*. It is to be borne in mind that Jesus is the historical name. It is

admitted on all sides that "one Jesus" lived about nineteen hundred years ago, and that his influence has extended far and wide. What account is to be given of this Personage? The right teaching is that which confesses him to be the Christ. This is in agreement with ch. ii. 22. Cerinthus taught that the Christ had a temporary abode in Jesus; the Christian teacher declares Jesus to be the Christ. But the Christ refers us to Divinity, eternal Sonship, with which we associate ideas of immateriality, invisibility, impassibility, exemption from death. This was virtually the understanding of Cerinthus, and his way of accounting for the ordinary manifestations of humanity in Jesus was that he was only *apparently* the Christ. This was the usual solution of the difficulty by the Gnostics. The right teaching is that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh. That is to say, the true solution is the *Incarnation*. Christ is Divine, and as such we can think of him as essentially immaterial, invisible, impassible, undying; and yet he is human, and as such there could be connected with him materiality, visibility, suffering, death. The Incarnation is well worthy of being made the great object of confession. For it proclaims the wonderful and indissoluble union between God and man with a view to human redemption, which sometimes tends to repel by its strangeness. It proclaims a new and unexpected outlet for Divine love, transcending all finite power of thought, to be estimated adequately only by him in whose heart the love burned. In this view we obtain *facts* which are rich in meaning. We first stand in presence of his birth, when the mysterious union commenced. We are amazed as we contemplate him growing up to manhood. We behold him setting himself to his work, and proving himself in a threefold encounter with the tempter. We are overwhelmed with awe to think of him, in death, passing under the eclipse of the Father's countenance. We are profoundly interested to behold him rising from the dead, and to think of him as passing into the heavens in our glorified nature. That is the right kind of teaching which deals with these facts, puts them forward for the grasp of faith, uses them for the clearing of thought and the stirring up of love.

2. *Negative*. "And every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already." The true confession has been defined; this is its contradiction. There is implied a certain knowledge of Christianity. The news has gone forth that God has become incarnate for human salvation. It is news which is fitted to arrest, and leaves no excuse for want of inquiry into the question of fact. Every teacher especially should have his mind made up with regard to it. The apostle lays it down as the test of a true confession. By this Cerinthus and other Gnostic teachers were to be condemned. They found a way of avoiding the Incarnation, and thus took away the impression of the great love of God manifested toward men. The same thing is done by the Unitarians now. They withhold acknowledgment from Jesus. Many of their teachers plead for warmth of feeling toward Christ. "Without the passions which move incessantly, like glittering and intense fire, around the Person of Christ, religious teaching will not make men's hearts so to burn within them as to bring them in crowds to hear and to obey, and to be impelled to become teachers in turn" (Stopford Brooke). They do not, however, leave room for the calling forth of such love, inasmuch as they represent Christ as a mere man, only transcending other men in excellence of character. They do not accept the Incarnation; it is not credible to them; it takes away from the simplicity of the faith. Their declaration must go forward to judgment; a Higher than man will one day pronounce upon its worth. It is an important consideration for our guidance that Unitarianism stands clearly condemned by the apostolic test. It confesses not Jesus, admits not the higher view of his Person and work. There are teachers of great eminence "who occupy rather a negative and undefined position in relation to Christ and Christianity. They have written upon almost every subject of human thought—upon government and the Church, upon history and biography, upon morals and destiny. They have gone round the world to find heroes and representative men, and have said many true and striking things about them; but, strange to say, they have never clearly informed the world as to what they think of Christ. They are unaccountably reticent upon a subject that is the most important of all. They allow a painful silence to brood over a Name that is above every name. What can be the meaning of this? Is it because they have no faith in Christ, but do not think it prudent or necessary to profess their unbelief? Can they have faith without professing

it? The fact remains that they have thought it their business to act as guides to the world, and have thought it necessary to publish many volumes of their opinions, and yet have never directly told the world what they think of Christ. That fact remains; and alongside of it the truth remains, 'Every spirit which confesseth not Jesus is not of God'" (F. Ferguson). Of the Cerinthian Gnosticism, which set aside the Incarnation, John says that it was the presence of antichrist. So early had the announced opposition to Christ commenced; it still exists under other specious forms. The most radical opposition is that which is directed against the central fact of the Incarnation, which would reduce Christ to the position of a mere human teacher.

III. SUCCESS IN APPLYING THE TEST. 1. *The fact of victory.* "Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them." This is another occasion on which the apostle is so affectionate as to call them his little children. He thinks of something which was greatly to their honour. They had overcome the *false prophets*. We are not told the wiles which were used by these prophets. They pretended to be under Divine inspiration. Very probably they pretended to work miracles. We do not know that they held out the inducement of false pleasures. Whatever the wiles were, in vain were they tried on those to whom John is now writing. They held tenaciously to the fact of the Incarnation, and to its blessed import. Nay, we can understand that they succeeded in separating from their communion all who were not in sympathy with the Incarnation, who for the fact put some fanciful idea. "They went out from us," it is said of these prophets in ch. ii. 19, which, taken in connection with what is said here, gives us an impression of their moral defeat. There needed to be no recourse to the disciplinary power of excommunication; they went out when they could no longer endure the power of the truth. 2. *The ground of victory.* "Because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." The Divine Person is left undefined. We naturally think of Christ in the Spirit. For the victory lies in discrimination; and John's conception of their qualification is their having an anointing from the Holy One. As qualified in the same way, Christ had to fight. He was brought into conflict with him that is in the world. All attempts were made to delude him, to lead him to abandon the Father's cause; but he conquered. "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out." As the hour approaches, he announces his victory for the encouragement of his followers: "Be of good cheer; *I have conquered the world.*" John's friends conquered too, because greater was he that was in them than he that was in the false prophets, and in the world to which properly these belonged, though they had once been connected with the communion of Christians. Christ is in us by his Spirit, to unmask all designs on us, to expose all fallacies, to disclose all the beauties of truth. He that is in the world has great power of delusion; but we can think of it as vanquished, and we can think of the victory as sure for us in the power of his Spirit which is within us as our equipment. Therefore let us be of good cheer. 3. *The manner of victory.* (1) *Discrimination in respect of the false prophets.* "They are of the world: therefore speak they as of the world, and the world heareth them." How are false prophets to be known? They are the birth of a worldly state of society, they give utterance to worldly sentiment, they gain worldly applause. As for the Incarnation, it is remote from their thoughts; it is too high for their low origin; it is too self-abasing, too self-restraining. Let a field be sought where looser sentiment may be uttered, or where there may be a grim handling of abuses and unrealities and failings, and, if there is only sufficient *vis* in the teacher, certain men will loudly applaud. (2) *Discrimination in respect of the true prophets.* "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not." How are true prophets to be known? They may be said to be the birth of a quickened Church; they are here represented as the birth of God. They teach about God, and they set forth the Incarnation as the grandest manifestation of what God is—as the fact of facts and the truth of truths. He that is in the school of God, and seeks to advance in the knowledge of God, is attracted to them; while he who is not yet born of God is repelled from them. "I have set thee," says God to Jeremiah, "for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way." *Marking of the discrimination.* "By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." We are to understand the principle laid down. By it we discriminate between the spirit of truth resting on the true teachers, and the spirit of wandering

resting on the false teachers. There is implied the test of the Incarnation. According as teachers are attracted to it do they come into the light of God; according as they are repelled from it do they wander themselves, and lead away others, into the darkness.—R. F.

Vers. 7—21.—*Threefold recommendation of the duty of loving one another.* I. THE DUTY RECOMMENDED, FROM LOVE HAVING ITS ORIGIN IN GOD. *The duty enjoined.* “Beloved, let us love one another.” John has a winning way of urging duty, addressing his readers as objects of his affection, and desiring himself to be stirred up to duty. He has in view the “absolute type of love” (Westcott) in the Christian circle. There are considerations adduced which go beyond *brotherly love*, which suggest rather *compassionate love*. But it is to be remembered that love to child, to friend, to sinner, is intended to have its *outcome and complete satisfaction* within the Christian circle. 1. *Divine origin of love.* (1) *Positive.* “For love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God.” It is true of all physical force that there is in the world, that it is of God, in this sense—that it came originally from the creative energy of God. In the same way, love is of God, inasmuch as we have been *created with a capacity of loving*. But that will not meet the requirement of the thought here. Love is of God in the sense that, as an *actual spiritual force*, it has come from a fountain of love in God. Every one that loveth, then, is *begotten of God*, i.e. has had a nature imparted to him like God’s, and so that he is a child of God. He also *knoweth God*, i.e. has daily and growing acquaintance with God, through which there is communicated to him more of the force of Divine love. (2) *Negative. Statement.* “He that loveth not knoweth not God.” There is not *derivation* in this case; but there is the *singling out* of a person in whom love is not a force, and it is said of him (passing over nature) that he knoweth not God. The difference of tense, which is not brought out in the translation, seems to be aimed at *apparent knowledge*. When he said, at his baptism or at any other time, that he knew God, looking to the absence of love as a force in his life, John is confident that he never knew him. *Reason.* “For God is Love.” This is the way in which the most sublime statement of Scripture is the first time introduced. One of the most striking introductions to a sermon is that by the late M. Monod of Paris, in which he supposes an almost effaced bit of paper to have been found among the ruins of Herculaneum. After great difficulty, the assembled men of letters succeed in deciphering the first two words, “God is —.” There is dreadful suspense, while they labour to decipher the third word. What is God? is a question upon the answer to which human destiny very much depends. There is a glow of satisfaction when, at last, they make out letter by letter l-o-v-e. *God is Love.* It was left to the disciple of love to make this late, but fully satisfying, announcement about God, if from his own consciousness, also from the spirit of inspiration. *God is a Spirit*—that is a statement of our Lord’s recorded by John, describing the Divine nature as above all limitations of space and time. *God is Light*—that is a statement already made in this Epistle, describing the Divine nature as purity with no limit to its diffusiveness. *God is Love*—that is a statement the excellence of which lies in its bringing out the *personal* element in the Divine nature. This God is *essentially*, apart from all thought of creation. But how are we to think of him as love in the depths of his own being? “Love involves a subject and an object, and that which unites both” (Westcott). “We must not, therefore, think merely of the love of God to the creature, but also of the inner Divine Trinitarian love in God” (Ebrard). There is the outgoing of infinite love in the Father which finds an infinite response in the Son, and this is maintained through the Spirit. That language is vague; but it may serve to mark the loving intercommunication that there is within Godhead. It is because God essentially realizes love, without going outside of his own being, that he is *Self-blessed*. 2. *The love of God was manifested in the Incarnation.* “Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” There is the full satisfaction of love within Godhead; and yet there was a movement of love with an object *beyond* Godhead. It was love that moved God to create—the desire to communicate of the riches of his own Being. It can be said that, even from eternity, we lay in the thoughts of God, with the clearness of the Divine intentions and the kindling of the Divine affection around us. And so the place of all beings and of all things in his world

lay before him, as that in which, anticipatively, he took delight. When angels were brought into being, it was love that was operating, and, there being none other, God himself rejoiced over them. When the foundations of the earth were fastened, and the corner-stones thereof laid, it was love that was operating; and "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." "Herein was the love of God manifested." Creation, in all its lines, has been drawn by love, and so it is essentially a glad study, calling forth, from the students of its many parts, the symphonious song, and the common shout of joy. But it is not to this manifestation that John calls attention. His mind has been filled, from the beginning of his letter, with that which is the manifestation of love by pre-eminence. It is the Incarnation that he cannot leave out of sight. "Herein was the love of God manifested." The manifestation is said to be *in us*, i.e. in believers; for it is in them that the Incarnation reaches its end. The Incarnation is described as God sending his only begotten Son into the world. We start from the thought of his *dignity* as the only begotten Son of God, besides whom the Father had none in whom the Father's love found an adequate object. He found the *condition* appointed for him in the world. That is, without ceasing to be the only begotten Son, he became a man among men, even sharing the evil of their condition, yea, suffering death at the hands of sinners. What was the meaning of this strange manifestation? It was not that God took delight in the evil condition of his Son. But it was love going out toward men. We were in a *dead state*, in relation to the vindication of Law, and in relation to our true life; and we had not yet come to the worst. God did not blot out the fair page of creation, he did not part with one son out of many; but he parted with his only begotten Son—the most glorious of all beings, perfectly reflecting his own majesty, that we might live through him. He made the sacrifice in which his feelings were the most deeply involved, that our interests might be advanced to the highest point. "Herein was the love of God manifested." 3. *The Incarnation is proof that love was not first in us, but in God.* "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the Propitiation for our sins." Whence has love sprung? Was it first in our hearts, and then, by contact with love in our hearts, was it kindled in the Divine heart? Ah! no; love has its eternal dwelling-place in God. It was not that *we loved God*; any movement of love in us was necessarily subsequent to the movement of the Divine love in creating us. It was not that we loved God; we were not actually lovers of God in our characters. We were laden with sins, those sins being all love of self and want of love toward God. It was that *he loved us*; and he created us that he might make us sharers with him in his bliss. It was that he loved us; and, when we had frustrated the end of his love, he did not leave us in our sins. He acted without prompting from without, he acted with absolute spontaneity, he acted out of the infinite freedom of his own will; and what did he do? He sent his Son to be the Propitiation for our sins; i.e. sent him into our nature to remove all the obstacles that our sins presented to our enjoying the blessings of Divine fellowship. Love is free, and yet it has an inner law of righteousness. Our sins could not be removed in any way, they could not be removed by Divine fiat, they could not be removed without adequate satisfaction. And, when righteousness demanded that the satisfaction should be given in our nature, Divine love proved equal to the emergency. The Son, breathing forth the Father's love, did not eschew our nature, and, in it dying, made infinite satisfaction for our sins. *Such is love, in all the glory of its freedom and of its power.*

II. THE DUTY RECOMMENDED FROM LOVE BEING NECESSARY TO FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. *The duty inferred from the Incarnation.* "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." John again adopts the affectionate form of address. He proceeds on the manner of love brought out in the preceding verse. "If so [the emphatic position] God loved us." It is implied that we have been brought into the position of God's children, and should act as God does. The conclusion then follows, that we should *love one another*. As for the *manner* of our love, it should be love that can go the length of sacrifice, and love that can conquer obstacles of sin. But as for the *object* of our love, why is it *loving one another*? It is to this point that John directs himself. 1. *To love one another is the way to have fellowship with the invisible God.* "No man hath beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us." The fact of the invisibility of God is also stated in John i. 18,

"No man hath seen God at any time." The verb is different here, conveying the idea of seeing intently, seeing so as to image to the mind what God is through the sense of sight. In John i. 18 the invisibility of God is regarded as relieved by the Incarnation. Here the invisibility of God is regarded in connection with fellowship with God, and there is brought into view, not the visible Mediator, but *our visible brethren*. How are we to have (not to prove that we have) fellowship with the invisible God? The way is to have visible objects for our love, especially to love one another in the Christian circle. Loving one another, on the one hand, "God abideth in us," so as to be nearer to us for fellowship, than if we beheld him. Loving one another, on the other hand, his love, i.e. our love to him, is perfected. It cannot be brought to perfection unless with the help of love to the brethren. This thought receives further expression at the close of this chapter. 2. *Participation in the Spirit is the sign of fellowship with God.* "Hereby know we that we abide in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." The thought is similar in ch. iii. 24. Loving one another leads to mutual abiding. But how is this to be discovered? It is by the distribution to us of the Spirit. He cannot be communicated to us in the full flood of his influence, but only according to our nature and disposition. It is evident that the Spirit is the common element on which our fellowship with God proceeds. But another question at once arises—How do we know that we participate in the Spirit? The answer, given in what follows, is, our appreciation of the Incarnation. 3. *There can be no fellowship with God apart from the Incarnation.* (1) *The Incarnation historically attested.* "And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Strictly speaking, what the apostles beheld was what Christ was in the flesh. There was thus a good historical basis for their testimony. They knew, at first hand, that Christ was baptized, wrought miracles, was transfigured, died, rose again, and that he claimed to be the Son of God. But the testimony is carried here beyond the actual facts to the meaning of the facts. As here expressed, it is that "the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." The apostles, carefully observing the facts, gave this as their only rational explanation. He with whom they had been thrown into closest contact, was no mere man, but the Son of God. He was the object of the Father's infinite love; but the Father, in a wondrous manner, sent him forth on a mission of a saving nature and wide as the world in its reach. John here echoes the Samaritans, of whom he records that they said to the woman with whom Christ had a conversation, "Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world." It is well to have a title that sets forth so clearly the impartiality, the universality, of Christ's mission. It is implied that his mission is lasting. He is still to be thought of as sent into the world as its Saviour. Every unsaved person has a right to claim him as his Saviour; and that is the simple fact with which we have to do. There is hint here of a love that oversteps love of the brethren. (2) *The test of confession.* "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God." It underlay the apostolic attestation that Jesus is the Son of God. This, then, is the form which the test takes, in agreement with forms in which it has already been put. The Unitarians escape the application of the test, by retaining the language while taking away from the meaning. "To us," says Channing, "he is the first of the sons of God, the Son by peculiar nearness and likeness to the Father. In this mighty universe, framed to be a mirror of its Author, we turn to Jesus as the brightest Image of God, and gratefully yield him a place in our souls, second only to the infinite Father, to whom he himself directs our supreme affection." But the whole aspect of the Incarnation is changed if we think of Jesus as only an exalted creature, humbling himself to a lower creaturely condition, and not as the uncreated Son, humbling himself to what was infinitely below him. As an exhibition of love, the one humbling is not to be compared with the other. *The Son* is to be taken as absolutely as *the Father*, i.e. One in whom the Father sees his perfect image. Where the Spirit of God works, there is prompting to the confession of the mysterious entering of the Divine Son into our nature; and it is only in the line of this thought that we can maintain fellowship with God. 4. *Experience of love in which there is fellowship with God.* (1) *Experience of love.* "And we know and have believed the love which God hath in us." The comfort of the Incarnation is that it is infinite love finding a lodgment in our nature, and especially in our hearts as believers. According

as we believe, have we experience of the love: and, however much we have experience of it, there is still room for the exercise of faith. (2) *Restatement regarding the nature of God.* "God is Love." In neither case is the statement made to stand out; it is introduced as though it were a familiar thought to the writer. "Pure, universal Love thou art." One bearing of this is that God cannot love *partially*, loving one and not loving another.

"For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

Another bearing of it is that God cannot love *feebly*. Even in his reserve there is strength. He rests in his love (Zeph. iii. 17); but it is because he is conscious of his strength. He had infinite repose in view of the entrance of sin into the world; but it was because he was conscious of his power to defeat it for his own glory on the cross. And we must think of him as having infinite repose in view of the final issue of things. That he is Love means this to us—that all means will be used to overcome the evil of our hearts. (3) *Inference regarding fellowship with God.* "And he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." If God is Love, as the Spirit gives us to see in the Incarnation, then he who moves habitually in love as the sphere of his being, keeps up fellowship with God.

III. THE DUTY RECOMMENDED FROM LOVE WORKING TOWARD BOLDNESS. 1. *Consummation.* "Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he [that One] is, even so are we in this world." It is a most solemn thought that there is before us all the day of judgment. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment." There is a final and authoritative judgment to be pronounced on the value of our life. What has there been in it of obedience to God? How far have we received Christ into it? Upon that the sentence must turn. Love is now *with us*; i.e. joined to us as an influence in our life. What is the greatest thing that it can do for our future? It is this, to inspire us with boldness that day when we stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. The ground of our present confidence is likeness to Christ. That One who is to be on the judgment-seat was once in this world in bodily form; he is still in the world in spirit, loving those who are his people, and seeking to embrace all others within the number of his people. According as we are in sympathy with the movements of his love—love his people, and seek to embrace others within the number of his people—can we assure our hearts in view of the day of judgment. 2. *Imperfection on the way to the consummation.* "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love." The opposite of boldness is fear: this is excluded from love. It is of the nature of fear to shrink back from a person; it is of the nature of love to be attracted toward a person. There is naturally fear in us to be cast out. According as love takes possession of us does it cast out fear. Men may have a certain fear of each other on first acquaintance; but let love be drawn out, and fear is gradually expelled. So we have a feeling of fear toward God, while our relations to him are not satisfactorily determined, while we have not satisfactorily discovered his feelings toward us. We are startled when we think of our sin, when we think of the Divine indignation against sin. But when we think of God as in infinite compassion making provision for us as sinners, we are emboldened. "He is near that justifieth me; who is he that will contend with me?" And as we realize more of the greatness of redeeming love, there is less room left for fear. There is a punitive office fulfilled by fear. It is God in a painful manner dealing with us for our imperfect love, and telling us that we must love better. 3. *Love that is operative is caused by anticipative love.* "We love, because he first loved us." There is an affirmation here, and an explanation. The affirmation is, "We love" (without definition of object). There are multitudes who, without untruthfulness and without presumption, can say, "We love." Can we say this? The love of parents to their children is acknowledged to be real. We are not long in a home before we see that love is, in no feigned manner, operating. The parents cannot suffer their children to be long out of their sight. They have doubts and fears about them in many ways. And they are always planning for their well-being. Do we love all round in the same way? Would we be conscious of a great blank in our existence if we had not a God to love? Would the light of our eye, the joy of our heart, be gone? Do we delight

in fellowship with God? Do we form plans for advancing the glory of God? Does love, too, operate toward our brethren? Have we a real interest in them, rejoicing with them when they rejoice, and weeping with them when they weep? Does our love operate toward those who are not yet brethren, leading us to make sacrifices for them, and to form plans for their being brought into the fold of the Redeemer? But there is also an explanation. "We love, *because* he first loved us." What is the origin of love in us? It is God exercising influence over us; but in what way? Not by the manifestations of his power, not by the manifestations of his wisdom, not by the manifestations of his righteousness; but by the manifestations of his love. Like produces like. God loved us before we had the opportunity of loving. He loved us in *creating* us, in putting it into the hearts of parents to care for us in infancy and childhood. He thus anticipated us with goodness. And then he was ready with a *scheme of mercy* for our coming into the world. We are not long in the world before we learn that we have got evil hearts, that we are in the midst of sin and misery; and sometimes the prospect seems dreary enough. But, on the other hand, it is true that God has made the world *warm* for our coming into it. There is love in it as well as sin; and thus God has been beforehand with us. He did not wait until we sinners *returned* to him. That was impossible by an act of our own will, even by an act of the Divine will, as sheer force. It needed some powerful influence to bear upon our hearts; and that was found in the *anticipative* love of God in redemption. It is the *greater love that ever comes first*. Two persons have a quarrel. The one comes to the other, and desires a reconciliation; the other is overcome, and loves in return. That was the greater love which took the initiative, and broke down the alienation. So God's love is the greater, for he speaks the first word of reconciliation. And what makes it all the greater is that the *fault* was entirely on our side. We had wronged him; he regarded our sin with the utmost displeasure; and yet he loved us. The love with which he anticipated us was greater than any of which *we* were capable; great as his own nature. That love has received ample *manifestation*. There was once a poor Man in this world. He was brought up in an insignificant little town. He received no education but what that little town could afford him. He at first worked as a carpenter, eating his bread in the sweat of his brow. Then he began to work miracles as with Divine power, and to teach as with Divine wisdom. His public career was, however, cut short; for men did not like his teaching, and plotted his death. He was crucified as a malefactor at the age of thirty-three. This poor Man was none other than the Son of God. What was the meaning of this humiliation? It was anticipative love. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Of this love we can give no account, no explanation; it is a mystery, before which we must bow. But *our* love is capable of explanation. "We love, because he first loved us." Let the pressure of anticipative love upon us be evermore felt. 4. *Love that is operative rises from the seen to the unseen*. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." It is declared in the most emphatic manner that love to God cannot exist apart from love to our brother, on the ground that there is a close connection between loving the seen and loving the unseen, and further, on the ground that this connection is embodied in a positive Divine command. A *first* noticeable thing is that *love should form the subject of a command*. It seems strange that we should be commanded to love. Love is supposed to have a freedom, an immunity of its own. And yet, it must be with the affections as with other parts of our nature. They must be placed under government and discipline. There must, in the first instance, be the voice of God, the voice of conscience, authoritatively prescribing their course, directing them to proper objects, and keeping them in just harmony. This would be necessary, even if the affections were naturally pure. The authority of conscience would need to be exercised over them in order to give them *character*. It is, therefore, all the more necessary, seeing their most fine gold has become changed. They are not naturally *Christian*. Christ is the very last Person round whom they would centre. For "he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." And how hard it is to Christianize the affections, to give them the genuine, unmistak-

able Christian stamp and temper; to give them Christ's steadiness, and tenderness, and fervour, and catholicity! How hard for us, who are beset with sin, to reach to that! A *first love*, a youthful enthusiasm, is beautiful, as youth always is. But it is not true to Christ, as the needle to the pole; it is notoriously erratic. Neither is it strong and enduring, as the feeling of him who has been accustomed to the storm; it soon waxes faint. And when youth is past, how dull and sluggish the affections, how unexcitable even before the cross, and in presence of human sin and sorrow! how unseemly, and perhaps malicious, when they come unexpectedly out in the conflict of opinion and interest! They need to be treated with severity; they need to be dragged at the heels of duty. It is only by superintendence and watchfulness and chastening that they can be brought into loving obedience to Christ Jesus, the altogether Lovely. A commandment, then, is reasonable; it is urgently needed, and shall be needed until love is the law of our being—until love shall perform every function in the body of Christ, with all the quickness and all the regularity of an instinct. A second noticeable thing is the manner in which *John issues the command*. There were two commands *from him*, i.e. from God. The first and great commandment is that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. It might seem, then, that we should not love *others* at all. But Christ, going beyond the lawyer's question, brings into view the second commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," connecting it by declaring it to be *like unto the first*. John, in the line of the Master's thought, brings the two more closely together, calling them *one* commandment. The broad principle here is this—that *the love of our brother man, whom we see, is a help to the love of our Father-God, whom we do not see*. (1) *The family affections*. What does the *family institution* teach us regarding God? *Nature* gives us an idea of God as the great and inexhaustible Creator. To the magnitude and beauty of his working there no one has yet discovered the limit. Every augmentation of optical power, every improvement in the science of seeing, only brings fresh worlds into view—a truth which holds not merely in astronomy, but in the whole circle of the sciences. And yet the distance between God and nature is very great—all the distance there is between *a workman and his work*, between an author and his book. Nature, after all that can be said of it, is only a work, a production, a *thing made*. *Society* gives us a higher idea of God; for here, under a variety of forms, we have the relation of governing and governed. The state, especially, is the great governing institution. It gives us the idea of God as the righteous Governor; One ruling in right, and backed by power. This brings God nearer to us; for the distance between a ruler and his subjects is much less than between a workman and his work. But the family gives us a still higher, and the very highest, conception of God; for it is to be regarded as the revelation of his *Fatherhood*. We are more than creatures, we are more than subjects; we are sons. We stand in the most intimate relation to God: a more intimate relation we do not know. And we take it that God has founded the family, has instituted the relationship of father and son among men, just to show us how closely related we are to him. The family is full of spiritual interest and meaning. Traces of infinite benevolence and wisdom are to be found in all its arrangements. The first significant fact is that the opening period of each human life is marked by *helplessness*. This is not peculiar to man; for the same arrangement is found in other creatures. In the human economy, however, it is most strongly marked. In comparison with other creatures, man is but slowly furnished with the knowledge and strength needful for self-subsistence. The period of his pupilage or dependence may be said to extend to a third or a fourth of his lifetime. At first sight this does not seem to be honouring to man. Would it not be better for him to spring at once into self-subsistence, with powers not needing to be matured? But the true explanation is greatly to his honour. Among the lower creatures, it is those that in infancy are most dependent that show the greatest natural affection. And so it is because infancy and childhood, and to a certain extent youth, serve the purpose of God in cultivating the affections, that they are thrown so much on the kindly help of others, and take up so large a proportion of our brief lifetime. The *filial affection* seems to be the special care of God. While there is yet no reflection, no power of resistance, no reasoning about anything, it comes into existence under parental nurturing. It gets the start of all else that has a place or a power in our nature. And for a time it has all the sway. It

is allowed time silently to operate and to deepen, and to become an ineradicable habit of the nature. To the young novitiate, the parent is very much in the place of God—is supposed to know everything, to be able to do everything. But by-and-by in many little things his finitude is discovered. It is then that the thought of God breaks in upon the child, and in the form most congenial to his training, viz. as the *earthly parent raised out of all imperfection*. Mark here the beautiful illustration of the apostolic principle, that it is through the love of the seen that we are to rise into the love of the unseen. The child does not need a new class of feelings, does not need to part with the old, when God is first thought of. It is not the seen *against* the unseen; for if it were, then, the feelings with which we regard the seen being already deeply rooted, there would be no inlet for the unseen. But herein magnify and adore the wise and good providence of God, that, in giving such strength and vitality and advantage to the filial feelings, he is thereby recommending and fortifying religion; he is giving it the start; he is unfolding and putting forward the great truth of his Fatherhood, and winning over the young heart to it before the entrance of a heartless world. If we would understand the love of the seen parent, strong and overmastering, we must connect it with the love of the unseen Parent. The one naturally passes into the other, when wants arise too deep for that which is finite to supply. "If ye love not the seen," says the apostle, "how can ye love the unseen?" implying that it is by loving the seen that we are to learn to love the unseen. There is a lesson to be learned here regarding the *education of children*. There must be a proper representation and interpretation of fatherhood made to them. There must be gentle, wise, and firm dealing, signifying this, "As I the earthly father love you, so does the heavenly Father love you." For, more than we think, the *our Father in heaven* depends on the *our father on earth*. How much parents have it in their power to make religion attractive, or to make it repellent, to their children! The family affections are, to some extent, connected with *trying experiences*. "When father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up." And there is a forsaking by father and mother before there may be a forsaking by death. The child, as he grows up, becomes more and more independent of his parents; but it should not be to be cut loose from all supports, but only to be more thrown upon and taken up by the heavenly Parent. And then, when the total forsaking by father and mother takes place, he is not so desolate, having a Father upon whom to lean, who has promised, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Again, when a youthful member of a family is put into the furnace of affliction, what an effulgence and concentration of affection! It was strong before, but, in the effort to relieve the sufferer, it is wonderfully intensified. And when is it strongest? when does it pass all bounds? Is it not in the last dark lone hour? This is the method of the Divine working. And, without doubt, one end is effectually attained—affection does break forth in all its strength; it does shine with more than a sevenfold lustre, the darkness only making it more refulgent. But may it not be charged with severity? Strange, some one may say, that the child should so charm the parent's heart, should be placed so as to secure the tenderest affection, should be suffered to remain until being is inseparably blended with being, and *then* be taken to the altar! Strange that Abraham should be sent into the land of Moriah, to have his affection toward an only and a peculiar son cut to the quick! Strange that there should be such lamentation in Ramah—Rachel weeping for her children, and not to be comforted because they are not! Were it not better to love the seen less? were it not better to be divested of all affection, or, at least, to limit its sphere? were it not better to retire into a convent, there to forget all earthly relationships, there to escape all heart-breakings and sad farewells, there to love God purely and uninterruptedly? But that would be to fight against nature—and nature is strong. We must love the seen, and must love passionately when the seen threatens to leave us. Now, there is reason, and very weighty reason, that the seen should be loved, and should be taken away so as to bruise love; there is reason for the breaking up of families, as well as for the institution of families; and in both cases the reason is substantially the same. We have a family education on earth, that we may be early familiarized with the truth of God's Fatherhood. Now, what is the Bible representation of that truth? We find that earthly things are indeed made after the heavenly things. We find a home in Godhead; we find the relationship of Father and Son existing in eternity.

How very strong, how very affecting, the expression of home feeling and experience—the Father delighting in the Son, and the Son rejoicing in the Father's works (Prov. viii.)! How true to human nature, we should say, looking from our standpoint, or, rather, how very like the human and the Divine, the seen and the unseen! We find, further, such words as these, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son;" "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us;" "He who spared not his Son, but delivered him up for us all." There was sacrifice, then, on the part of God—the sacrifice of the Son of his love; and, in thinking of it, away with all callousness. It is a sacred theme, and is not to be approached with common feeling. There was no cessation, no diminution of affection—no, not for a moment. But what shall we say? We must, indeed, beware of ascribing to God human imperfection; but are we to think of him as an uninterested on-looker at Calvary? Would not these words, "God so loved the world," and other kindred words, be emptied of their vast meaning if, in our way of thinking, we are not allowed to take into account the strong paternal affection? It is *because* the relation between Father and Son was so very close, so very intimate, that the straining of it for a time, in a human atoning life and death, was so very high and so very mysterious a manifestation of Divine love. And how shall we understand how God felt in contemplating the cross? How shall we understand the meaning of his not sparing his Son, his not holding him back even from the altar of sacrifice, better than by such an experience as that of Abraham, or that of David when he uttered the lamentation, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son"? To gain this high end, viz. *to enter into sympathy with God in the highest act and manifestation of his Godhead*, is it not fitting that the family relations are made so close and tender, and should we not be willing to bear the dismemberment of the family with all its hallowed associations? He in whose hands all these arrangements are is not severe or austere, as some say; he is the God of families, very tender and very compassionate; and in every home there should be an altar erected for his worship. (2) *The brotherly feelings as connected with excellence in others.* It is in this line that the apostle's thought chiefly moves. How are we helped to the conception of the Divine excellence? Partly by what of excellence we find in ourselves; but, beyond that, by what of excellence we find in others. It is in the Christian circle that true excellence is to be found. Friendship is not placed on a proper basis unless it is associated with Christian elements. Our conception of excellence is enriched from the past. We are greatly helped in this respect by the excellence exhibited by those two men—Paul and John. But there is additional help when we have actual experience of excellence in our own circle. We feel it to be more of a reality, we can lay more definite hold upon it, and our love is called forth into actual operation in all befitting forms. Divine excellence is the varied excellence apprehended in a wide circle, infinitely purified and heightened. And our love to God is more real, more definite, and flows forth more naturally, when we rise from excellence that is seen to excellence that is unseen. Let us, then, love our brethren sincerely, with appreciation, and within no narrow circle, that our love to God may have reality, definiteness, richness. "If ye love not the seen," says the apostle, "how can ye love the unseen?" (3) *The missionary feelings.* We mean those feelings which we are to cherish toward a sinner, or toward a fellow-Christian who has fallen into sin. It is the element of *sin in their object* that broadly distinguishes them from those feelings with which we regard kindred or friends. Here, too, as formerly, it holds true that the love of our brother-man, whom we see, is a medium through which we are helped to rise into the love of our Father-God, whom we do not see. What are the feelings with which we are to regard the sinner? There are some—and the thought of it is saddening—there are some who actually rejoice in the existence and prevalence of sin. A *second* class look upon sin as a weakness, or, what is the same thing, lay the blame upon circumstances. A *third* class treat it with utter indifference. The dust they tread under their feet gives them as little concern. A *fourth* class, strange to say, find in it occasion for bitter, irreconcilable hatred. The man who has fallen from respectability is to be branded and cast out, never to be received back. If we belong to any of these four classes, then we are not true Christians. For the Christian, by all holy memories, by all sacred associations,

is a *philanthropist*. By this he should be known in his private walk and in the public arena. On his banner the device is, "One lifted up to the cross by men, and yet drawing all men to him." Let us inquire for a little into the nature of *Christian sympathy*. It is often misrepresented or misunderstood. The creed of some is of this nature, "We must take up a certain moral position; we must, indeed, be humane when suffering comes in our way; but to go down to the fallen is, forsooth, to compromise our moral position." It is the old Pharisaic feeling: "He is the Friend of publicans and sinners: he sits down with those, therefore he countenances their wicked practices. It is safe to keep the leprous at a distance." But Christian sympathy is *not at variance with the highest moral position*. The truth is, it is only to be found in conjunction with the very severest view of sin. It may be said to have its origin, its exciting, stimulating cause in *self-condemnation*. We ourselves must feel the darkness, the isolation, the insupportable sorrow of heart occasioned by an awakened conscience. For it is only when we have realized what sin is in ourselves that we can feel for those who are under its power. Were sin a light thing, we might let it pass, we might suffer it to lie upon a neighbour; but seeing it is so heinous a thing, so subversive of law, so dishonouring to God, so ruinous in its consequences, how can we but deplore it wherever and in whatever form it exists? And is it not when such a view of sin is brought home most strongly to our minds that we feel greatest sympathy with the erring? Is it not in this way, too, that we cast off *uncharitableness*? There is a providence in our having faults, if, by keeping our eyes upon them, we are led to pass a charitable judgment upon the conduct of others. What pleasure can it be to see a neighbour plagued as we are? So is it with *forgivingness*. It is well that we ourselves stand in perpetual need of forgiveness, if thereby we are led to forgive others. So is it with *active benevolence*. Does it never seem strange that the Christian life is so very difficult? The young Christian imagines it is to be all victory: his faith shall never waver, his Father's countenance shall never be turned away; and so, when he turns to his neighbour and says, "Come with us, and we will show you good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel," he is not prepared for a refusal; he expects the devil to go out of the possessed at once; he lacks patience, which is a sure sign that his sympathy is not yet deep. But he does not go far ere a change comes over himself. As it is put, the old Adam is too much for the young Melancthon. Satan is not yet cast out of his own heart; but continues to molest in formidable strength, and it is only too apparent that there must be many a struggle and many a fall. Mark now how this produces a very material change in his treatment of others. Sin is a greater evil than he supposed it to be, and he feels for it a deeper sorrow. Shall he not sorrow the more for those who are under its power, but who do not see it as he sees it? Shall he not be more patient when abuse and obloquy are heaped upon him, or when he receives the stolid look of the indifferent? It is not to be overlooked that the simple manifestation of a genuine, warm-hearted sympathy is sometimes sufficient. There are many souls in the world, ay, in the sphere in which we move, that are waiting to be comforted, that are waiting to be lifted up out of the dust. All that they need is a kind Christian word. Tell them that we forgive them—we, a brother and a sinner once like them. Assure them by all we hold most dear that God forgives them for his Son's sake—forgives them, the vile, the outcast; and that will be as life from the dead; the hope of the gospel will take possession of them, and shed a mild, benign lustre over their dark world. But there are others who are not so easily dealt with. There must be a prolonged, more laborious, and, in the end, perhaps, a sharper treatment. But, seeing that it *may* be got, shall we, who are the messengers of God, refuse the needful assistance? A physician finds that there are some diseases more malignant and more intricate than others; but shall he therefore confine himself to cases in which the cure is safe and easy? Why, if he has a remedy and refuses to apply it, because he is appalled at the danger or grudges the labour, he would be counted a disgrace to his profession; he would lack the element which is next in importance to skill—that which gives life and form and beauty to skill—sympathy with the distressed. And shall we who have a simple and universal remedy hold it back from those who have the worst kind of distemper, or from those who are the most virulent against ourselves? Shall we not the rather extend to them our warmest sympathy? shall we not the rather extend to them the largest share of our earnest, prayerful, thoughtful considera-

tion, regardless of consequences, regardful only of him whose Name we bear, and whose honour we would by no means tarnish? This may be put on various grounds. We put it here on this ground—that it is by thus loving sinners that we are to be brought into sympathy with that God who loves sinners. “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” That is one great feature of the Divine love—very mysterious, if we think of it, very repugnant to all our preconceptions—that God should love those who were so opposed to him. There is something here that startles us; there is something here that quite overwhelms us. The truth is, we do not wonder enough at it; we give our wonder to lesser things. Is it not often with us so low as this—only a vacant look as he passes before us? But say, all ye that pass by, have ye seen anything like to this in your experience, anything so really wonderful as God’s love to sinners? If we would realize it, if we would breathe the atmosphere of the cross, if we would feel with God in his love to sinners, we must love sinners even as he loves them. True, it is a hard thing to conceive an interest in a sinner, a hard thing to retain that interest when all the romance is gone, a hard thing to undertake some definite direct line of procedure for his reclamation; but that is the Divine arrangement, and Divine grace is offered. “If ye love not the seen,” says the apostle, “how can ye love the unseen?” implying that it is by loving the seen that we are to learn to love the unseen. If we do not know the forbearance and patience which need to be exercised towards sinners, how can we know the Divine forbearance and patience that need to be exercised toward us? It is to be borne in mind that love to our Father-God has an important influence on love to our brother-man. The latter would soon wither and decay if it were not fed from a higher source. He who commands here, spake from Sinai; he now speaks from Calvary. Here him speaking from Calvary. His first word to the sinner is not “Love your brother,” but, “Believe on me.” Should not an ordinary gratitude prompt to instantaneous obedience to the command?—R. F.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Vers. 1—12.—Faith is the source of love.

Ver. 1.—The verse is a sorites. To believe in the Incarnation involves birth from God. To be born of God involves loving God. To love God involves loving his children. Therefore to believe in the Incarnation involves loving God’s children. τὸν γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ is not to be understood as meaning Christ to the exclusion of Christians; it means any son of God, as the next verse shows.

Ver. 2.—Another mark by which we can test our love towards the brethren. In ver. 1 faith in the Incarnation is shown to involve this love. Here obedience to God is the test. To obey God proves love to him, and this again involves love of his children.

Ver. 3.—Reason for the preceding statement. “For the love of God consists in this (ch. iv. 17), that we keep his commandments: and these are not grievous.” These are the words, not merely of an inspired apostle, but of an aged man, with a wide experience of life and its difficulties. “Difficult” is a relative term, depending upon the relation between the thing to be done and the powers of the doer of it. The Christian,

whose will is united with the will of God, will not find obedience to that will a task.

Ver. 4.—Reason for the preceding statement: the opposition which causes the difficulty is already overcome. Nothing, however, is gained by transferring the full stop from the end of ver. 3 to the middle of ver. 4, any more than from the end of ver. 2 to the middle of ver. 3. The punctuation of the Authorized Version and the Revised Version is to be preferred. It is the world that hinders obedience to God’s commandments and makes them seem grievous. But everywhere God’s children (πάν τοις γεγεννημένοις, as in John vi. 57, 39; xvii. 2) conquer the world, and that by means of faith. The aorist (ἡ νικῆσασα) marks the victory as already won and complete: “the victory that hath vanquished the world is this—our faith.”

Ver. 5.—What other way is there of conquering the world? And how can he who believes fail? Belief in Christ unites us to him, and gives us a share in his victories; and he has overcome the world (John xvi. 33).

Vers. 6—12.—The section takes a new turn; the test of the Christian life furnished by the witness of the life itself. This witness

is that of the Spirit (ver. 6), identical with that of God (ver. 9), and possessed by every believer (ver. 10). Few passages of Scripture have produced such a mass of widely divergent interpretation.

Ver. 6.—This (Son of God) is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. This may be regarded as one of the main propositions of the Epistle—that the eternal Son of God is identical with the historic Person, Jesus. Of the water and the blood widely differing interpretations have been given. It would be tedious and unprofitable to enumerate them. Our estimate of John xix. 34, “the most perplexing incident in the Gospel,” will probably influence our interpretation of this “the most perplexing passage in the Epistle.” Not that we have here any direct reference to the piercing of Christ’s side, and its results. Yet both passages teach similar spiritual truths, viz. the ideas which underlie the two sacraments, and teach them by reference to facts in the life and death of Jesus Christ. But the facts are not the same in each case. It is difficult to believe that this passage contains any definite and immediate allusion to John xix. 34. Why in that case the marked change of order, “water and blood” instead of “blood and water”? And if it be thought that this is explained by saying that the one is “the ideal, mystical, sacramental, subjective order,” the other “the historical and objective order,” and that “the first is appropriately adopted in the Epistle, the second in the Gospel,” we are not at the end of our difficulties. If St. John is here referring to the effusions from Christ’s dead body, what can be the meaning of “not in water only, but in water and blood”? It was the water, not the blood, that was specially astonishing. And “in” in this case seems a strange expression to use. We should have expected rather, “not shedding blood only, but blood and water.” Moreover, how can blood and water flowing from the Lord’s body be spoken of his “coming through water and blood”? The simplest interpretation is that which refers *ὕδωρ* to the baptism of water to which he himself submitted, and which he enjoined upon his disciples, and *αἷμα* to the baptism of blood to which he himself submitted, and which raised the baptism of water from a sign into a sacrament. John came baptizing in water only, *ἐν ὕδατι βαπτίζων* (John I. 31, 33). Jesus came baptizing in water and blood, i.e. in water which washed away sin through the efficacy of his blood. This interpretation explains the marked change of preposition. Jesus effected his work *through* the baptisms of water and blood; and it is by baptism *in* these elements that he comes to his followers. Moreover, this interpretation harmonizes

with the polemical purpose of the Epistle, viz. to confute the errors of Cerinthus. Cerinthus taught that the Divine Logos or Christ descended upon Jesus at the baptism, and departed again when Jesus was arrested; so that a mere man was born of Mary, and a mere man suffered on the cross. St. John assures us that there was no such severance. The Divine Son Jesus Christ came not by water only at his baptism, but by blood also at his death. Besides these two abiding witnesses, there is yet a third still more convincing. And there is the Spirit that beareth witness (to the Divinity of Christ); because the Spirit is the truth. There can be no higher testimony than that of the truth itself (John xiv. 17; xv. 26; xvi. 13). It is surprising that any one should propose to translate, “The Spirit is that which is witnessing *that* the Spirit is the truth.” What has this to do with the context?

Ver. 7.—For those who bear witness are three, and thus constitute full legal testimony (Deut. xvii. 6; xix. 15; Matt. xviii. 16; 2 Cor. xiii. 1). It will be assumed here, without discussion, that the remainder of this verse and the first clause of ver. 8 are spurious. Words which are not contained in a single Greek uncial manuscript, nor in a single Greek cursive earlier than the fourteenth century (the two which contain the passage being evidently translated from the Vulgate), nor are quoted by a single Greek Father during the whole of the Trinitarian controversy, nor are found in any authority until late in the fifth century, cannot be genuine.

Ver. 8.—When all three witnesses are enumerated together, the Spirit naturally comes first. He is a living and a Divine witness, independent of the two facts of the baptism and the Passion, which concur with him in testifying that the Son of God is Jesus Christ.

Ver. 9.—An argument *à fortiori*. If we receive expresses no doubt, but states an admitted fact gently (see on ch. iv. 11; and comp. John vii. 23; x. 35; xiii. 14). “If we accept human witness [and, of course, we do], we must accept Divine witness [and, therefore, must believe that the Son of God is Jesus Christ]; for the witness of God consists in this, that he has borne witness concerning his Son.” Note the pertinacious repetition of the word “witness,” thoroughly in St. John’s style. The perfect (*μεμαρτύρηκε*) indicates that the witness still continues.

Ver. 10.—Hath the witness in him. This rendering is to be preferred to either “in Him,” i.e. God, or “in himself.” The former is obscure in meaning; the latter, though probably correct as an interpretation, is inaccurate as a translation, for the better

reading is *αὐτῷ*, not *ἐαυτῷ*. But *ἐν αὐτῷ* may be reflexive. The believer in the Incarnation has the Divine testimony in his heart, and it abides with him as an additional source of evidence, supplementing and confirming the external evidence. In its daily experience, the soul finds ever fresh proof that the declaration, "This is my beloved Son," is true. But even without this internal corroboration, the external evidence suffices, and he who rejects it makes God a liar; for it is God who presents the evidence, and presents it as sufficient and true. The second half of the verse is *parenthetical*, to show that the unbeliever, though he has no witness in himself, is not therefore excused. In ver. 11 we return to the main proposition at the beginning of ver. 10.

Ver. 11.—"And the substance of the internal testimony is this—we are conscious of the Divine gift of eternal life, and this we have in the Son of God." St. John's *ζωὴ αἰώνιος* is not "everlasting life:" the idea of endlessness may be included in it, but it is not the main one. The distinction between eternity and time is one which the human mind feels to be real and necessary. But we are apt to lose ourselves when we try to think of eternity. We admit that it is not time, that it is the very antithesis of time, and yet we attempt to measure it while we declare it to be immeasurable. We make it simply a very long time. The main idea of "eternal life" in St. John's writings has no direct reference to time. Eternal life is possessed already by believers; it is not a thing of the future (John iii. 36; v. 24; vi. 47, 54; xvii. 3). It is that life in God which includes all blessedness, and which is not broken by physical death (John xi. 25). Its opposite is exclusion from God.

Ver. 12.—Eternal life is not granted to the whole world, or even to all Christians *en masse*; it is given to individuals, soul by soul, according as each does or does not accept the Son of God. The order of the Greek is noteworthy—in the first half of the verse the emphasis is on "hath" in the second on "life." Here, as in John i. 4, the article before *ζωή* should be translated, "hath the life . . . hath not the life." The insertion of *τοῦ Θεοῦ* in the second half of the verse points to the magnitude of the loss: the possessor has no need to be told whose Son he has.

Vers. 13-21.—4. CONCLUSION OF THE EPISTLE; without, however, any marked break between this section and the last. On the contrary, the prominent thought of *eternal life through faith in the Son of God* is continued for final development. This topic is the main idea alike of the Gospel (xx. 31)

and of the Epistle, with this difference—in the Gospel the purpose is that we may *have* eternal life; in the Epistle, that we may *know* that we have eternal life.

Ver. 13.—These things I have written to you sums up the Epistle as a whole. At the outset the apostle said, "These things we write, that our joy [yours as well as mine] may be fulfilled;" and now, as he draws to a close, he says the same thing in other words. Their joy is the knowledge that they have eternal life through belief in the Son of God. There is considerable variety of reading in this verse, but that of the T.R., represented by the Authorized Version, is a manifest simplification. That represented by the Revised Version is probably right. The awkwardness of the last clause produced various alterations with a view to greater smoothness. The verse, both as regards construction and meaning, should be carefully compared with John i. 12. In both we have the exegetical addition at the end. In both we have St. John's favourite *πιστεύειν εἰς*, expressing the very strongest belief; motion to and repose upon the object of belief. In both we have the remarkable expression, "believe on his Name." This is no mere periphrasis for "believe on him." Names in Jewish history were so often significant, being sometimes given by God himself, that they served not merely to distinguish one man from another, but to indicate his character. So also with the Divine Name: it suggests the Divine attributes. "To believe on the Name of the Son of God" is to give entire adhesion to him as having the qualities of the Divine Son.

Ver. 14.—And the confidence that we have towards him consists in this. The thought of *knowing* that we have eternal life (ver. 13) leads back to the thought of confidence before God in relation to prayer (ch. iii. 21, 22). This idea is now further developed with special reference to *intercession for others*; a particular form of prayer which is in close connexion with another main idea in the Epistle—love of the brethren.

Ver. 15.—The point is not, that if God hears our prayers he grants them (as if we could ever pray to him without his being aware of it); but that if we *know* that he hears our prayers (i.e. trust him without reserve), we already have what we have asked in accordance with his will. It may be years before we perceive that our prayers have been answered: perhaps in this world we may never be able to see this; but we *know* that God *has* answered them. The peculiar construction, *ἐὰν* with the indicative, is not uncommon in the New Testament as a variant reading. It seems to be genuine in Luke xix. 40 and Acts viii. 31 with the

future indicative, and in 1 Thess. iii. 8 with the *present*. Here the reading is undisputed. Of course, *οἰδαμεν* is virtually present; but even the past tenses of the indicative are sometimes found after *εἰν* (see Winer, pp. 369, 370; see also Trench, 'On the Authorized Version of the New Testament,' p. 61).

Ver. 16.—How does this position respecting God's hearing our prayers affect the question of intercession for the salvation of others, and especially of an erring brother? If any prayer can be made with confidence of success, surely it is this. It is an unselfish prayer; a prayer of love. It is also a prayer in harmony with God's will; a prayer for the extension of his kingdom. St. John points out that this reasonable expectation has limits. *The prayer of one human being can never cancel another's free-will.* If God's will does not override man's will, neither can a fellow-man's prayer. When a human will has been firmly and persistently set in opposition to the Divine will, our intercession will be of no avail. And this seems to be the meaning of "sin unto death;" wilful and obstinate rejection of God's grace and persistence in unrepented sin. "Death" corresponds to the life spoken of above; and if the one is eternal (ver. 13), so is the other. Sins punished with loss of life in this world, whether by human law or by Divine retribution, cannot be meant. Christians have before now suffered agonies of mind, fearing that they have committed what they suppose to be the "sin unto death." Their fear is evidence that they have not committed any such sin. But if they despair of pardon, they may come near to it. There are certain statements made respecting this mysterious passage against which we must be on our guard. It is laid down as a canon of interpretation that the sin unto death is one *which can be known*, which can be recognized as such by the intercessor. St. John neither says nor implies this. He implies that some sins may be known to be *not* unto death. Again, it is asserted that he forbids us to pray concerning sin which is unto death. The apostle is much more reserved. He encourages us to intercede for a sinning brother with full confidence of success. But there is a limit to this. The sinner may be sinning unto death; and in that case St. John cannot encourage us to pray. Casuistical classifications of sins under the heads of mortal and venial have been based upon this passage. It lends no authority to such attempts; and they have worked untold mischief in the Church. The apostle tells us that the distinction between mortal and venial exists; but he supplies us with no test by which one man can judge another in this respect. By pointedly abstaining from making any classification of sins into mortal

and venial, he virtually condemns the making. What neither he nor St. Paul ventured to do we may well shrink from doing. The same overt act may be mortal sin in one case and not in another. It is the attitude of mind with which the sinner contemplates his act before and after commission that makes all the difference; and how seldom can this be known to his fellow-men! The change from *αἰεὶν* to *ἐπαρῆν* is noteworthy. The former is used in vers. 14, 15, and the beginning of ver. 16; the latter at the end of ver. 16. The latter is the less humble word of the two, being often used of equals or superiors requesting compliance with their wishes. Perhaps St. John uses it here to indicate that a prayer of this kind is not a humble one.

Ver. 17.—**All unrighteousness is sin.** "Among the faithful this ought to be an indubitable truth, that whatever is contrary to God's Law is sin, and in its nature mortal; for where there is a transgression of the Law, there is sin and death" (Calvin). But this terrifying truth brings with it a word of encouragement. For if all unrighteousness without exception is sin, it follows that not every sin is unto death. It is incredible that the slightest departure from righteousness should involve eternal damnation (see notes on ch. i. 7).

Vers. 18—21.—With three solemn asseverations and one equally solemn charge the Epistle is brought to a close. "Can we be certain of any principles in ethics? St. John declares that we can. He says that he has not been making probable guesses about the grounds of human actions, the relations of man to God, the nature of God himself. These are things that he *knows*. Nay, he is not content with claiming this knowledge himself. He uses the plural pronoun; he declares that his disciples, his little children, *know* that which he knows" (Maurice).

Ver. 18.—**We know;** *οἰδαμεν*, as in ch. iii. 2, 14, and John xxi. 24, which should be compared with this passage. These expressions of Christian certitude explain the undialectical character of St. John's Epistles as compared with those of St. Paul. What need to argue and prove when both he and his readers already knew and believed? We must have "begotten" in both clauses, as in the Revised Version, not "born" in one and "begotten" in the other, as in the Authorized Version. In the Greek there is a change of tense (*δ γεννημένος* and *δ γεννηθείς*), but no change of verb. The whole should run, "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not, but the Begotten of God keepeth him." For the perfect participle, comp. ch. iii. 9; v. 1, 4; John iii. 6, 8: it expresses him who has come to be, and still continues to be, a

son of God. The aorist participle occurs nowhere else in St. John: it expresses him who, without relation to time past or present, is the Son of God. The reading *αὐτόν* is preferable to *ἐαυτόν*. The Vulgate has *conservat eum*, not *conservat seipsum*, which Calvin adopts. The eternal Son of the Father preserves the frail children of the Father from the common foe, so that the evil one toucheth them not. The verb for "touch" (*ἅπτεσθαι*) is the same as in "Touch me not" (John xx. 17). In both cases "touch" is somewhat too weak a rendering; the meaning is rather, "lay hold of," "hold fast." The Magdalene wished, not merely to touch, but to hold the Lord fast, so as to have his bodily presence continually. And here the meaning is that, though the evil one may attack the children of God, yet he cannot get them into his power.

Ver. 19.—Omit the "and" before "we know." There is no *καί* or *δέ* in the true text; and the asyndeton is impressive. The whole world lieth in the evil one. This is the second great fact of which Christians have certainty. They, as children of God, and preserved from the evil one by his Son, have nothing to do with the world, which still lies in the power of the evil one. That "the evil" (*τῷ πονηρῷ*) is here not neuter but masculine is evident from the context, as well as from ch. ii. 13, 14; iv. 4. "By saying that it lieth in the evil one (*in maligno*) he represents it as being under the dominion of Satan. There is, therefore, no reason why we should hesitate to shun the world, which condemns God and delivers up itself into the bondage of Satan; nor is there any reason why we should fear its enmity, because it is alienated from God" (Calvin).

Ver. 20.—And we know. The "and" (*δέ*) is here rightly given—it sums up the whole with a final asseveration. Whatever the world and its philosophy chooses to assert, Christians know that the Son of God has come in the flesh, and has endowed them with mental faculties capable of attaining to a knowledge of the true God. The Christian's certainty is not fanaticism or superstition; he is "ready always to give answer to every man that asketh a reason concerning the hope that is in him" (1 Pet. iii. 15); by the gift of Christ he is able to obtain an intelligent knowledge of him who is indeed God. "Him that is true" does not mean God, who is not, like the devil, a liar, but "very God," as opposed to the idols against which St. John goes on to warn them. The Greek is *ἀληθινός*, not *ἀληθής*. Thus the Epistle ends as it began, with a fulfilment of Christ's prayer. In ch. i. 3 we had, "That ye also may have fellowship

with us," which is identical with "That they may be one, even as we are" (John xvii. 11). And here we have, "That we know him that is true," which coincides with "That they should know thee the only true God" (John xvii. 3). This prayer of the great High Priest is fulfilled. "We are in him that is true," says the apostle, "(by being) in his Son Jesus Christ." This is the true God, and eternal life. Does "this" refer to God or to Christ? We must be content to leave the question open; both interpretations make excellent sense, and none of the arguments in favour of either are decisive. The question is not important. "That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," who was with the Father from all eternity, is the very foundation of St. John's teaching in Gospel and Epistles; and it is not of much moment whether this particular text contains the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ or not. But if, with St. Athanasius, we interpret "this" of Christ, the conclusion of the letter is brought into striking harmony with the opening of it, in which (ch. i. 2) Christ is spoken of as "the *Eternal Life* which was with the Father, and was manifested to us." Moreover, we obtain a striking contrast with what follows. "This Man, Jesus Christ, is the true God: it is no idolatry to worship him. Whosoever says that he is not God makes us idolaters. But idolatry is to us an abomination."

Ver. 21.—Keep yourselves from idols; or, guard yourselves from the idols. In ver. 18 we had *τηρεῖ*; here the verb is *φυλάξατε*. The aorist, rather than the present imperative, is used to make the command more forcible, although the guarding is not momentary, but will have to continue (Compare *μείνατε ἐν ἐμοί*, John xv. 4; *τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσατε*, John xiv. 15). What is the meaning of "the idols" (*τῶν εἰδώλων*) here? In answering this question it will be well to hold fast to the common canon of exegesis, that *where the literal interpretation makes good sense, the literal interpretation is probably right*. Here the literal interpretation makes excellent sense. Ephesus was famous for its idols. To be "temple-keeper of the great Artemis" (Acts xix. 35) was its pride. The moral evils which had resulted from the abuse of the right of sanctuary had caused the Roman senate to cite the Ephesians and other states to submit their charters to the government for inspection. Ephesus had been the first to answer to the summons, and had strenuously defended its claims. It was famous, moreover, for its charms and incantations; and folly of this kind had found its way into the Christian Church (Acts xix. 13—20). As so often happens with converts from a religion full of gross

superstition, a good many of the superstitious observances survived the adoption of Christianity. With facts such as these before us, we can hardly be wrong in interpreting "the idols" quite literally. The apostle's "little children" could not live in Ephesus without coming constantly in contact with these polluting but attractive influences. They must have absolutely nothing to do with them: "Guard yourselves

and abjure (ἀποδοῦ) them." Of course, this literal interpretation places no limit on the application of the text. To a Christian anything is an idol which usurps the place of God in the heart, whether this be a person, or a system, or a project, or wealth, or what not. All such usurpations come within the sweep of the apostle's injunction, "Guard yourselves from your idols."

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—5.—*The victory of faith.* *Connecting link:* The preceding chapter closed with a statement of the twofoldness of love, showing us that love of our brother must follow our love to God, and is, in fact, the commanded and the only outward expression thereof. But, so far, at any rate, as our redeemed brethren in Christ are concerned, they being believers in Christ have been begotten of God. Consequently they are members of one family with us. And every one who loves the Father will, as a matter of fact, love those who are begotten of him, and so bear his image. With this new birth, and the faith and love which are its fruits, there comes to be a spring of holy obedience, so that there is not only an external command telling us we ought to love, but a spirit within leading us on to love. We do not by any means feel the yoke of a command to be grievous; for all that would otherwise have made it so has been overcome by a living faith born from above. *Topic—Faith victorious over the world, and faith alone.* It will be noted that in ver. 4 the verb "overcome" is twice used. In the first instance it is in the present, in the second in a past tense. "Overcometh" is overcoming, continuously—"hath overcome," rather, "which did overcome" (aorist), referring to some victory which was gained once for all. The continuous overcoming is attributed to "whatsoever is begotten of God." The overcoming, which is accomplished once for all, is attributed to "our faith." Hence our lines of homiletic exposition are at once suggested.

I. WE HAVE A GLORIOUS FAITH WHEREBY THE WORLD HAS BEEN OVERCOME. It is hardly possible to regard the "faith" here as other than objective, as in Jude 3; Luke xviii. 8 (Greek). We have, moreover, the contents thereof clearly stated here, "that Jesus is the Son of God." This is the mighty fact by which the world has been conquered. How? In three senses. 1. *The Lord Jesus as the Son of God has himself overcome the world*; i.e. he has grappled with and put to open shame the sinful element in the world—that of self-rule and opposition to God. (1) By his obedience unto death. (2) By his conflict with and conquest of the evil one. (3) By his atoning death the prince of this world was cast out. (4) By his intercession he secures a like victory to all his followers (John xvi. 33). 2. *By the use of his Name, the powers of the world had been met and worsted.* (2 Cor. ii. 14; Acts xix. 20; Phil. i. 12; Col. i. 13.) 3. *This glorious objective truth, that Jesus is the Son of God, is that whereby God, in his wondrous grace, has come to have new-born sons in whom the world is overcome.* All things are through Christ. By his wondrous work he has come to be the Firstborn among many brethren. Every one of these is a fresh trophy of grace. The creation and sustenance of the Church is a conquest of the world, being so much snatched from it!

II. THIS FAITH, ACCEPTED, BECOMES A LIVING FORCE IN NEW-BORN SOULS, WHEREBY THEY CONTINUOUSLY OVERCOME THE WORLD. (Ver. 4.) 1. *God's own begotten ones are born to a new life.* (1) Of faith (ver. 1). (2) Of love (ch. iv. 7). (3) Of righteousness (ch. ii. 29). (4) Of inability to be sinning (ch. iii. 9). 2. *This new life of theirs is sustained by the Lord Jesus as the Son of God.* Faith laying hold of him appropriates his power. They are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." They can do all things through him that strengtheneth them. 3. *Thus strengthened, their faith achieves a continuous victory over the world.* By Christ, the world is crucified to them and they to the world. And however so many may be the aspects of wrong-thinking and wrong-doing which are seen in the world, so many will be the ways in which the children

of God will meet and overcome them. They will overcome its errors, its glare, its enticements, its threats, its unbelief, its hatred, its opposition, its persecution. They will overcome by powerful argument, by holy living, by sturdy resistance, by faithful testimony. "By the Word of truth, by the power of God." They will maintain the fight earnestly, fearlessly, joyously, persistently, even to the end; and they will

"Win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way."

And all—all through the unconquerable might imparted by him in whom they believe—Jesus the Son of God! What a glorious series of continuous victories over the world have our eighteen Christian centuries witnessed! How great a chapter, like to the eleventh in the Epistle to the Hebrews, might be compiled from the histories of God's faithful ones, who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of his testimony; for they loved not their lives unto the death!

III. THIS VICTORY OVER THE WORLD IS WON ONLY BY BELIEVERS IN JESUS CHRIST. (Ver. 5.) "Who . . . but." Those who are not in Christ are still in the world; hence they cannot even fight against it, much less overcome it! Apart from Christ's light, men's vision is bounded by things seen and temporal; apart from Christ's life, their pursuits are entirely of the earth, earthy; apart from Christ's love, their aims are all for self—"They turn every one to his own way." Hence the world is ever conquering them, and will make them first its tools, then its slaves, and at last its victims.

Note: Three matters are suggested here for pungent and powerful application. 1. If these things be so, then whoever casts away the doctrine that Jesus is the Son of God leaves himself helpless in life's struggle. 2. It is only by a living faith in Jesus that we receive power to carry on the struggle. A mental adhesion to the doctrine only will not suffice. A living cling to the Person is needed. 3. We see the purpose intended to be secured by religion, viz. a victory over all that is false and wrong.

Vers. 6—9.—*The Divine witness objectively given. Connecting link:* If the victory over the world can be secured only by those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then it is of vast importance that the Divine testimony to him should be unmistakably clear to the upright. As if this or some such thought had been suggested to his mind while writing, the apostle proceeds, in one of his most striking passages (one of the most striking paragraphs, indeed, in the New Testament), to show, first, that the testimony of God concerning his Son is objectively given (vers. 6—9), and then that it is subjectively proven and confirmed (vers. 9—12). To each of these topics we must devote our attention. Topic—*God's three witnesses to his Son.* The student is specially requested here to compare the Authorized Version with the Revised Version. We follow, in this homily, the Revisers' Greek text. This passage has an intense charm for us. It is so manifestly the echo of words which the apostle had heard from his Master's lips (John v. 32—39), together with such addition as the facts consequent on our Lord's death and resurrection had enabled the apostle to furnish. As bearing on the Christian evidences the paragraph is unique. It is of infinite value, and deserves more elaborate exposition than, so far as we know, it has ever yet received.

I. THE KNOWLEDGE THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD COMES TO US THROUGH TESTIMONY. We gain some knowledge through the senses; other knowledge through mental observation; some through experience; some through reasoning. Knowledge of necessary truth may be gained by intuition, or by reasoning. Knowledge of contingent truth, i.e. of truth that is dependent on the will of another, can be gained only as we have information concerning that will. Such information is ordinarily gained, and in some cases exclusively, by testimony. The whole of the gospel message comes to us in this way, by testimony (cf. 1 Cor. ii. 1). An inquiry into the laws of trustworthy testimony will disclose the fact that the evidence on which we should feel bound to receive the testimony of men is far exceeded by the evidence for the testimony of God (see homily on vers. 9, 10).

II. THERE ARE THREE HISTORIC INCIDENTS BEARING ON THE TESTIMONY THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD. "There are three that bear witness: the Spirit, the water, and the

¹ See Hare's 'Victory of Faith.'

blood." "This is he that came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood." 1. *The water.* To what does the apostle refer when he says that Christ came "by water"? Undoubtedly to the baptism of the Christ by John the Baptist. When the herald baptized his Lord as the great High Priest, and so set him apart to his calling by that act, the race of prophets was closed, and the Messiah was ushered in. It was *the first step* taken by our Lord in his official ministry. But why *such* a step? Why should HE be baptized? Under the Law of Moses the priests had to be cleansed before entering on the sacred office. Still, the wonder is that he who knew no sin should submit to a rite which, whatever else it might or might not signify, implied impurity of nature in the baptized One from which he required to be cleansed. We do not wonder at John the Baptist shrinking back from baptizing the Holy One; it surely could not be fitting that the Sinless One should do just as the vilest of the vile had done—come and let Jordan's stream roll over him as if he had been a sinner along with the rest! Yet, somehow or other, it was needful that so it should be, in order to "fulfil all righteousness." What was that righteousness the Saviour had to fulfil? First of all, as he came to be the sinner's Representative by bearing the liabilities of the race, it was becoming that he should openly, formally, avowedly, *step into the sinner's place, and take up the burden of sin as if it were his own.* This he did when he was "baptized for us." It was the first act which showed that he was "numbered with the transgressors." And mysterious as it was before to John the Baptist, yet he saw its meaning afterwards, and forthwith began to announce him, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, that is *bearing away* the sin of the world"—bearing it on himself, and bearing it off from us. This is he that came "by water." 2. *The blood.* "Jesus bare our sins in his own body upon the tree." In the margin of the Authorized Version read "to." He took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses. He offered himself without spot to God. He laid down his life for us. He gave it up of himself. He poured out his blood. It was "precious blood," as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (cf. Matt. xx. 28; xxvi. 28; Acts xx. 28; Heb. xiii. 20; Rev. i. 5). "Not by water only, but by water and blood." 3. *The Spirit.* Our Lord left a promise, "the promise of the Father," that when he had gone from earth the Spirit would supply his place. The Holy Ghost would be the Gift of a risen Saviour. He it was who "should baptize with the Holy Ghost." The narratives in the Acts of the Apostles are the confirmation of this. The four Gospels take the work of Christ up to the point when the atonement was "finished;" the Acts of the Apostles continue the record of Christ from the point when the baptism with the Holy Ghost was bestowed (see Acts ii., *et seq.*). This was the crowning seal that Christ was the Son of God. Note: In John i. 29—36 the threefold witness concerning our Lord is summed up. John had baptized him with water; had heard the voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son;" had pointed out Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb, and yet as the Baptizer with the Holy Ghost; and on the whole he remarks, "I saw and bare record, that this is the Son of God."

III. THESE THREE WITNESSES ALL AGREE IN ONE. (Ver. 8.) By which we understand, not merely that they confirm one another as to the one fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, however true that unquestionably is, but that they all agree in setting forth the glory of his mission. For the testimony is "that God hath given to us eternal life," as well as that "this life is in his Son." And the Son of God brings about the life by taking out of the way what would prevent it, in order that he may grant what would ensure it. Now, "the Spirit," "the water," "the blood," all bear, primarily and directly, on man's great enemy "*sin*." By the water sin is *acknowledged*; by the blood sin is *atoned*; by the Spirit sin is *destroyed*. The voice from heaven owned the first; the Resurrection ratified the second; the living Church is the standing result of the third.

IV. THESE WITNESSES, THUS AGREEING IN ONE, ARE GIVING FORTH THE PERPETUAL TESTIMONY OF GOD TO US CONCERNING HIS SON. These historic facts—the baptism, the sacrifice, the gift of the Holy Spirit—are not events that once had a significance and now are done with; they are not merely incidents unwoven into the texture of history, which cannot be torn out of it without leaving a disfiguring rent, but they are continuous voices of God, which are now speaking to us, and which will continue to speak to men in tones as loud and clear as ever. And the message they give forth

is ever this: "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." They say: 1. Here is One who, by the dignity of his nature, is the Son of God, though through the lowliness of his form you see him only as the Son of man. 2. He, the Son of God, the Lord of man, has taken human flesh and blood, that, coming into the race, he might bear its liabilities on himself, and, by bearing their burden on him, might throw it off for ever. 3. In stepping into the stream, and numbering himself with the transgressors, he publicly assumed the sinner's place, as if laden with the sinner's guilt. 4. Thus laden with the guilt of the race, through having voluntarily taken it on himself, he bore the burden to the cross, there atoned for sin, cried out, "It is finished!" and the burden was flung off for ever. 5. The validity of his work was sealed by his resurrection and his ascension to heaven. 6. The Gift of the Holy Ghost was his own promised proof of his having received all power in heaven and on earth; and now he reigns Head over all, having received gifts for men, to bestow on us the gift of eternal life, having atoned for the sin which forfeited the life, and having received authority and power to give and to sustain the life. This is "the testimony of God."

Vers. 9—12.—*The Divine witness subjectively verified. Connecting link:* The main topic is now *the witness of God*. In the preceding sketch we dwelt upon the witness of God objectively given. Now we have for our topic—*The witness of God verified in the individual experience*. The apostle gives us this in two forms—the positive and the negative. (1) Negative: "He that hath not the Son of God hath not the life."¹ (2) Positive: "He that hath the Son hath the life." We deal now only with the positive statement (save as in the footnote). In so doing, we join with it the corresponding one: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (ver. 10). There are two well-known laws concerning testimony. (1) That it is appropriate and even obligatory to receive adequate testimony objectively given. (2) That it is impossible to question such testimony when it is subjectively verified. It is the latter of these two laws the operation of which we are now to consider.

I. LET US INQUIRE WHAT THIS INWARD WITNESS IS. "The witness in himself." So far as the expression is concerned, apart from the context, the apostle's words might bear either of two meanings: (1) "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself that he believes;" or (2) "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself that God's testimony concerning his Son is true." The context decides for the latter, and it is set by the apostle in form most exactly logical. First step: "This is the witness—that God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son." Second step: "He that hath the Son *hath* the life." Conclusion: "He has the witness in himself of the truth of God's testimony." Had we time to elaborate this part of our theme, we would do so in four distinct stages. 1. God gives man life through Christ, and promises it to all that believe. 2. Man believes unfeignedly in the testimony God has given of his Son. 3. Believing in Jesus, he already enjoys the life which God has promised to bestow. 4. Therefore he has within him an actual verification of God's own faithful Word. He *believed* the testimony was true, and now he *knows* it to be so.

II. WHAT IS THE SPECIAL VALUE OF THIS INWARD EVIDENCE? It has a sevenfold value. 1. It is a *distinctively personal verification* of the truth of God's Word concerning his Son. It is emphatically the believer's own, which may be paralleled in the experience of others, but cannot be shared by them. There is first of all a firm and unwavering certitude that he has a life above and beyond that of nature. Then there is the knowledge gained by continuous experience that only by and through Christ has such a life been initiated, nourished, and sustained. 2. It is an evidence that *attends him everywhere*. It is always with him. He affirms, "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." This is what Dr. Chalmers used to call "the

¹ On this negative expression it seems appropriate to note that the absence of "life" in the scriptural sense by no means denotes the loss of being. Men may have all their rational faculties and moral responsibilities, and yet be without "the life." We do not wonder at Dr. Edersheim's remark that the annihilation theory seems to be based on "bad philosophy and worse exegesis" (see Dr. Edersheim's 'Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,' vol. ii. p. 791).

portable evidence of Christianity." It can be carried about with a man, go where he will. It takes up no space on the shelves in his library, but ever fills a snug corner of his heart. 3. It is an evidence which is *independent of what man may say*. At one time, when the only evidence he knew of was that which is external to the man, he was dependent on what this or that one might say, and his belief would be stronger or weaker according to the speaker's success or failure in argument. But his faith is no longer a traditional one. It is the result of the Spirit's work within him; and if no other advocate for the Saviour should appear, what Christ has done for him and in him would lead him to say from his own experience, "I know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." 4. It is an evidence which brings a joy along with it, with which a stranger intermeddled not. Evidence which merely shows a man the glory of what he ought to believe, and that it is binding on him to believe, may but irritate, and will, if there, be a dislike to the truth. But when a man has God's witness within himself, then he knows whom he has believed, and the knowledge brings a joy unspeakable and full of glory. His may be—yea, is—a life of calm resting in the promise, "Where I am there shall also my servant be." 5. Such an evidence *gives him power* as a pleader for God. With what zest can he tell to sinners round what a dear Saviour he has found! He can speak, not from hearsay, not merely out of a book, but of "what he has tasted and handled and felt of the Word of life." 6. This evidence *accumulates in strength* with advancing years. The longer his experience of the power and grace of Christ to sustain in him the eternal life, the more he has received from the fullness of the Saviour, and the severer and the more frequent the trials which have thrown him on his Redeemer for sympathy and for strength,—the stronger will this inward evidence become. The value of the testimony, "Not one thing hath failed of all that the Lord hath spoken," must needs increase with the number of the years that such testimony includes. 7. This is an evidence of *which its possessor cannot be deprived*. All evidences that are without a man—historical, philosophical, moral—may lose their hold on him, "when mind and memory flee." And besides, of any evidence for which he is dependent on man, by man he can be deprived. An evidence of which man cannot rob us must be an evidence man cannot give us. And here it is: "The witness in himself"—the life within, which, when nature sinks, will rise the higher, and which will enable the believer even in death to shout, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory!"

Note: 1. When we summon up before our imagination the thousands and millions of this and of past ages who have known and declared that life in Christ is their certain experience, we see how great the problem which the destructive sceptic has to solve ere he can demolish the evidences of and for Christianity! He might as well try to put out the sun's light! If it were possible (which it is not) for an unbeliever to know *all* the evidence of Christianity, objective and subjective, he would give up his puny attempts at disproof thereof. 2. Let those who do not possess this inward witness look at the fact that, unless they are to disbelieve in, or to regard as fools, the holiest of their friends who speak of the life in Christ as theirs, *this* evidence, though *inward* to their friends, is *outward* to themselves, and as such must be taken into account by them as pertaining to human experience. For it is by no means allowable to claim experience as a basis of evidence, and at the same time to decide *à priori* what that experience ought to be. 3. If a man knows that some have an experimental and living faith which he himself lacks, if he feels painfully that religion is as yet something entirely outside him, how great should be his desire to pass from a dead faith which is dependent on man, to a living one imparted and sustained by God! 4. Let us use the doctrine of the text as the basis of an earnest and loving appeal; and say, "We know what Christ is, for he is our Saviour; we know how freely he forgives, for he has forgiven us; we 'speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen,' we have tried his own words, and have found them true, 'He that believeth on me hath the everlasting life.'"

Vers. 9, 10.—*Human and Divine testimony compared. Connecting link:* There is a topic suggested in these verses closely bearing on the themes of the two preceding homilies. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come into the world, bearing a message from the eternal throne. Of the contents and value of the message there are

three witnesses—the Spirit, the water, and the blood. The message is that God has given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. Where the Son of God has been received by faith, there is the life actually existing; and this inward life is a distinctive personal seal of the truth of God's words, whereby they are verified by every one who shares the life. But, granting that *this* verification is lacking (as it is) in those who have not the life, and that in consequence the only testimony to the truth of God's words is that which comes to them from without, how, then, does the case stand as to the sufficiency of that outer testimony? Thus there are certain well-understood laws which govern belief in human testimony; there are circumstances under which no one would think of rejecting such testimony—under which, if he were to reject it, he would be doing a manifold wrong. Much more is this the case with regard to the testimony of God concerning Jesus Christ. It is in every respect greater, fuller, clearer, than the testimony of man. "If we receive," etc. *Faith in God's testimony concerning his Son is required by the laws which ordinarily govern human belief.*

I. THERE ARE CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THE TESTIMONY OF MAN WOULD BE UNHESITATINGLY ACCEPTED. "If we receive the testimony of man," etc. If, not as expressing a doubt whether we do or no. The "if" is nearly equivalent to "since" or "inasmuch as." The fact is taken for granted, as one well known, that receiving testimony from man is a commonly accepted way of gaining knowledge. We can but offer in our limited space the very barest outline of how this matter stands. 1. More than three-fourths of *every man's* knowledge comes to him from the testimony of others. Even those who demand "verification" are content to accept the verification of another in *every department save their own*. If it were not so, the progress of man would be slow indeed. 2. What is required in a witness is (1) truthfulness; (2) competent knowledge. Let these conditions be fulfilled, and few would gainsay his testimony. 3. If for a particular fact, call it *x*, there were not only one, two, or three, but twelve witnesses. 4. If the twelve witnesses were all men of unimpeachable character, and teachers and examples of the loftiest morality the world has ever known. 5. If they one and all gave up all that the world holds dear, and risked, or even forfeited, life itself in giving their testimony. 6. If it was well-known that the testimony was directly opposed to the very strongest prepossessions in which they had been nursed and nurtured; and if: 7. The effect of their testimony was to impart soundness, joy, life, love, where only disease, sorrow, death, and selfishness reigned before;—in such a case, we venture to say, such testimony would be regarded as warranting, and even demanding, belief. It could not and would not be rejected. Be it so: then observe—

II. THE TESTIMONY OF GOD IS STILL WEIGHTIER THAN EVEN SUCH HUMAN TESTIMONY WOULD BE. Evidently the apostle's meaning is that, if we feel it incumbent on us not to reject human testimony when clear and adequate, much more ought we to feel it binding on us to receive the testimony of God. For this (and specially this concerning Christ) is greater than any human testimony could possibly be. In what sense? In many. 1. *It is greater in its origin.* "God." It may, and probably would, be urged by an unbeliever here, "I grant that at once, that God's testimony is greater than man's; but the difficulty with me is, *is it God's testimony?*" That is just the thing to be shown. The following hints may serve. (1) It is admitted by the philosopher that at the back of all things there is an *infinite energy*.¹ We can take this pagan text for a starting-point, and we affirm, if the energy is infinite, *it can let us know something about itself*. (2) If the infinite energy deigns to tell us something about itself, it *must* be through such channels of life, thought, and words as we can apprehend. (3) The fact that the channel of communication may be human is entirely consistent with the *origin* of communication being Divine. (4) When this is the case, then such human communication has to be interrogated and tested as to its whence and how. (5) If it stands this test, *i.e.* if (a) it claims to be from God, if (b) it justifies that claim,² and if (c) there is

¹ See article by Mr. Herbert Spencer, in *Nineteenth Century*, January, 1884.

² "If it justifies that claim." We desire to expand this, but cannot. The claim might be justified (1) by the glory of pure moral teaching; (2) by the purity of personal character; (3) by mighty works. Jesus Christ appealed to all three. The third, however, is now regarded by some as an additional hindrance rather than a help. To such we would offer the following hints. 1. The New Testament miracles are not merely wonders, but signs. They fall in with a great redemptive plan. 2. If the evidence afforded by the noble moral

nothing inconsistent with the claim,—then the proof of the validity of its testimony is complete. *The carrying out of this argument will prove that the Christian testimony is from God.* We have a heavenly treasure, though put into earthen vessels. 2. *It is greater in its contents.* It is a grand proclamation that “the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.” 3. *It is greater in the manifoldness and strength of the evidence.* Let all the tests suggested under the first division be applied, e.g., to the testimony for the resurrection of Christ, and it will stand them all, while the evidence from the perfection of the moral character of the Christ is absolutely unique and sufficient. 4. *It is greater, consequently, in its binding force.* Well we know, alas! that, inevitable as this conclusion is, it is precisely the one many would evade and avoid; and, in fact, it may even be that, because they see this to be the issue of the inquiry, some decline to enter upon it. They do not like to be bound. Their spirit is Ps. ii. 3. And the clearer the evidence, the greater their wrath. But John vii. 17 (Greek) shows us what the conclusion will be with a man who is “of God” (John viii. 47).

III. IF GOD’S TESTIMONY CONCERNING HIS SON BE SO GREAT AND SO CLEAR, WHAT THEN? 1. *The believer is abundantly justified in his faith*; so that he is doubly happy, for the outer evidence justifies his faith when he believes, and the inner evidence verifies the faith after he believes. 2. *The unbeliever is condemned.* The apostle makes a terrible charge against him—he maketh God a liar. How? Thus: he declares the greatest work which God has ever done in the world to have its basis in a delusion and a lie. The noblest life that the world has received has been grounded on the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. The man denies that. In doing so he consequently declares that God builds up his noblest lives on an untruth. What is this but making God a liar? 3. *The sinner has abundant warrant for saying—*

“Hence and for ever from my heart
I bid my doubts and fears depart,
And to those hands my soul resign
That bear credentials so Divine.”

Ver. 13.¹—*On believers knowing that they have eternal life.* *Connecting link:* The statements which have just been made point out very clearly who have the eternal life and who have it not. But it is quite possible that such statements may exist, may be before a man’s eye, may have been read over again and again, and yet they may have been left unapplied to himself by him who reads them. But it is not enough to know what the eternal life is, and what are the marks of its existence. It is all-important for the individual himself to possess the life, and to indicate it by its appropriate signs. And it is also important—though it cannot be said to be equally so—that, if a man has this life, he should know that he has it. Hence the apostle declares that the object of his writing thus has been that those who believe on the Name of the Son of God should know, clearly and decisively, that they have life, and that the life they have is an eternal one. Topic—*On believers knowing that they have eternal life.*

I. TO EVERY ONE WHO BELIEVES IN CHRIST THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE BELONGS. This is the repeated and clear declaration of the Word of God (John v. 24; vi. 47; iii. 36; ver. 12; Rom. vi. 23; John i. 12 compared with Rom. viii. 17, 38, 39). (For remarks on the meaning and contents of eternal life, see homily on ch. ii. 25.)

II. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR A TRUE BELIEVER TO BE UNAWARE OF HIS WEALTH. He may have the life eternal and not know it. So, at any rate, the Apostle John declares, by implication, in this verse. We gather this: 1. From such Scriptures as the one before us. 2. From observation. Have we not known many of the most devout believers in Christ “go mourning all their days” through the lack of the full assurance of faith and

teaching is sufficient, well, be it so, and wait for further light on what you deem miraculous, only remember: 3. That when we believe in one God and Father of all, we do in that one article of faith cover vastly more supernatural ground than all the recorded miracles put together. 4. Certainly there have been days when miracles were the very helps that men required. Our Lord did not like its being so. He complained of it. Apostles put miracles in the fourth place. But if to some minds they were the most efficient helps, it was very kind of the Father thus to stoop to teach his children in their infancy.

¹ The difference between the Authorized Version and Revised Version should be specially noted here.

hope? 3. From experience. There are times, even with those who usually live in the sunshine of God's love, when their joys seem clouded over. It may be asked—What are the causes of this uncertainty? They are various. Probably no two cases are exactly alike; but, among others, we suggest (1) lack of intelligence; (2) mistaken self-probing, which often causes men to miss that which they are seeking for; (3) ill health, when the nervous system is out of order; (4) decline in communion with God; (5) natural excess of caution. But whatever the cause may be—

III. SUCH IGNORANCE OF OUR REAL POSITION IS MOST UNDESIRABLE. 1. It seriously hinders spiritual joy. Who can glory in the hope of heaven when he cannot tell whether he is an heir of its bliss? 2. It dishonours God; for it casts reflection on the completeness of his provision for his children's peace, when believers seem as if they never knew whether they were children of God or no. 3. It cripples their advocacy of the cause of God. How unattractive the invitation to believe in Christ will seem when it comes from one who is moaning and groaning, instead of singing the songs of Zion! 4. It will seriously interfere with their progress. Men cannot walk fast if their legs are like lead rather than like cork.

IV. THE TEACHING OF GOD'S WORD IS INTENDED AND ADAPTED TO REMOVE THAT IGNORANCE. 1. There are four things clearly unfolded concerning the life eternal. (1) That it is the gift of God. (2) That it belongs to those who are Christ's. (3) That the life is a present possession (cf. Eph. ii. 6). (4) That there are distinctive signs and marks of the life (cf. ch. iii. 14; ii. 29; ver. 1)—even faith, righteousness, love; where these are, the man is born of God and has the eternal life. 2. By the careful and candid application to his own case of these four lines of teaching, a man may come to a distinct and decisive conclusion as to his possession of eternal life. For, be it ever remembered, this eternal life is not to be regarded as something which is to commence in the next state of being, but as something already possessed, to be tested and verified now, as a blessed possession over which death will have no power.

INFERENCES. 1. It is no virtue to be the subject of "doubts and fears." 2. If we are uncertain, or if we remain in uncertainty as to our having this greatest of all boons, it is time that we (1) restudied the Word of God to see the condition on which eternal life is granted, and then re-examined ourselves to see if we have fulfilled that condition; and (2) that we restudied the Word of God to see what are the invariable marks of that life, and then re-examined ourselves to see if we bear those marks. 3. Our religious life has not blossomed into its full beauty until we are perfectly at home in the love of God in Christ, and move as freely and step as firmly there as children in their Father's house, so that the question "whether we *are* children," or "whether we are at home," never comes up at all. A loving confidence *never* to be disturbed—this, oh! this is "*knowing* that we have the eternal life."

Vers. 14, 15.—*Liberty and prevalence in prayer.* Connecting link: The knowledge that we have eternal life is, in fact, a coming to feel perfectly at home in the redeeming love of God in Christ Jesus. Where this is the case, confidence, freedom of speech, is enjoyed towards God; and this holy freedom will find expression in prayer. The thought uttered here by the apostle is nearly akin to that in ch. iii. 22 (see homily on ch. iii. 19—22). There are, however, one or two not uninteresting points of detail peculiar to these verses, which will suggest a very brief homiletic outline. Topic—*Liberty and success in prayer.*

I. ONE OF THE PRIVILEGES OF KNOWING THAT WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE IS FREEDOM IN PRAYER. (See closing sentences of preceding homily.) The word *παρρησία*, as remarked in homilies on ch. ii. 24, 28; iii. 19—22; iv. 17, 18, is equivalent to "freedom of speech." If we know that we have eternal life, we shall have unreserved openness in communing with our God. The relation between the knowledge and that freedom is clear. 1. Knowing thereby that we are the sons of God, we can speak freely to the Father. 2. Knowing that we are redeemed and saved, we can be at entire liberty in communing with our Saviour. 3. Knowing that we are "alive unto God," we can breathe out that life towards its Giver and Sustainer.

II. ONE FORM OF PRAYER WILL BE "MAKING REQUEST UNTO GOD."¹ *Ἐάν τι (αἰτώμεθα).* "One form," we say, and that advisably. For the outbreathing of love and desire to

¹ See Trench's 'New Test. Synonyms': *προσευχή, δέησις, αἴτημα, ἐρωτήν.*

God will be the habit of the soul, and will include vastly more than the asking for specific objects. So that we must regard the apostle here as not covering the whole ground of prayer, but as simply indicating one direction that prayer may take (in the next homily a still further limitation is noted). We may freely "make our requests known unto God." Faith, reverence, and love will, however, regulate this boldness in prayer. "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." Even so. God's will is infinitely wiser than ours. And our faith in him will lead us to offer all our petitions subject to that will. This is not, however, a fetter upon our freedom. It is a safeguard to it. Otherwise the greater the freedom the greater the peril.

III. SUCH REQUESTS WILL CERTAINLY BE GRANTED. There are two issues of such a prayer. 1. *We know that he hears us.* The *εἰς* in ver. 15 does not indicate any uncertainty. If we know, as we certainly do, that he hears us,¹ our petitions are not wasted breath; they go not forth to empty air (Ps. l. 15). This follows from the truth in Ps. ciii. 13. 2. *We know that we have the petitions we desired of him.* *τὰ αἰτήματα*, if not *τὰ αἰτηθέντα*. "The substance of the requests, if not necessarily the actual things asked for," says Canon Westcott, beautifully. The mother of Augustine prayed earnestly that he might not go to Rome, fearing it would be his bane. Her son, however, went to Rome; but his going was one of the steps which led to his conversion. As Augustine himself said afterwards, God regarded *the hinge* of the petition. So it ever is. God hears the prayer, but answers it according to his infinite wisdom rather than according to our limited foresight. Note: Though this at first sight seems a restriction upon prayer, yet it is precisely this which makes us free to pray. Were it otherwise, we could not open our lips to ask aught which we deemed a boon, should the gift asked for be granted even though it would prove a bane. God, in his love, buries our mistakes in prayer, and gives us just what we should most desire could we see as he sees.

Vers. 15—17.—*Intercessory prayer: its sphere and its issues. Connecting link:* We have freedom in prayer. That freedom will show itself in making intercession for others. At once there is suggested our topic—*Intercessory prayer*. There are six matters here requiring notice.

I. HERE IS AN OUTLOOK PRESENTED. We are surrounded with brethren—not only Christian brethren, whether those that are really or those that are nominally such; but with "brethren" in the world, those of our own race, of our own flesh and blood, owned as "brethren" by him who took human nature on himself, and certainly not to be disowned as such by his followers.² Such may be seen giving way to sin. Sins are of two kinds—those "unto death" and "sin not unto death." Inasmuch as *all* sin persisted in and unrepented of is "unto death," we seem to be shut up to the inference that there is a state of sinning which is beyond the boundary-line of hope; while there are also sins which by no means involve any such sad conclusion. The case they present may be grievous, but it is by no means hopeless. It is to be hoped that the absolutely hopeless cases are rare indeed. "All injustice is sin;" it stains the soul, but need not destroy it.

II. A CASE SUPPOSED. A believer sees a brother sin a sin which is *not* unto death (for of the hopeless cases we do not just now speak). Such a case may fall under one of three heads. 1. It may be the case of a real Christian surprised into a fault (Gal. vi. 1). 2. It may be that of a nominal Christian who says he has faith, but has not works. 3. It may be that of one entirely outside the Christian camp—who is (1) alienated from God; (2) sunk in the mire of uncleanness; (3) entangled in temptation; (4) bewildered with doubt; (5) hardened, careless, dead. In all such instances there is cause for grief, there is urgent need of laying the case before God; but there is no need for despair.

III. A COURSE ADOPTED. "He will ask," *i.e.* he will plead for such a one with God. The apostle does not lay this down as an injunction; he says "he will" do it, as if by the instinctive promptings of an earnest spirit. It is not said *for* what he will

¹ See 'Speaker's Commentary,' *in loc.*

² The context seems decisive against any limitation of the term "brethren" to Christians, since no Christian brethren would be seen sinning a deadly sin. According to ver. 18, and also ch. iii. 9, that is not possible.

ask; that is understood. He will ask for "life"—for new life where there has been none, for more life where it is feeble, for revived life where it is flagging. Note also that it is here supposed that the intercessory prayer will not lose its point by wandering over general themes and spheres, but will aim at laying the case of *one sinning brother* before God. How much point and power would our prayers gain if they were more intercessory! How much force would accrue to intercessory prayer if it were more specific!

IV. A BOON SECURED. "He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death;" and these are those for whom the petitions are offered. There are four points to be noted. 1. The gift is life. This suggestive word includes all spiritual good in each case as it is needed. 2. The Giver is God; the Divine name is not specified, but we cannot be in doubt, since (1) none but God *can* give life, and (2) it is to him the prayer is addressed, therefore from him the answer comes. 3. The gift of life is for those who have sinned, but not unto death. These are the wanderers whose case was borne upon the pleader's heart. 4. This gift of life for the dead and dying ones is God's gift to the anxious pleader. Beautiful gift! To see life from God coming to those for whom we pray is surely the largest gift our hearts can desire. It is the "open reward" of the prayers offered to the Father in secret. Not thousands of gold and silver, yea, not the wealth of worlds, can compare with a boon like this! What must be the joy of him who can point to a thousand living souls turned from the error of their ways in answer to his prayer!

V. A QUESTION RESERVED. "There is sin unto death" (not "*a sin*." Whether that be so or no, it is not what the apostle says here. He is speaking rather of the state than of a specific act). Great obscurity rests on this phrase; for the reason given in division I., we regard it as necessarily meaning a state of sinning that is beyond the hope-line. 1. *What is this state?* The following texts sum up nearly all that we know: John xv. 6; Luke xii. 10; Phil. iii. 19; Heb. vi. 4—6. (1) Severance from Christ; (2) the sin against the Holy Ghost; (3) apostasy; (4) final and fixed impenitence. Either of these is a state of "sin unto death." There are rocks out at sea in perpetual mist. Such is this rock of fatal sin. We cannot sketch it, nor point out its exact *locus*. God keep us all far away from it! But granting such a case: 2. *What is to be done?*¹ Is no intercessory voice to go up for such a one? The apostle is alarmingly silent. *He does not say*. An appalling thought is here brought into the field of vision. That possibly a man may be so far gone in sin that not the fondest intercessor could offer up a prayer for him, if *he knew how far the sin had gone*. We cannot venture to write on such a theme without fear and trembling. But we ask the reader to note the words we have italicized, "*if he knew*," etc. We are never in a position to *pronounce* a case hopeless; hence there is nothing to bar our pleading for the worst of sinners. Besides, if a man be a man of prayer, the Spirit of God will guide him for whom to pray and what to pray for; and wherever a praying man is borne along by God's Spirit to pray without ceasing for the conversion of this one or that one, such inward groaning, divinely born, is a pledge of a gracious answer. In the life of a medical missionary (Dr. Henderson) we are told by him that he had ten thousand cases under his care in the hospital. For some cases he could not open his lips in prayer. In other cases he was borne along to plead again and again for their recovery; and when this was so, *he never lost a case*.

VI. THE RESULT, when all such reserved cases are allowed for. The boon secured as touched on in division IV. will still remain, a witness to the power of prayer, a seal to the reality of communion with God, and a blessed reward for the "strong crying and tears" of the faithful pleader. Note: 1. "The apostolic teaching recognizes a mysterious dependence of man on man in the spiritual order, like that which is now being shown to exist in the physical order" (Canon Westcott). Even so. There are wandering souls whose weal is bound up with the intercession of the saints. 2. It is by this intercessory service that the priesthood of believers is to become a practical reality. We are "kings and priests unto God" (Rev. i. 6). No priest was ever made such for his own sake. Priests are for others. We are to go into the holy of holies, and there to bear precious souls upon our heart before God. 3. What vast possibilities of life are wrapped up in a believer's prayers! When the breath of prayer rises up

¹ The change of verb is remarkable—we have *ἠρωτᾷν* instead of *αἰτεῖν*, *rogare* instead of *petere* (see Canon Westcott thereon).

from man to God, the breath of life will be unbreathed by God to man. 4. Who would not wish to spend and be spent in prayer, if we may receive, as God's blessed boon, life for souls! Why are we not more unselfish in our prayers? Why is so large a portion of them for ourselves, so small a portion for others? And why are we not more specific in prayer? Let us call up before us some brother or brethren for whose return to God we long and yearn; for them let us plead, and never, never give up. And if by our pleading many are visited by Heaven's best gift of life, *they* may never know who prayed for them; but our prayers will go up for a memorial before God, and we shall find it true that "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

Vers. 18, 19.—*The strong foe and the stronger Friend.* *Connecting link:* It is not without reason that the apostle had just written of life from God as the needed gift to those who are sinning, whether their state be that of sin unto death or no; for the fact is that whosoever is born of God is not sinning. By the fact of the new birth he has been delivered out of that state in which the evil one would fain have held him, as that evil one still holds the world. But now the evil one is powerless, for his power is neutralized by the watchful care of the only begotten Son of God. Note: According to the Authorized Version this verse seems to teach that the believer has and exercises an instinct of self-preservation. The Revised Version and the Revisers' Greek text should be studied. Instead of *ἐαυτὸν*, we now read *αὐτόν*. And further, the *ὁ γεννηθεὶς* plainly points to another than *ὁ γεγεννημένος*, even to him that was and is the Begotten One of God. He it is who so watches over the new-born child of God that the evil one has no power to touch him. Topic—*The conquering and the conquered ones.*

I. THERE IS A GREAT FOE OF MAN. "The evil one." The personality of the evil one is clearly implied in such passages as these: Matt. iv. 1; xiii. 39; xxv. 41; John viii. 44; xiii. 2; Eph. iv. 27; 1 Tim. iii. 6; Jas. iv. 7; 1 Pet. v. 8; ch. iii. 8; Luke xxii. 31; Rom. xvi. 20; 1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Cor. iv. 4. It is not possible fairly to interpret all these passages as indicating only an all-pervasive, impersonal evil. If any demur, let them consider these two points. 1. It is not possible for moral evil to exist apart from some personal being in whom it exists. 2. Whatever evil is in man is there whether there be a devil or no. If there be no devil, and all man's evil is self-originated, then man's nature is a great deal worse than the Scriptures declare it to be.

II. THOUGH MAN HAS A GREAT FOE, HE HAS A GREATER FRIEND. This Friend is the "Begotten One of God;" "the only begotten Son." He beheld this world usurped by the destroyer, and came to set it free. His work is fourfold. 1. He came and worsted the evil one in single combat. 2. He laid down his life for men, and claims the globe as his. 3. He has assumed the sovereignty over all, and dethroned the evil one (John xii. 31, 32). 4. He is now engaged by his Word and Spirit in (1) snatching men from the power of darkness, and transferring them to his own kingdom (Col. i. 13); and (2) in guarding those thus rescued (Luke xxii. 31, 32). Note: The great mystery of evil has its origin elsewhere than here, and a vaster field than this globe, although it is only here that we can trace it.

III. THROUGH THIS FRIEND (the only begotten Son of God) THERE ARE THOSE WHO ESCAPE THE EVIL. 1. *Who are these?* Those who are born again (ver. 18). *All of them.* 2. *How do they escape the evil?* Through the watchful care of the Lord Jesus. He guards (*ῥησέει*) them. The word "expresses a watchful regard from without, rather than safe custody" (so Westcott). This guardianship is exercised (1) by gracious intercession (Luke xxii. 31); (2) by providential care (Ps. cxxi.); (3) by sustaining the inward life (John xv.); (4) by bringing to nought the plans of the evil one (Rom. xvi. 20). 3. *What is the effect?* The wicked one does not touch them with a contaminating, poisoning hand. He would, but he cannot. This must be the issue. (1) The strong one is outwitted by the Stronger (Luke xi. 21, 22); (2) has been, as matter of history (Rev. xii. 10, 11); (3) is, as matter of observation (ch. iv. 4); (4) we know it as matter of experience (ver. 19).¹ The life which is guarded without and sustained within by the Son of God is a perpetual proof that there are some whom evil cannot touch. They move amid the evil, but it harms them not. Let the world get more and more corrupt, they do but become more and more like their Lord.

¹ See a most instructive note from Mr. J. Taylor, quoted in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' *in loc*

IV. WE HAVE HERE THE SECRET OF VICTORY OR DEFEAT IN LIFE; *i.e.* of conquest over evil or conquest by it. All depends on whether we are *ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου* or *ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ* (cf. ch. iv. 4); *i.e.* whether we have a life that is inspired by God or a life upon the lower level of this world.¹ If our being is still of the earth earthy, we are in that region which lieth wholly in the wicked one, "in all its parts and elements." It is in his domain, in his grasp. He is the "god of this world," blinding men's minds. Its darkness is the realm in which he moves. And if we remain in this sphere, and are never extricated from it by a mightier power, with darkness and sin we must "lie down in sorrow." Who can consent to remain a prey to evil when the great Redeemer stands ready with a mighty hand to pluck us out of it, and to guard us so securely that no evil shall touch us?

V. ALL THIS IS AMONG THE CONTENTS OF THE BELIEVER'S KNOWLEDGE. "We know." 1. *Who know it?* "We"—we who are born of God. Much is known by us that is hidden from the world. 2. *How do they know it?* (1) Partly by testimony (a) of God, (b) of history. (2) Partly by observation. (3) Partly by experience. (But see next homily, division II.)

Ver. 20.—*Life's hardest problems solved. Connecting link:* The connection between this verse and those before it is indicated by the adversative particle *δὲ*, which is equivalent to "but." "We know," etc., as if John had said, "I am quite aware of the vastness of the mystery in the conflict between good and evil. Still, I have not spoken at random. There are before us positive, verifiable data which enable us to see something of the wonders of the spiritual world. The Son of God has poured a flood of light upon the invisible realm, and has given us discerning power, so that we see what he has revealed." Topic—*The Son of God the Solver of life's greatest problems.* At this point we must indicate the conclusion to which we have come upon the verse before us. The student will be well aware of the controversy which has gathered round its last clause, owing to some obscurity which rests on the questions: (1) What is the antecedent of *οὗτός*—is it "Jesus Christ" or "him that is true"? (2) When the apostle says, "We are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ," does he mean, "We are in him that is true, [even] in his Son Jesus Christ," or "We are in him that is true, [being] in his Son Jesus Christ"? For a discussion of the questions, the student can turn to the writers named below.² As the structure of this homily depends on the answer given thereto, we must needs indicate the conclusion to which we have come. 1. The answer must be given without doctrinal bias, and simply on exegetical grounds. For our own part, we have the most unhesitating conviction of the true and proper Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, *but we have never quoted this verse in proof thereof*; not because it does not contain it by implication, but on account of the dispute as to its grammatical construction. 2. In reply to the second question above named, we accept the last-mentioned form of the phrase, viz. "We are in him that is true, [being] in his Son Jesus Christ." 3. It almost follows therefrom that the antecedent of *οὗτός* is "him that is true;" and as, according to that expression when used in the preceding clause of the verse, the apostle evidently means the Father, whom we know through the Son—"that we know him that is true"—the antecedent of *οὗτός* being "him that is true," which is equivalent to "the Father." The theological question here at stake, however, is not whether the Son is of like nature with the Father, nor whether the Son be the very "Image of the invisible God," but whether in this particular verse the apostle declares that we know the true God *in* the Son or *through* him. 4. The full point before "This" cuts off the following sentence too completely. It may be a complete sentence grammatically; it is not an independent one either exegetically or doctrinally. 5. The word *οὗτός* includes much more than the "Being." It is equivalent to the "Being" *plus* the entire revelation which he is and brings: "This is the true God *and* eternal life," the masculine form, *οὗτός*, being used on account of the noun first following. In the text, so understood, three lines of thought open up to us.

I. WE HAVE A CERTAIN FACT DIRECTLY AND ABSOLUTELY KNOWN. "We know that the Son of God is come;" rather, "is here," *i.e.* has come and remains with us. Accord-

¹ Is it needful to point out that it is not of the world as to its geographical extent, but as to its ethical relations, that the apostle is writing?

² See Westcott, Ebrard, and Haupt.

ing to the usage of the apostle, this would include the Incarnation, or his coming from the heavenly home to earth (ch. iv. 1—4). It also distinctly declares that the Son of God is on earth still—that he remains with us. Nor can the student of Scripture be at a loss to understand how that is (Matt. xviii. 20; xxviii. 20). His people are his representatives. His Spirit supplies his place. His words are still among us. So that we may assign a manifold meaning to the expression. Jesus Christ is here: 1. In his words. 2. In the influence and power of his holy life. It abides in the world, the ideal standard of humanity. 3. In the people in whom he dwells. 4. In the living Church which he inspires. 5. By his Spirit, by whom he, though now bodily in heaven, is converting the world and educating the Church. Note: It is quite possible to do our Saviour a great wrong by representing his Church as mourning an absent Lord. He is much more fully with believers now than when his feet walked the earth.

II. A BLESSED EXPERIENCE as the outcome of the coming of the Son of God. This is declared in the text to be fourfold. 1. We owe to Jesus Christ the gift of a spiritual understanding (*διδωσαν, sensum*; cf. 1 Cor. ii. 14; Eph. i. 18 (Greek, T.R.); Matt. v. 8; xiii. 14; vi. 22, 23). As is the heart, so is the eye. When Christ by his Spirit renews the one, there is new power of sight in the other. More is included, however, than a clear perception. The word also bears the meaning of a power of sound reasoning. Sin vitiates the reasoning powers by warping the will which directs them (Eph. iv. 17, 18, 23). When men are born again, their powers of reasoning become rectified and sanctified, being governed by the Spirit of God. 2. Having this new understanding, we know, through Christ, him that is true, i.e. the Father. Christ being himself the "Effulgence of" the Father's "glory, and the very Image of his substance," in knowing him we know the Father. As by his incarnation he discloses the Object, and by imparting a new understanding enables us to see the Object, there comes to be through Christ the meeting of subject and Object, which constitutes knowledge. 3. The Lord Jesus has also brought us into a living and abiding union with himself. "We are in his Son Jesus Christ." The knowledge we gain is not that of One who is far off from us, and from whom we remain far off. It is attended with a vital union with him. We are "in him." How? (1) In him as our Life; from him we draw our own. (2) In him as the Sphere of our communion and abiding fellowship. (3) In him as our Mediator; in whom the Father sees us. (4) In him as "the Lord our Righteousness" and Strength. (5) In him as our Refuge from the storm. (6) In him as our eternal Joy. No less expressive phrase than this, "*in him*," will suffice to tell how closely Christ and his own are locked in each other's embrace. 4. Being brought into this vital union with the Son, we are in living and loving union with the Father. "We are in him that is true," through being "in his Son Jesus Christ" (cf. ch. iv. 15, 16, 12). We are "born of God," "begotten of him."

III. IN THIS BLESSED EXPERIENCE IS THE ACHIEVED SOLUTION OF LIFE'S VASTEST PROBLEMS. "This is the true God, and Eternal Life." There are two problems which men have been for ages attempting to solve—one concerning the Supreme Being; another concerning the meaning and destiny of human life. The one the greatest objective, the other the greatest subjective problem. Both find their solution in Christ, and only in him. For: 1. In Christ, or through him (whichever view of the text be taken), we come to know the true God. The word thrice translated "true" is not the one which means true in distinction from the false; it means "true" in distinction from the inferior, partial, defective, and incomplete. "True" as fulfilling completely the highest ideal, as "in contrast with all imaginary and imperfect objects of worship," and as fully satisfying "the idea of Godhead in the mind of man." This perfect ideal of the great Supreme, and this Being who answers to that perfect ideal, we know through Christ. 2. In Christ, eternal life, too, is revealed as existing in him, as imparted by him to those who believe on his Name. Note: Obviously we have here, and here alone, the absolutely universal religion, not only for all the world, but for all the worlds. It is so, not simply because it is too exclusive to tolerate any other, but because in it, and in it alone, are secured all to which any religion anywhere can aspire—even a knowledge of the very God, and such a union with him as ensures a life of eternal and ever-growing blessedness. What more can any religion show us? The whole ground of possible yearning is covered. And is there any other in the world that professes to secure all this, and that verifies its claims by giving now, in a living expe-

rience, the actual foretaste of the life to come? Verily in and through Christ alone have we "the very God, and the eternal life."

Ver. 21.—Beware of the idols! Closing warning. By how much the evidence is clear that in Christ we have the true God, and eternal life, by so much should we be sternly jealous over ourselves that we suffer nought to take the place in our regard which he alone should fill. Hence it is not unnatural that a sentence like this should come from the apostle's pen ere he closes the letter. It is easy to detect an undertone of deep emotion, as the apostle, having discharged his responsibilities in unfolding the truth, now reminds his readers most tenderly of theirs, in cleaving to it and rejecting all besides. *Topic—A warning against the idolatry of cleaving to any but Christ.*

I. WE ARE UNIFORMLY TAUGHT IN SCRIPTURE TO CHERISH AN ABHORRENCE OF IDOLS. The second commandment forbids any worship to them. Isaiah poured scorn on idol-worship. "Idols" (εἰδωλα, *simulacra*)—images, dead representations of the Living One. Anything which fills the place in the understanding, the heart, the life, which is due to God alone, is an idol. Note: None have ever been more noted for horror of idolatry than those who have paid the most reverent worship to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It is, in fact, in connection with the most distinct avowal of him as "the true God and eternal life," that this warning against all idolatry is found. But the verse is not general and indefinite, for observe—

II. THE APOSTLE HAS BEFORE HIS EYE THE VARIOUS "IDOLS" WITH WHICH HIS READERS WOULD BE SURROUNDED. "Guard yourselves from the idols (ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων)." It is absolutely necessary to study with close attention the actual surroundings of John and the Churches of his care, if we would rightly apprehend and expound the caution here recorded.¹ There appears to be no reason to doubt that the apostle wrote this Epistle at Ephesus. The worship of the great goddess Diana had its seat there. The temple of Ephesus was a wonder of the world. And, over and above the dark black mass of people who cared not either for religion or morals, Gnosticism and Dualism were prominent there. The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes was taught there, and there too a spurious and magic spiritualism had its seat (see Acts xix. 19, 26, 35; Rev. ii. 6). There was both a denial of the true and a presentation of the false claim to the regard of men.

III. WITH ALL THESE FORMS OF ERROR BEFORE HIM, THE APOSTLE HAD CALLED THEM BY THE ONE NAME—ANTICHRIST. With this one word he indicates the one feature they all have in common. They so mar the representation of Christ that he is no longer the Christ; and set up in his place a substitute of their own, which is no better than an antichrist. There were many of them; but their huge denials of the truth were not to be tolerated (ch. ii. 22, 23; iv. 1—3; 2 John 7). If the Incarnation were denied, along therewith must be the denial of the Propitiation, the Redemption, the cleansing, the fellowship, the life. All goes if the Christ goes. And inasmuch as men will have a faith of some kind, so that when they have dethroned the true, they will enthrone the false, there will at once come to be some antichrist—some rival to the Son of God. It may appear in the form of some worldly attachment, eliciting a false affection (ch. ii. 15—18); or in the disguise of some intellectual subtlety, leading to or from a false philosophy (ch. iv. 1—3); or in some manifest depravity of morals denying the need of an atonement or of cleansing grace, through denying the fact of sin (ch. i. 8, 10). The "many antichrists" which John espied were but so many εἰδωλα, and whoever followed them would be, in fact, an idolater.

IV. FROM ALL THESE FORMS OF IDOLATRY IT IS NECESSARY FOR BELIEVERS TO GUARD THEMSELVES. The preposition ἀπὸ is significant here. They must keep away from them. From everything that (1) denies, or (2) lowers, or (3) opposes, or (4) dishonours, or (5) supplements the Christ. "Keep yourselves," "guard" yourselves, the word is—as in a watch-tower (φυλάττετε). But what is the fortress? Can we be wrong in saying: 1. *The truth is the stronghold in which they were to remain*, while keeping a vigilant watch on the foe? The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of men, the Propitiation for sins, the final Judge of men, the true Object of a devout and adoring worship, the Life, the Mediator, the Model, the Leader, the Lord.

¹ See the Bampton Lecture by Dr. Burton, on the 'Heresies of the Apostolic Age,' also "Introduction to the First Epistle of John," in the 'Speaker's Commentary.'

2. *They were to ensure remaining in this stronghold of truth by cultivating fellowship in him who is the Truth.* (Ch. ii. 28; cf. also the analogous phrase in Phil. iv. 7, *ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὰ ἡνίκαρα τοῦ θεοῦ*.) Communion with God will ensure a holy peace that will guard the heart from restlessness and the thinkings from error.

V. THIS KEEPING OF THEMSELVES IN GUARD AGAINST THE IDOLS IS HERE THROWN ON THEIR OWN PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. "Guard yourselves." It is as if the apostle had said, "I have done what I can in writing down the truth and in warning you against the errors of the day. Now, where my responsibility ends, yours begins." Compare the parting words of Moses (Deut. xxix. 9—29; xxxi. 2—13) and of Paul (Acts xx. 28—31).

VI. THIS REMINDER OF THEIR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IS GIVEN WITH THE UTMOST TENDERNESS OF PASTORAL SOLICITUDE. The last stroke of the pen reminds the apostle of his own inability to do more than he has done. He cannot always be with the Churches. And as if the thoughts that they and he must soon part, and that he, the last surviving apostle, must leave the Churches "as sleep in the midst of wolves," as their Lord had said, were almost overwhelming, his tone at parting is that of the utmost tenderness: "Little children, hold yourselves aloof from all the idols."

VII. THE PRECEPT, THOUGH IT HAS A LOCAL AND TEMPORAL REFERENCE, IS OF WORLD-WIDE AND PERMANENT SIGNIFICANCE. Forms of antichrist still abound, and there is as much need for vigilant watchfulness on the part of believers now as there was in the apostle's time. Can we think of pantheism, agnosticism, positivism, materialism, rationalism, anti-supernaturalism, without seeing how many forms of error would supplant the Christ, and put a rival in his place? Can we think of sacerdotalism, rampant and wild, without seeing how many there are who would put a priest between the soul and the Saviour; who teach that the Church is to be our bulwark, by remaining in which we shall keep from idols; ¹ who would make an idol of the sacramental bread, as if it would nourish the spiritual life, and even of the baptismal water, as if it could initiate it? And we venture to think that these sacerdotal εἰδωλα are more perilous to many than those of the unbelieving world. They are more specious, and therefore more deceptive. May the Holy Ghost grant us his enlightening unction, that we may discern and detect error with a glance of the eye! Amen.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The reason and the evidence of brotherly love.* "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," etc. Our text is vitally related to the last two verses of the preceding chapter. To our mind it presents two important aspects of love amongst Christian brethren.

I. THE REASON OF THE OBLIGATION OF BROTHERLY LOVE. The duty to love our Christian brethren is here based upon our common relation to God. The order of the apostle's thought seems to be this: 1. *The Christian brother is a true believer in Jesus the Christ.* "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ" is included by St. John among the Christian fraternity. The genuine Christian accepts Jesus as the Christ of God, the Anointed of the Father for the great work of human redemption. He looks to him as the Being in whom ancient prophecies are fulfilled, and in whom the noblest expectation and the purest desire of the human race are realized. And the belief of which the apostle writes is not the mere intellectual acceptance of the proposition that Jesus is the Christ, but the hearty acceptance of Jesus himself as the Saviour appointed by God. Every one who thus receives him is a true member of the Christian brotherhood. 2. *Every true believer in Jesus the Christ is a child of God.* "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God." Where there is genuine faith in our Lord and Saviour there is a new moral disposition. The Christian believer is born anew of the Spirit of God. "As many as received him [i.e. Jesus the Christ], to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his Name," etc. (John i. 12, 13). "If any man is in Christ he is a new creature," etc. (2 Cor. v. 17)—he has new sympathies, new purposes, new principles, new relation-

¹ So 'Speaker's Commentary,' *in loc.*, sadly disfigured by its High Churchism and sacramentarianism.

ships, a new spirit. He has the filial spirit, "the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." 3. *Every child of God should be loved by the children of God.* "Who-soever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." (1) It is taken for granted that the child of God loves his Divine Parent. In whomsoever the new life beats there is love to God. In the spiritual realm love is life. "Every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God." The highest life is that of supreme love to God; and, where this is, love to the brotherhood will not be absent. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar," etc. (ch. iv. 20, 21). (2) From the fact that the child of God loves his Divine Parent, St. John makes this deduction, that he will love the children of God. It is natural and right that he who loves the Father should also love his children, or that the children of the one Father should love each other. Here, then, is the reason of the obligation to love our Christian brethren. We believe in one Lord and Saviour; we are children of the one Divine Father; we are members of one spiritual family; we are characterized by some measure of moral resemblance to each other, for each is to some extent like unto the Father of all; we are animated by the same exalted and invigorating hope; and we are looking forward to the same bright and blessed home. That we should love each other is in the highest degree natural and reasonable.

II. THE EVIDENCE OF THE GENUINENESS OF BROTHERLY LOVE. "Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God," etc. (vers. 2, 3). Two remarks, we think, will help us to apprehend the meaning of St. John. 1. *Our love to the brethren is genuine when we love God.* "Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and do his commandments." We may love our Christian brethren for other and inferior reasons than that of their relation to the heavenly Father; we may love them because they are rich in worldly goods, or because they are gifted and clever, or because they are amiable and attractive, or because they hold the same political principles, or believe the same theological opinions, or belong to the same ecclesiastical party, as we do. But love for any of these reasons is not necessarily and essentially Christian love. The genuine Christian affection towards the brethren is to love them because they believe that Jesus is the Christ, and they are the children of God. In the consciousness of our love to God we have evidence that we love our Christian brethren as his children. 2. *Our love to God is genuine when we cheerfully keep his commandments.* "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." (1) The divinely appointed test of love to God is obedience to his commandments. "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments. . . . He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me," etc. (John xiv. 15, 21, 23); "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love," etc. (John xv. 10); "This is love, that we should walk after his commandments" (2 John 6). Genuine love is not a merely sentimental, but a practical thing. (2) The obedience which springs from love is cheerful. "His commandments are not grievous" to them that love him. Love is not only life, but inspiration, courage, and strength; therefore, as love to God increases, obedience to his commands becomes easier and more delightful. "I confess," says Watson, "to him that hath no love to God, religion must needs be a burden; and I wonder not to hear him say, 'What a weariness is it to serve the Lord!' It is like rowing against the tide. But love oils the wheels; it makes duty a pleasure. Why are the angels so swift and winged in God's service, but because they love him? Jacob thought seven years but little for the love he did bear to Rachel. Love is never weary; he who loves money is not weary of toiling for it; and he who loves God is not weary of serving him." Says Miss Austin, "Where love is there is no labour; and if there be labour, that labour is loved." Will our love to God bear this test of cheerful obedience to his commands? Then do we love him truly; and so loving him, we shall love all his children.—W. J.

Vers. 4, 5.—*The victorious life.* "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world," etc. St. John here presents the victorious life in four aspects.

I. IN ITS ORIGIN. "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world." The true Christian is "born anew;" he is "born of the Spirit;" he "is begotten of God." This relationship involves: 1. *Participation in the life of God*, especially the life of

love (cf. ch. iv. 7).¹ 2. *Resemblance to the character of God.* 3. *Possession of the filial spirit in relation to God.* 4. *The title to a glorious inheritance from God.* "We are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 16, 17); God "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible," etc. (1 Pet. i. 3—5).

II. IN ITS CONFLICT. Our text speaks of overcoming, and overcoming is suggestive of struggle. "Victory" implies combat. The Divine life in man and the life of the ungodly world are essentially antagonistic.² Satan is "the prince of this world"—"the god of this world." "St. John constantly teaches," says Canon Liddon, "that the Christian's work in this state of probation is to conquer 'the world.' It is, in other words, to fight successfully against that view of life which ignores God, against that complex system of attractive moral and specious intellectual falsehood which is marshalled and organized by the great enemy of God, and which permeates and inspires non-Christianized society. The world's force is seen especially in 'the lust of the flesh, in the lust of the eyes, and in the pride of life.' These three forms of concupiscence manifest the inner life of the world," and against them the Christian has to contend. It is the battle of truth against error, of light against darkness, and of love against hatred.

III. IN ITS CONQUEST. "Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." The Divine life in the children of God is by its nature mightier than the life and spirit of the unchristian world. There is conflict, but the conflict issues in the victory of the child of God. He is not overcome of evil, but overcomes evil with good. He is not led astray by "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the vain-glory of life," but rises superior to them. In proportion as he who "is begotten of God" participates in the life of God, he vanquishes the world and its temptations, both its seductions and its tribulations. And all the evil world, of which the apostle wrote, is destined to be completely conquered by the life of God working in and through men.

IV. IN THE SECRET OF ITS POWER. "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Notice: 1. *The nature of this faith.* It is not the mere intellectual acceptance of a theological proposition or propositions; "not that heartless assent which never touches the practice nor moulds the affections." This faith is quite as much a moral as an intellectual act; it is of the heart as well as of the head; and it infuses courage, moulds character, and directs conduct. 2. *The Object of this faith.* "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1) Faith in Jesus as truly human. St. John, in thus mentioning Jesus, evidently took for granted that his readers believed in the reality of his human life. We must believe in him as toiling and tired, tempted and tried, suffering and sorrowful, persecuted and crucified, risen and ascended. Yet he was never the vanquished, but always the Victor. Even on the cross he conquered. (2) Faith in Jesus as essentially Divine. Not that he is a son of God, but "that Jesus is the Son of God"—"His only begotten Son" (ch. iv. 9). If the Christian would overcome the world, "he must have a strong faith," as Canon Liddon says—"a faith in a Divine Saviour. This faith, which introduces the soul to communion with God in light, attained through communion with his blessed Son, exhibits the world in its true colours. The soul spurns the world as she clings believingly to the Divine Son." We have said that Jesus was always victorious. As we truly believe in him, we are part-takers of his life and sharers in his victory. This is in accordance with his own word to his disciples: "In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Says Dr. Stier, "Our faith in him is the victory which has already overcome the world. 'The conflict and suffering which we now have is not the real war, but only the celebration, a part of the glory, of this victory' (Luther)." So St. Paul, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." 3. *The exclusiveness of this faith as the means of victory over the world.* "Who is he that overcometh the world,

¹ See this and the following points more fully stated in our homily on ch. iii. 1.

² On the meaning of "the world" in this Epistle, see our homily on ch. ii. 15—17.

but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" The complete victory over the world can be attained only by genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.—W. J.

Vers. 6—11.—*The fourfold witness to the Divine Sonship of Jesus.* "This is he that came by water and blood," etc. We omit the interpolated clauses, and take the text as it is given in the Revised Version. St. John here states the basis of that faith by means of which the Christian overcomes the world. We have the most convincing testimony that the confidence which is reposed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is well founded. That testimony is manifold. We have—

I. THE TESTIMONY OF HIS BAPTISM. "This is he that came by water, . . . even Jesus Christ." The coming here meant is not that of his incarnation, his entrance into this world; but his coming forth from the retirement of Nazareth to enter upon his great redemptive mission. His coming "by water" we regard as referring to his baptism by John. That baptism was: 1. *The inauguration of his great mission.* When Jesus went to John for baptism he had finally left his private life, and was just about to enter upon his public ministry, and his baptism was a fitting introduction to that ministry. 2. *An inauguration characterized by supernatural and Divine attestation.* Probably it is for this reason that St. John here refers to our Lord's baptism: "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him," etc. (Matt. iii. 16, 17). And John the Baptist testified, "This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is become before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel," etc. (John i. 30—34).

II. THE TESTIMONY OF HIS CRUCIFIXION. "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood." The reference is to the blood which he shed upon the cross for the redemption of mankind. But how did his death witness to the truth that he was the Son of God? 1. *By the extraordinary phenomena associated with his death.* "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. . . . And Jesus yielded up the ghost. And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom," etc. (Matt. xxvii. 45, 50—54; Luke xxiii. 47, 48). 2. *By the transcendent moral grandeur expressed in his death.* He voluntarily submitted himself to death for the salvation of the lost world. Our Lord said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me," etc. (John x. 17, 18); "He gave himself for our sins," etc. (Gal. i. 4); "He gave himself a Ransom for all," etc. (1 Tim. ii. 6); "He gave himself for us," etc. (Titus ii. 14); "Christ also suffered for sins once, the Righteous for the unrighteous," etc. (1 Pet. iii. 18). He freely surrendered himself to the most painful and shameful death, not for himself, or for his friends, but for sinners and rebels against him and his Father, and in order that they might have eternal life. Such self-sacrifice was more than human, more than angelic,—it was strictly and properly Divine.

"This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was his blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew."

(Watts.)

III. THE TESTIMONY OF HIS SPIRIT. "And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one." Notice: 1. *The nature of the testimony of the Holy Spirit.* At our Lord's baptism the Spirit bore witness that he was the Son of God (Matt. iii. 16, 17). Our Lord said, "The Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me" (John xv. 26). Again he said, "The Spirit of truth . . . he shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you." He bore witness to the Messiahship of Jesus by coming down, according to his promise, upon the apostles, and by making the gospel of Christ which they preached a saving power to thousands of souls (Acts ii.; iv. 31). And he bears witness for Christ in the hearts of Christians (ch. iii. 24; 1 Cor. xii. 3). 2. *The*

value of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit is the truth;" "The Spirit of truth" (John xiv. 17; xv. 26); "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth." His testimony is of the utmost value and importance, because it is perfectly free from error or fraud; proceeding from the Spirit of truth, the Spirit who is the truth, it is light without any darkness, truth without any error. And his testimony is that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.

IV. THE TESTIMONY OF HIS BELIEVING PEOPLE. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him. . . . And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." "The object of the Divine testimony being," says Alford, "to produce faith in Christ, the apostle takes him in whom it has wrought this its effect, one who habitually believes in the Son of God, and says of such a one that he possesses the testimony in himself." All genuine believers in Jesus Christ have the witness of their own consciousness "that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." They are conscious that the life of love—love to God and to man—is theirs. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." And we know that this life was quickened within us through the exercise of faith in Christ. To us individually this is the most convincing of all witnesses. "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."

V. THE TESTIMONY OF ALL THE BEFORE-MENTIONED COMBINED. All the foregoing witnesses are united and concurrent in their evidence. "The three agree in one." We may say that the four agree in one. Their testimony is unanimous. There is no contradiction, no discrepancy in their evidence. With one voice they declare, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Notice two points in conclusion: 1. *The claim which this testimony has upon our acceptance.* "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater," etc. We receive human testimony, notwithstanding that (1): The witness may unintentionally be untrue. Human observations and impressions and recollections are not always accurate; hence the witness of men is sometimes undesignedly incorrect. But in the manifold and Divine testimony to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God there cannot be any inaccuracy or imperfection. (2) The human witness may intentionally be untrue. Man may endeavour to deceive; he may wilfully bear false witness. But "the witness of God is greater." The Spirit of truth cannot lie. Therefore this testimony has the most commanding claims upon our acceptance. 2. *The issue involved in the non-acceptance of this testimony.* "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son." Is any one prepared to discredit God? Will any one implicitly charge him with falsehood? Be it ours to receive his testimony with larger, fuller confidence, and to rest in his Son with deeper, more loving, and more reverent trust.—W. J.

Ver. 12.—*The supreme possession.* "He that hath the Son hath the life," etc. In our text the apostle expresses—

I. A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. "He that hath the Son." What are we to understand by these words? What is involved in them? 1. *Realizing faith in him.* (1) *In his existence.* Saving faith in Christ is faith, not in his historic reality only, but in his present existence—that he is. "He ever liveth." (2) *In his perfection.* It will profit me nothing to believe in Jesus as an ordinary Man, having the imperfections, weaknesses, and sins of our human nature. Faith in such a being would not result in any accession of strength. Faith must be exercised in him as "holy, harmless, undefiled," etc. Thus believing in him we are, as it seems to us, necessarily led on to faith in his proper Divinity—"that Jesus is the Son of God" (ver. 5). (3) *In his interest in us.* Faith in his existence and perfection and Divinity will not benefit us unless we believe in his regard for us—that he cares for us, desires to bless and save us. Now, we need what I have called a *realizing* faith in him. The faith of which St. John and St. Paul wrote, and which our Lord required in himself, is a far greater and deeper thing than intellectual assent. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." "When the soul in very truth responds to the message of God," says Canon Liddon, "the complete responsive act of faith is threefold. This act proceeds simultaneously from the intelligence, from the heart, and from the will

of the believer. His intelligence recognizes the unseen object as a fact. His heart embraces the object thus present to the understanding; his heart opens instinctively and unhesitatingly to receive a ray of heavenly light. And his will, too, resigns itself to the truth before it; it places the soul at the disposal of the object which thus rivets its eye and conquers its affections." With a faith like this, the Christian apprehends Jesus Christ as a grand, living, spiritual, Divine Person; enshrines him in the heart's innermost and holiest temple; and offers to him humblest and deepest reverence. Thus the Christian "hath the Son." 2. *Acceptance of his teaching.* The Christian is intellectually and practically loyal to the teaching of Jesus Christ. In a very true and important sense Plato may be said to have had Socrates. He had so studied his utterances, so mastered his method, so thoroughly acquainted himself with his views and theories and principles; moreover, he held him in such high esteem, regarded him with such reverence, that we may, without exaggeration, say that he possessed Socrates. "We have the mind of Christ." By means of his teaching we have intellectual communion with him. His precious utterances, his glorious revelations, we believe; they are ours. All that he spake we receive as true; so his mind becomes ours; and in this sense we have him. 3. *Supreme sympathy with him.* He gave himself for us, and in return we give ourselves to him. "We love him, because he first loved us." By reciprocal affection we have him. This is the trust, completest, highest way in which one person can have another. He by whom I am truly loved, and whom I truly love, is mine indeed. Thus we have the Son. He dwells in us by his Spirit. His teaching, his presence, his love, his life, his Spirit, are ours; himself is ours, inalienably and for ever. St. John frequently represents this relationship to Christ as conditioned simply by faith in him (ver. 13; John iii. 14—16, 34). In his vocabulary "faith" is a comprehensive word. It "is not merely a perception of the understanding; it is a kindling of the heart, and a resolve of the will; it is, in short, an act of the whole soul, which, by one simultaneous complex movement, sees, feels, and obeys the truth presented to it." He who thus believes on the Lord Jesus Christ "hath the Son."

II. THEY WHO HOLD THIS RELATIONSHIP ARE POSSESSORS OF THE HIGHEST LIFE. "He that hath the Son hath the life." What are we to understand by "the life" (ζωή) (*zhay*)? 1. *Not mere existence.* The most wicked among men have this. Fallen angels have existed through thousands of years (2 Pet. ii. 4; Jude 6). To argue for either the perpetuity or the non-perpetuity of existence from the teaching of the apostle concerning "the life" is a gross perversion of his teaching. 2. *Not mere intellectual life.* Voltaire, Byron, *et al.*, possessed this in a high degree; but who would affirm that they had "the Son" and "the life"? 3. *Not mere emotional life.* There are many whose sympathies are abundant and active, who sincerely pity the wretched, who have often been moved to tears as they have contemplated the woes of the Man of sorrows, who yet have neither "the Son" nor "the life." The life of which St. John writes is "the new life of God in humanity." This new life may be viewed as a new reigning affection. By faith in Christ man is regenerated, his ruling love is changed. His deepest and strongest affection is no longer earthly, selfish, or sinful, but heavenly, self-abnegating, holy; he loves God supremely. He is thus brought into vital and blessed relationship with God. Holy love is life. "The mind of the Spirit is life" (Rom. viii. 6). He who has the Son has this life. He has it now, not in its most glorious development, but really and increasingly (Gal. ii. 20). Under the influence of this supreme love to God all the faculties of the spiritual nature advance towards perfection in blessed harmony with his holy will.

III. THIS LIFE IS ATTAINABLE ONLY THROUGH CHRIST. "He that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." What is essential to this life? That man's strongest and deepest love shall be fixed on God. And we have no revelation of God adequate to inspire this affection save that which is given unto us in Jesus Christ. On viewing the life as consisting of the union of the soul of man with God, we affirm that it is only through the mediation of Jesus Christ that this union can be effected. Man is estranged from God by sin, "alienated from the life of God," and under condemnation because of sin. "The Son of man has power to forgive sins." "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." By the manifestation of the love of God in his life, and especially in his death, he destroys the enmity of the sinful heart, and reconciles man unto God. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of

his Son." Christ reveals God as a Being possessing in infinite degree those attributes which are necessary to command the soul's supreme love. He manifests the perfect *righteousness* of God. The cross of Jesus Christ is the grand declaration of God's unappeasable hatred of sin, and his zeal for the maintenance of rectitude. It is the perfect revelation of *religious truth* for man's intellect and heart. He is "the Truth." In him truth was incarnate. In him the *love* of God is most perfectly expressed. Divine love toiling, sorrowing, suffering, dying, to save the unlovely, the unworthy, the ill deserving, is manifest in him. He shows us the ineffable mystery of God in self-sacrifice for us. He reveals, as fully as is possible to our dim vision, the transcendent *beauty* of the Divine character, for our admiration and reverence. In a word, taking holiness as expressing the summation of the Divine perfections, he reveals the *infinite holiness of God*. Here in him we have such a revelation of the Supreme Being as is perfectly fitted to command the homage of conscience, to quicken and strengthen the intellect, to expel all enmity, and beget in the soul the purest, deepest, intensest love, and to call forth the reverent devotion of our being. Such a revelation believed in and brought home to our spirit by the Holy Spirit, is life-giving; and such a revelation we have in Christ alone. Only through him can we attain the highest life (cf. John iii. 36; xiv. 6; Acts iv. 12).

CONCLUSION. 1. *This relationship may be attained by every one.* (John iii. 16.) 2. *God seeks to bring all men into this relationship.* He invites, exhorts, entreats, etc. 3. *If any have not this life, it is because they refuse to comply with the condition of its bestowment.* "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life."—W. J.

Vers. 14, 15.—*The Christian's confidence toward God in relation to prayer.* "And this is the confidence that we have in him," etc. We have in our text—

I. AN ASSURANCE THAT GOD HEARS PRAYER. "This is the boldness that we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." Prayer is much more than petition. Canon Liddon admirably defines it: "Prayer is the act by which man, conscious at once of his weakness and of his immortality, puts himself into real and effective communication with the Almighty, the Eternal, the self-existent God. . . . Prayer is not only—perhaps in some of the holiest souls it is not even chiefly—a petition for something that we want and do not possess. In the larger sense of the word, as the spiritual language of the soul, prayer is intercourse with God, often seeking no end beyond the pleasure of such intercourse. It is praise; it is congratulation; it is adoration of the Infinite Majesty; it is a colloquy in which the soul engages with the All-wise and the All-holy; it is a basking in the sunshine, varied by ejaculations of thankfulness to the Sun of Righteousness for his light and his warmth. . . . Prayer is not, as it has been scornfully described, 'only a machine warranted by theologians to make God do what his clients want;' it is a great deal more than petition, which is only one department of it: it is nothing less than the whole spiritual action of the soul turned towards God as its true and adequate Object. . . . It is the action whereby we men, in all our frailty and defilement, associate ourselves with our Divine Advocate on high, and realize the sublime bond which in him, the one Mediator between God and man, unites us in our utter unworthiness to the strong and all-holy God." Such is prayer in its highest and largest significance. But in our text prayer is viewed simply as petition. "If we ask anything; . . . whatsoever we ask, . . . the petitions which we have asked of him." Notice: 1. *The offering of prayer.* This implies (1) consciousness of need. How many are man's wants! Regular supplies for the requirements of the body, forgiveness of sin, daily guidance and grace, reliable hope as to our future, etc. We are creatures of constant and countless necessities. Every moment we are dependent upon the power and grace of the Supreme. The exercise of prayer implies (2) belief that God is able and willing to supply our needs. Without this faith man would never address himself in his times of need to God. Moreover, the "we" of our text refers to Christians, even unto them "that believe on the Name of the Son of God" (ver. 13). Their belief in the reality of prayer springs out of their faith in Christ. And the exercise of prayer is an expression of their spiritual life. 2. *The hearing of prayer.* How marvellous is the fact that God hears the innumerable prayers that are ever being presented unto him! None but an Infinite Being could hear them. And a Being of infinite intelligence cannot fail to

observe every longing which is directed towards him. No utterance whatever escapes the Divine ear. None but a gracious Being would regard the prayers which are offered by such unworthy suppliants. Great is the condescension of God in attending to our requests. That he does graciously hear and attend to them is repeatedly declared in the sacred Scriptures (see 2 Sam. xxii. 7; Ps. xxii. 4, 5, 24; xxx. 2, 8—12; xxxi. 22; xxxiv. 4—6; l. 15; Matt. vii. 7—11; Luke xviii. 1—8; John xvi. 23, 24; Jas. i. 5; v. 16).

II. AN IMPORTANT LIMITATION OF THE SCOPE OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER. "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." 1. *This limitation is necessary.* God's will is supreme. The well-being of the universe is bound up with the execution of his will. Therefore he cannot grant the petitions which are not in harmony therewith. This limitation is necessary also, inasmuch as different suppliants may be seeking from him at the same time things which are thoroughly opposed to each other. Thus in time of war between two Christian nations, prayer is presented to God for the success of each of the contending armies. The requests of both cannot be granted. 2. *This limitation is beneficial.* The judicious and kind parent does not give to his child the thing which he asks for, if it will prove hurtful or perilous to him. In our ignorance we may pray to God for such things as would be injurious to us, in which case it is well for us to be denied. Thus the request of St. Paul was not granted, though his prayer was graciously answered (2 Cor. xii. 7—9). On the other hand, the clamorous cry of the unbelieving and self-willed Israelites for flesh was acceded to, to their sore injury (Numb. xi. 4—6, 31—34; Ps. cvi. 15). 3. *This limitation allows a large sphere for the exercise of prayer.* There are many things which we know are "according to his will," and these are the most important things; e.g. supplies for bodily and temporal needs, forgiveness of sins, grace to enable us to do or to bear his will, guidance in our quest of truth and in our way of life, the sanctification of our being, and possession of an inheritance in heaven. We may seek the salvation of others, the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the final triumph of his cause throughout the world. These and other things we know accord with his will.

III. AN ASSURANCE THAT THE THINGS SOLICITED IN SUCH PRAYERS WILL BE GRANTED. "And if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him." Alford calls attention to the present, "we have the petitions," with the perfect, "which we have asked of him." "The perfect reaches through all our past prayers to this moment. All these 'we have;' not one of them is lost: he has heard, he has answered them all: we know that we have them in the truest sense, in possession." It is important to bear in mind here the character of those to whom St. John writes. They are genuine Christians; possessors of Jesus Christ, and of eternal life in him. Their will is that God's will may be done. In them is fulfilled the inspiring assurance of the sacred psalmist: "Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." In whomsoever this character is realized, the desires are in harmony with the will of God, and the things solicited in prayer are such as God takes pleasure in bestowing and man is blessed in receiving. And this assurance which the apostle expresses is confirmed by the experience of the godly in all ages (cf. Exod. xxxii. 11—14, 31—34; Numb. xi. 1, 2; 1 Kings xvii. 17—24; xviii. 42—45; 2 Kings iv. 28—36; Ps. cxvi. 1—8; Isa. xxxviii. 1—8; Dan. ix. 20—23; Acts xii. 1—17). Let us seek a character like that indicated by the apostle (vers. 11—13), and then this inspiring and strengthening "confidence toward God" may be ours also.—W. J.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The Christian's prayer for his brethren.* "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death," etc. Having expressed his assurance as to the efficacy of the prayers of Christians generally (vers. 14, 15), the apostle here brings forward a special case in which prayer may be beneficently exercised, viz. on behalf of an erring brother. Notice—

I. THE OCCASION OF PRAYER FOR THE BRETHREN. We do not mean that St. John would restrict our prayers to any one occasion, but he mentions one in which they may be profitably exercised. "If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask," etc. 1. *The liability of a brother to sin.* Whether we limit the term "brother" to those who are believers in Christ—Christian brethren, or take it in its

broadest signification of our fellow-men, it is true that they are liable to sin. Genuine Christians are so (cf. ch. i. 8, 10). The grave fact of temptation to sin, the proneness of man to sin, the moral weakness in some respects of even good men, the history of the godly, the teachings of the Bible, and our own experience,—these show our liability to sin. 2. *The knowledge of a brother's sin.* "If any man see his brother sinning a sin." The sin spoken of is not a secret one. The knowledge of it is not derived either from irresponsible rumour or from malignant slander. To these we should pay no heed. We should discredit them, and seek to extinguish them. But it is immediate, direct, and certain. 3. *Prayer for a brother because of his sin.* "If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask," etc. Without entering at present upon the inquiry of what is the "sin unto death," we may say, with Ebrard, that taking the statements and directions of the text as to "sin not unto death" "in their simple meaning, the only thing laid down and presupposed is this,—that a sin which is not unto death may be surely known as such. That any particular sin which another may commit, as also the general state in which he may be found, is not unto death—that he may still repent and be converted—this may be easily and with the utmost confidence known. And where this is known with certainty, where there is no necessity for thinking another to be hardened and past salvation, there must prayer be offered." We know a great many sins which men commit for which there is forgiveness with God, and in all such cases, unhindered by any question as to the "sin unto death," we should pray to God for the sinner. But more than this, is not Barnes right in saying, "It may be said now with truth, that as we can never be certain respecting any one that he has committed the unpardonable sin, there is no one for whom we may not with propriety pray"? Let us, then, learn from our text what our conduct should be towards a sinning brother. We are not to sit in judgment on him and condemn him, not to spread abroad the fact of his sin, not to turn away from him as if he were unclean and we holy, not, on the other hand, to make light of his sin. Such, alas! is the treatment very often dealt to a brother who has sinned. But so should not we do. As Christians, our duty is to pray for him. Such prayer is not optional, but obligatory; it is not a thing which we may do, but which we ought to do. "He shall ask." In this spirit St. Paul exhorted the Galatian Christians, "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one," etc. (Gal. vi. 1).

II. *THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO PRAY FOR THE BROTHER WHO HAS SINNED.* "He shall ask, and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death." How unspeakably great and precious is the blessing which by our prayers we may secure for our erring brother! As a result of our petitions on his behalf, God will grant him forgiveness of his sins and confer upon him spiritual life. How exalted and glorious a boon is this!¹ The knowledge that we may obtain such a blessing for him should prove a powerful stimulus to us to pray for the brother who has sinned. How can we do other than pray for him when our prayers may have such a glorious issue? "My brethren, if any among you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins" (Jas. v. 19, 20).

III. *THE LIMITATION TO OUR PRAYERS FOR THE BROTHER WHO HAS SINNED.* "There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request." What are we to understand by the "sin unto death"? With a view of ascertaining this, let us endeavour to fix upon the meaning of "death" here. There are three distinct uses of the word in the sacred Scriptures. (1) The death of the body. (2) That death of the spirit which is common to all men apart from the renewing grace of God. "Dead by reason of trespasses and sins." (3) The eternal death, which is the antithesis of the "eternal life" which God gives through Jesus Christ (vers. 11—13). Now, "death" in the text cannot mean either (1) the death of the body, for that is the lot of all men; or (2) the spiritual death above mentioned, for every sin tends to such death. If we are right thus far, and in this also that the death must be the antithesis of the life, we conclude that it must be that death which is the just retribution of those who have deliberately and resolutely rejected the Christ. Such a sin involves the abiding loss of the life which is derived through him (ver. 12). The rejection of the Christ necessarily involves the renunciation of the life. If a man deliberately and decidedly

¹ See our homily on ver. 12.

rejects the only Being through whom he can obtain eternal life, what remains for him but to abide in the dark night of death? For such persons St. John does not encourage us to pray. He neither prohibits nor commands us to pray for them. The negation belongs to the "I say," not to the "he should make request." "Not concerning this do I say that he should make request." The encouragement to offer prayer for those whose sin is not unto death is withheld in respect to prayer for those who have committed the sin unto death.

CONCLUSION. 1. Let the fact that it is possible to commit a sin which is unto death lead us to watchfulness and prayer against every sin and all sin. Beware of beginnings in evil. 2. Let this gracious assurance as to the result of prayer for those who have sinned lead us to be often at the throne of grace on behalf of our brethren.—W. J.

Vers. 18—20.—*The sublimest knowledge.* "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not," etc. There are certain things of which St. John writes without even the faintest tone of hesitation or doubt, with the calmest and firmest assurance, and with the accent of deep conviction. And the things of which he writes with so much certainty are of the greatest and most important. So in the paragraph before us he utters his triple "we know" concerning some of the most vital and weighty questions. Let us notice each of these in the order in which they here stand.

I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHARACTER AND CONDITION OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD. "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not." Here are three points for consideration concerning true Christians. 1. *Their origination from God.* They are "begotten of God." They are "called children of God," and are such.¹ 2. *Their abstention from sin.* "Whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not." He will not commit the "sin unto death;" and in proportion as he participates in the Divine life he will shun sin in any form (cf. ch. iii. 6—9; and see our remarks on ch. iii. 6). 3. *Their preservation from the evil one.* "He that was begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not." Danger is clearly implied here. "Be sober, be vigilant; your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith." "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," etc. (Eph. vi. 11—18). "Satan transformeth himself into an angel of light." Hence the danger. But notice: (1) The means of preservation. "He that was begotten of God keepeth himself." He is sober and watchful and prayerful in order that he may not be surprised by temptation and seduced into sin. It has been well said by John Howe, "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself from those deadly mortal touches which would endanger his precious life; that is, he is his own underkeeper. We are every one to be our brother's keeper, much more our own; but still in a subordinate sense, subservient to, and dependent upon, the Supreme One. Indeed, it were a kind of monstrous thing in the creation, that there should be so noble a life planted in us, but destitute of the self-preserving faculty or disposition; whereas every life, how mean soever, even that of a worm, a gnat, or a fly, hath a disposition to preserve itself." Christians are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." (2) The nature of the preservation. "The wicked one toucheth him not." This does not signify exemption from temptation, but victory over it. The great adversary shall not touch "the true-born child of God" so as to destroy his spiritual life or effect his overthrow.

II. THE KNOWLEDGE OF PERSONAL FILIAL RELATIONSHIP TO GOD. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." The assurance with which the apostle writes is remarkable. Not, "we are probably of God;" not, "we hope we are of God," etc.; but "we know that we are of God," etc. We may know this: 1. *By our consciousness of our Christian character.* The genuine Christian can say of his spiritual condition, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." He is conscious of his faith in Christ. "I know whom I have believed," etc. (2 Tim. i. 12). He feels that the Saviour is precious unto him (1 Pet. ii. 7). He knows that he loves the Christian brotherhood; and "we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." He is conscious of his sincere desire and endeavour to follow Christ as his great Exemplar, and to obey him as his Divine Lord.

¹ See our homily on ch. iii. 1.

2. *By our consciousness of our filial disposition toward God.* We have "received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Our own hearts assure us that we trust and love and reverence our heavenly Father. Thus "we know that we are of God." 3. *By the contrast between ourselves and the unchristian world.* "The whole world lieth in the wicked one." We have already endeavoured to indicate the character of "the world" of which St. John writes.¹ "Concerning the world, he says, not merely that it is of the wicked one, or has him for a father, and bears his nature, but also that it 'lies in him,' that is, lies in his bosom, . . . like an infant on the bosom of a mother or a father, which is absolutely given up to its parent's power" (Ebrard). The true Christian knows that he is not in such a condition, but in a decidedly opposite one—that he "abides in the Son, and in the Father" (ch. ii. 24).

III. THE KNOWLEDGE OF A TRANSCENDENT FACT, AND OF GREAT PERSONAL BENEFITS DERIVED THROUGH THAT FACT. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know him that is true," etc. Here are four points which require our attention. 1. *That the Son of God came into our world.* "We know that the Son of God is come." (This great fact has already engaged our attention in our homily on ch. iv. 9—11, and the apostle's assurance of it in that on ch. iv. 14.) 2. *That the Son of God hath given to us spiritual discernment that we might know God.* "And hath given us an understanding, that we know him that is true." This does not mean that he has given to us any new faculty, but that he has brought our spiritual faculties into a right condition for the apprehension of the Divine Being. "As Christ has come (in the sense of ch. iv. 9)," says Ebrard, "and through this act of love has kindled love in us (ch. iv. 10), thus communicating his nature to us, he has furnished us with the understanding necessary in order that we may know God. For God is, according to ch. i. 5 and iv. 8, Light and Love; and only he who is penetrated by his light, and kindled by his love, can know him." God was not the Unknowable to St. John. He knew him through the revelation of Jesus Christ, by the conscious realization of his presence with his Spirit, and by hallowed communion with him. 3. *That we are in vital union with God and with his Son Jesus Christ.* "We are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ." (We have already considered what it is to be in God, in our homily on ch. ii. 6.) The true Christian is in God the Father through being in Christ the Son. He is in the Father through the mediation of the Son. 4. *That the Son of God is truly and properly Divine.* "This is the true God, and eternal life" (cf. vers. 11—13).

Let us seek to realize the exalted and blessed knowledge which we have been considering. And if it be already ours, let us endeavour to possess it in clearer light and fuller measure. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord."—W. J.

Ver. 21.—*Self-guardianship against idolatry.* "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The connection of this verse with the preceding seems to be in the antithesis between the "true God" and "idols." Loyalty to the "true God" demands separation from all false gods. Notice—

I. THE AFFECTIONATE APPELLATION BY WHICH THE APOSTLE ADDRESSES HIS READERS. "Little children." "He parts from them with his warmest and most affectionate word of address." This form of address suggests: 1. *The spiritual paternity of the apostle.* Probably many of those to whom he was writing were his children in the Lord, begotten by his ministry—by his preaching, his prayers, and his faith. Very tender and sacred is this relationship (cf. ch. ii. 1; 1 Cor. iv. 14, 15; Gal. iv. 19; Philem. 10). 2. *The spiritual affection of the apostle.* This is delicately yet clearly indicated by the use of the diminutive. 3. *The spiritual authority of the apostle.* His relation to them, his affection for them, and his large and ripe experience, combined to invest him with sacred and commanding influence. And, as "little children," his readers needed guidance, and owed to him obedience.

II. THE IMPORTANT EXHORTATION WHICH THE APOSTLE ADDRESSES TO HIS READERS. "Keep yourselves from idols." Consider: 1. *The nature of the sin to be guarded against.* Idolatry. Originally it seems to have comprised two things: (1) the attempt to represent the Divine Being by visible and material forms; (2) the offering to these forms the worship which belongs only to God. Some are in danger to-day of falling

¹ See our homily on ch. ii. 15—17.

into idolatry of this kind through the use in worship of pictures and statues designed to represent the Saviour. But the essence of idolatry is giving to another the love and reverence and devotion which are rightly due to God alone. Many make an idol of riches. Money is their god, and they devote all their powers and opportunities to the eager pursuit of it. "Covetousness . . . is idolatry." Others worship pleasure. They live but for amusement, and endeavour to subordinate everything to their personal gratification. And others make honour, or fame, or power, their god. We may make an idol of some beloved relative or friend—wife, husband, or child. Or, and this is in some respects worst of all, a man may make a god of himself—may think first and chiefly of himself, study his own interests and happiness, and love himself supremely. It has been well said, "Wooden idols are easily avoided, but take heed of the idols of gold. It is no difficult matter to keep from *dead* idols, but take heed that thou worship not the *living* ones, and especially *thyself*; for as soon as thou arrogatest to thyself either honour, or praise, or knowledge, or power, thou settest thyself in the place of God, and he has declared that he 'will not give his glory to another.'" And this sin offers the greatest dishonour and wrong and insult to God. 2. *The danger of the sin to be guarded against.* This may be seen from the following considerations. (1) The worship of anything less than God cannot satisfy our spiritual nature. God has made us for himself, and our souls cannot rest until they rest in him. (2) The worship of anything less than God dwarfs and degrades man's spiritual nature. The exercise of real worship transforms the worshipper into likeness to the object worshipped; e.g. the idolatry of riches will gradually mould man into a grovelling, grasping miser; of power, into a ruthless, despotic tyrant, etc. (3) The worship of anything less than God will lead to bitter disappointment and irretrievable loss. Sooner or later, the idolater will be awakened from his delusions, and then he will find that his god is a poor sham, and that, as for himself, he has "forsaken the Fountain of living waters, and hewed him out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." And how terrible is death to the idolater! Death may take from him the wife whom he loves more than he loves God, or the child, etc. And when he dies he must leave his idols behind him—his money, etc. "We brought nothing into the world, neither can we carry anything out." "When he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him." And then will arise the bitter cry, "Ye have taken away my gods; and what have I more?" 3. *The method of guarding against this sin.* The most effective preservative against idolatry is growing fidelity to God. He who assiduously cultivates reverent attachment and hearty devotion to him cannot fall into idolatry. "The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."—W. J.

Vers. 1—12.—*Faith and the Divine testimony.* I. FAITH. 1. *A common faith with a common life is the foundation of brotherly love.* "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God: and whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." A general aspect is given to the truth. Given a person who (according to what John has formerly taught) believes that *Jesus is the Christ*, it can be said of him that he is *begotten of God*, i.e. is the subject of a Divine life. It is implied, but not expressed, that a child of God loves the Author of his life. This love is extended to him that shares with him the same Divine life. There is thus created a *brotherhood*, with a common source of life and a common stream of life. And shall not all who have a common origin and common movements love one another? 2. *The reality of brotherly love is proved by the activity of obedience.* "Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and do his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." There is here personal application of the truth. When can we say that we love the children of God? The answer given is (the converse being also true), *when we love God*. Have we some real love to God? then *inseparable* from that is love to his children. For along with love to God goes the *doing of his commandments*, under which is included love to the children of God. This is the love of God in its working, that we are *careful about doing* the commandments of God. If a child has a sincere love to his parents, and knows that they

wish him to be kind to his brothers and sisters, he will not oppose that wish. So if we have love to God, and know that it is his will that we should extend our love to his children, we shall make an endeavour in that direction. *Transitional thought.* "And his commandments are not grievous." If a parent loves his children, he will not give them all that they are inclined for; but he will lay commandments on them, *i.e.* he will lay down certain rules for their conduct, lines in which they are to act, which will be for their benefit, and, he hopes, their ultimate emancipation. There is nothing grievous in these commandments; they are the expression, not only of righteousness, but of kindness. So with the Divine commandment. If God had not loved us, he might have left us without directions for our life; but because he loved us, and could not bear to see us straying in devious paths to our destruction, therefore he has commanded and warned us well. There is "line upon line, precept upon precept." So far from these commandments being grievous in their nature, they are beneficial, emancipating. They are the direct roads to our happiness. They are not arbitrarily laid on us, but are thoroughly reasonable and suited to our nature. Is there anything unreasonable or unnatural in our loving the God of our life, and with our whole soul? And, loving the Father, may we not be asked to love also those who share with us the life of God? 3. *The difficulties of obedience which are presented by what the world is are conquered by faith.* "For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith." The apostle's thought is not of the world in its normal state, but as it has been made by sin. The world is that of which the pervading spirit is *forgetfulness of God*. "The wicked . . . and all the nations that forget God" (Ps. ix. 17). Men may not be all wicked in the highest degree—deliberate and daring in sin; they may be divided against each other; but it is natural to all alike to wish to banish God out of their minds as an unwelcome, disagreeable subject. The world is that of which the pervading spirit is *selfishness*—the opposite of what is here inculcated. Men may not be all malevolent in the highest degree—devilish, according to the common conception—but it is natural to all alike to hurry on to their own satisfaction, without regard to the claims of others. The world is, further, *that in social condition which is formed by following ungodly, selfish tendencies.* Take such a social condition as is presented among the *Jews*. Long ago they took up a wrong position with regard to the Messiah. "His blood be on us, and on our children!" And in their generations, with few exceptions, they have stood to their position. Scattered among the nations, they have not conformed to the creeds of the nations. A common sentiment has pervaded them in many lands. Centuries of neglect and persecution have only served to burn into their minds the conviction that their forefathers were in the right. And now it would seem like a cutting off a right arm to acknowledge the Messiah. Take, again, such a social condition as is presented in the *Church of Rome*. It is well organized, is restlessly active, has a wonderful power of reaching minds, and yet it is identified with a system which is, to a great extent, in the name of Christ, a flattery of the human heart. Take a *quasi-Christian* condition of society. Without flagrant irreligiousness and vice, there is a worldly tone prevalent in families, in communities, in trades, in professions, even in Churches. There are views of life and practices that tend to lessen the sense of responsibility, and to divide men. When the world has on its side the influences of early training, of numbers, of dignitaries, of daily example, it is a formidable power to which to be opposed. And, if we look to ourselves, we are entirely at its mercy. But we are not hopeless, for a Divine power can be communicated to us, and all within us that is quickened by the Divine touch overcometh the world. What God does is to impart life; what we have to do is to *exercise faith*. We lay hold on what is outside of us, and thus we conquer. We lay hold on the infinite satisfaction there is in Christ, and thus we are not clogged, in our battle with the world, with the feeling of guilt. We lay hold on the conquest Christ obtained over the world. There is presented to our faith a God whom we are powerfully impelled to love. Thus situated, the commandments of God are not grievous. We may be said to conquer the world when no longer worldly ideas are influential with us. And when we have taken up the position of faith, the world becomes only the means of our discipline. The world will only be conquered in the fullest sense when the customs of society and influences which permeate it are such as to afford the greatest help to remembering God and living for

the good of others. *Appeal to experience.* "And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" "Survey the whole world, and show me even one of whom it can be affirmed with truth that he overcomes the world, who is not a Christian, and endowed with this faith." In the apostle's day there were many who seemed hopelessly involved in heathen customs and traditions; but even out of their heathenism they reached forth the hand of faith to the incarnate Son of God, and conquered, in giving up their heathen life, and living according to Christian rule. It is only condescending love, apprehended by faith, that can break the spell of the world.

II. THE DIVINE TESTIMONY TO THE OBJECT OF FAITH. 1. *Its nature.* "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one." The Bible is not so plain in every part that he that runneth can read. Peter found in Paul's writings some things hard to be understood. John uses simple words, but it is not always easy to catch his meaning. The present passage has been very perplexing. The *historical* basis is obvious. There was water at the *commencement* of our Lord's ministry; there was blood at its *close*. He came by water as *baptized*, he came by blood as *crucified*. Water signifies life in its purity; blood signifies life in all its purity sacrificed, and so made available for us. He came not with the water only; for his pure life by itself could not be available for us. But he came with the water and with the blood; for it was as sacrificed that his pure life was available for us. The fact that he had a pure life in the midst of sinful humanity testified to his being the Son of God. And so at his baptism there was the voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The fact that by his death a fountain of life was open for men (significantly there gushed from his pierced side blood and water—first blood, and then water) also testified to his being the Son of God. And so there was the Divine attestation following in his resurrection. That is historical testimony belonging to a distant century. But the Spirit is the ever-present Witness, being the Truth. There are thus *three* present witnesses. There is the *Spirit*, placed first; because he witnesses through the water and the blood. There is the *water*, witnessing in the power of a new life in us. There is the *blood*, witnessing in redemptive virtue going into us to give us the power of a new life. And the three agree in one; their testimony converges to one point, viz. to the new life in us being the grand proof that *Jesus is the Son of God*. 2. *Its sufficiency.* (1) *It is Divine.* "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son." It is implied that we receive the witness of men. If three human witnesses of ordinary intelligence and probity agree, we proceed upon their testimony even in matters affecting life and death. There is an important sense in which the condition of three witnesses is fulfilled with regard to the Divine testimony. Apart from that there is to be taken into account the infinite superiority of God to man. He is not a man, that he should be deceived; he is not a man, that he should lie; and, therefore, when he gives his testimony concerning his Son, he should be believed. (2) *It is in consciousness.* "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son." The object of the Divine testimony is that we should believe on the Son of God. He that, accepting the Divine testimony, believes on the Son of God is made independent of it as external. He hath the (Divine) testimony in himself, so that he does not need to go beyond his own consciousness for testimony to the place of Jesus. In the case of him who believes not God who hath testified, this testimony in consciousness is forbidden by the very nature of his unbelief, which is making God a liar—believing what men say in ordinary matters, but not believing what God says about his Son. (3) *It is in the possession of life in Christ.* "And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." We have here a better disclosure of the purport of the testimony, showing it to be fraught with the greatest blessing. It is testimony regarding God's own gift of *life*. One element in life is the enjoyment of the Divine favour; another element is the quickening of our powers. It is life that, even in what is begun of it here, is *eternal* in its

nature. It is life not promised, but *actually given*. It is life intended for our *appropriation* by faith. It is life to be found *in Christ*, by whom, though free in reference to us, it has been meritoriously procured, in whom also its nature is exhibited. We who have appropriated the Divine gift in the Holder and Dispenser of it can *testify* to his being more than man, even God incarnate. *Practical inference*. "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life." The boon, which is of unspeakable value, comes with the possession of the Son; therefore the all-important thing is to possess the Son. He that hath the Son hath the life gifted, enjoys the favour of God, has his spiritual powers quickened. He that hath not the Son of God hath not the life gifted, lies under the Divine disfavour, has his spiritual powers with the torpor of death on them. And the two states are the poles asunder. Let us believe on the Son of God, and we are at the pole of eternal sunshine. Let us refuse the Divine testimony, and we are at the opposite pole of eternal cold.—R. F.

Vers. 13—17.—*Assurance*. I. THE AIM OF THE EPISTLE CONNECTED WITH ASSURANCE. "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the Name of the Son of God." At the beginning of the Epistle, the apostle's aim was stated to be Divine fellowship and completed joy. In looking back, he feels that he has kept his end in view. In the restatement of his aim, he goes the length of completed joy. Beyond the quickening of their spiritual life, he has aimed at their having the joy of *knowing* that they had the life eternal actually begun in them. He has given them certain marks (usually introduced by "herein") by which to make clear to them their Divine birth, or possession of the Divine life as believers on the Name of the Son of God. When we have the right elements in our life, and can make a correct diagnosis of them, we have comfort. We are indebted to the apostle yet for the help he has given us, in this Epistle, to the right reading of our life.

II. ASSURANCE IN RELATION TO PRAYER. 1. *Confidence of being heard*. "And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." Knowing that we have the Divine life, we are reasonably bold toward God, as children are bold toward their parents. Our boldness comes out especially in our *asking*. We are full of wants, and so we need to be constantly asking. We ask in the confidence of being heard. If we ask *anything*, he heareth us—which has only this limitation, that we ask *according to God's will* (not properly a limitation; for God's will is our highest good). If we are to ask according to God's will, then the meaning of that is that we are to have our desires in a proper state—to have them *educated up to God's will*. We are to have them *chastened* by proper submission to God's appointments; and we are to have them thoroughly *enlightened*, so that we desire *with God*, and *up to the largeness of the blessing* that he holds out to us. As Jesus was praying in a certain place, after he ceased, the disciples, filled with a sense of their own deficiencies, said, "Lord, teach us to pray." It is not the language of our prayers that we need to have improved, so much as our simple responsiveness to the Divine will. 2. *Certainty of having our petitions*. "And if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him." We have actually presented our petitions in confidence of being heard: how do we stand? We know that we are *richer* than we were before. Hannah rose to accord with the Divine will, and, knowing that she had her petition, it happened to the "woman of a sorrowful spirit" that "her countenance was no more sad." The Master was in perfect accord with the Divine will; and he had his every petition. "And I knew that thou hearest me always" (John xi. 42). In so far as we resemble him, in confidently expressing the Divine will, shall we know ourselves to be richer for our prayers.

III. ASSURANCE IN SPECIAL RELATION TO INTERCESSION. 1. *Promise*. "If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death." This is asking suggested by the brotherly love which the apostle has been inculcating. Have we any ground of confidence to go upon in asking for a brother? We have here very distinct ground pointed to, even in the case of a brother who is seen *sinning a sin*. It is not a sin by which he is wholly deprived of life, but a sin by which his life is regarded as in part *suspended*. He is

seen by one who is united to him by the tie of Christian brotherhood, who does not regard him with unconcern, who is moved by the sight to ask for him *restoration of life*. The promise is that the asker will be the *instrument of giving life* to those within the brotherhood of whom it can be said that they sin not unto death. 2. *Limitation of the promise*. "There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request." This must be taken in close connection with the context. The reference is simply to the brotherhood. Are we warranted in all cases to pray for an erring brother, in the expectation that we shall be the means, under God, of giving him life? The promise does not go that length. A (hitherto) recognized member of the brotherhood may *unbrother* himself, may cut himself off from fellowship with God, by denying (let us say) the force of the Incarnation. In such a case, the apostle does not say that we are to make request (familiarily) for him as for a brother. The virtue that there is in brotherhood and in brotherly intercession is there lost; and he is really to be dealt with as one *unbrothered*. That is not to say that we are not to pray for him at all; for we are to pray for *all men*. 3. *Large scope of the promise*. "All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." "Sin" is a wide word; it includes all violation of right. Every unbrotherly expression that we use is an offence against God. There is thus abundant room for the exercise of intercession. There is sinning through many degrees without sinning *mortally*. Let us, then, realize what is in our power. A brother, to our knowledge, sins even seriously. He does not sin, in our judgment, so as to put the Incarnate One decisively away from him; but he sins so as seriously to interrupt fellowship with God, which is his life. As belonging to the same privileged circle, we have a part to perform. We have to intercede with God on his behalf. We have to intercede *confidently*; for the promise of our giving him life is clearly applicable. In answer to our intercession there will be a wakening of him up out of the slumber that has been upon him, so that he enjoys *renewed* fellowship with God.—R. F.

Vers. 18—21.—*The three certainties of the Epistle*. I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE POWER OF THE DIVINE BIRTH. "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but he that was begotten of God keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not." This is doctrine which has already been laid down. In ch. iii. 6 sinlessness is connected with human action; here it is connected with Divine action. There is sin, as in the context has been admitted, within the Christian circle; but it is according to the *norm* of the Divine life *not to sin*. The language that is added here is unusual. Westcott would remove its unusual aspect by thinking of Christ, as the Begotten of God, opposed to the evil one. But it is God that is opposed to the evil one in the following verse; and the mere change of tense does not prepare for the introduction of Christ. In passing from the *now* begotten of God to the *past* begotten of God, we naturally think of the same person, only at a different moment, viz. that of the *commencement of the Divine life*. The new nature then received (ascribing all to God), it keepeth him; and the evil one, having nothing in the new nature to lay hold on, toucheth him not. He is indeed tempted; but he has a defence against temptation in his quickened sensibilities and activities.

II. THE CERTAINTY OF OUR POSSESSING LIFE FROM GOD. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one." There is here the strength of personal assurance. We know that we are of God; we know that we draw our life from the highest source. But there is also the certitude of Christian *pessimism*—the *worst* view of the world. In the Christian judgment, the whole world lieth in the evil one. It is not only *touched* by the evil one (ver. 18), but the evil one is, as it were, the circumambient element in which it passively lies, and by which it is completely moulded in all its systems and customs and institutions. This is not a cheering view to take of the world; but it would be less cheering to think that the world is only as God intended it to be—that it has not suffered from a fall. The counterbalancing truth is that, bad as it is, it is loved by God, and is susceptible of redemption. And the Christian *optimism*, which we are warranted to entertain, is this—that the world, in all its thinking and fashions, will yet be on the right side, not fraught with peril, but fraught with deliverance to souls.

III. THE CERTAINTY OF THE REVEALING POWER OF THE INCARNATION. "And we

know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." This is the third "we know" which the apostle recalls. We know that the Incarnation is a fact. Through the Incarnation our understanding is Christianized, that we know him that is true, which is equivalent to being in him that is true, which again is equivalent to being in his Son Jesus Christ. This God whom Jesus Christ reveals, this is the true God, and eternal life. The proof of the Divinity of Christ here lies in this, that *in his incarnation* he absolutely reveals God as Father, as infinite Love, which is the highest truth about the nature of God, and also absolutely reveals eternal life, which is the highest happiness of God, he being, according to the thought of ver. 11, the *receptacle* of it for us. From the centre all things are made capable of ultimate explanation. The world, as it lies in the evil one, may seem to call up gloomy thoughts of God; but the Incarnation, the fact that Christ is come, and come into the midst of the world for its redemption, calls up bright, cheering thoughts of God. *Parting word.* "My little children, guard yourselves from idols." In parting, he naturally fixes on the word of special affection for his readers. In ver. 18 he put forward Divine keeping—"he that was begotten of God [the Divine birth] keepeth him." Here he puts forward self-keeping—"guard ['keep,' with added emphasis] yourselves," *i.e.* in the use of means. The idols against which we are to be on our guard are the vain shadows that usurp the place of the true God. In connection with *heathen* idolatry, there are such false representations of God as these—that he is to be apprehended by sense; that he is confined to temples made with hands; that he has a divided sovereignty; that he takes delight in impurities and in the blood of human victims. In connection with idolatry, in the wide sense here to be thought of, there are such false representations of God as these—that he is pleased with our taking selfish gratification; that he does not extend his interest beyond our home, or some narrow circle with which we are connected; that he is indifferent to our happiness; that he does not notice our actions, and will not bring us into judgment for them. Let us oppose to these false representations of God the representation given in the Incarnation. Let us brood over this great fact till all vain shadows flee away, and God comes forth to us in all the splendour of his love. This is a word suitable for parting. We may think of John, now amid the realities of heaven, still beseeching us, and with greater intensity, to beware of the deceitful shadows that are here as often taken for God.—R. F.

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