

ST. JOHN AND OTHER NEW
TESTAMENT TEACHERS

BY

PROF. A. L. HUMPHRIES, M.A.



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ST. JOHN

AND OTHER NEW TESTAMENT
TEACHERS

BY

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IN sending forth this little book, dealing with a subject on which the literature already existing is so very extensive, the author finds it impossible to make formal acknowledgment of all the writers to whom, in greater or less degree, he has been indebted. He feels bound, however, to break through that silence to the extent of expressing his obligation, so far as the discussion of the Fourth Gospel is concerned, to Professor E. F. Scott, with whose critical conclusions, set forth in his book "The Fourth Gospel," he has found himself in large agreement. He would add a word of regret that, owing to limitations of space, he has been compelled to omit from his treatment of the Fourth Gospel a final section dealing with the permanent value of its message.

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I
ST. JOHN

CHAPTER I

THE FOURTH GOSPEL

A.—ITS NATURE AND PURPOSE

UPON the threshold of any inquiry concerning the teaching of the Fourth Gospel there stand two problems, one relating to **its authorship** and the other to its historicity. The identification of the author is one of the outstanding difficulties of criticism. The traditional view, that it was written in extreme old age by John, the son of Zebedee, has many great names, including Godet and Bernhard Weiss on the Continent and Lightfoot and Sanday in England, ranged on its side, and there is much to be urged in its favour. Its opponents, however, are impressive in both number and authority. Some of these, *e.g.* Schmiedel, Wernle, and Martineau, absolutely reject the traditional theory, whilst others, like Wendt and Weizsäcker, occupy a mediating position, and are of opinion that the Gospel is in part made up of material furnished by John, just as the First Gospel is believed to have derived some of its contents from the Logia-

document of Matthew. Wellhausen, again, traces in this Gospel two main sources, differing in both contents and date, and finds in that ingenious theory the solution of some of the apparent inconsistencies in its teaching. Into the discussion of these rival positions it is not necessary to enter. They have but little relevance to an investigation into the teaching of this Gospel, for one thing which criticism has taught us is that the truth of a message does not stand or fall with some particular theory of its authorship, but is determined by the intrinsic qualities of the message itself. So, though we shall speak of the author as John, it will be understood that we are simply following the convention of tradition, and that we pass by, as not vital to our present discussion, the vexed question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel.

The **problem of its historicity**, however, cannot be so summarily dismissed. Even the acceptance of the Johannine authorship would not settle that, for though we could infer that John was able, had he been so minded, to write a fresh account of the actual events of Christ's ministry, we should have to learn from a patient study of the Gospel itself whether this was what he had really chosen to produce. The investigation starts from the Synoptic Gospels, since it is generally conceded that they bring us into substantial contact with fact. But to pass from them to John is like entering a different atmosphere, the difficulty being not so much that the

Fourth Gospel contains new incidents and sayings, as that the whole story is told from a fresh standpoint and in a different way. The scene of Christ's ministry is laid largely in Judæa; new characters appear, or familiar characters play a new rôle, e.g. John the Baptist, who acts throughout as a witness to the Messianic dignity of Jesus; the perspective of the history is foreshortened, for whereas in the Synoptists the assertion of His Messiahship by Jesus and the recognition of it by others belong to the closing period of His ministry, in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is recognised as Messiah from the first by both the Baptist and the disciples, and His own dignity and claims are the constant theme of Christ's discourses with "the Jews," who in this Gospel take, as opponents of Jesus, the place filled by the Pharisees in the Synoptists. Some of these discrepancies are doubtless less impressive on closer examination, and in the narrative itself we find many vivid touches and picturesque details which suggest that the story is being told by a witness of what he records. But the difference under discussion **extends to discourses** as well as incidents. There is, as between the Fourth Gospel and the other three, a contrast in both form and theme. The pithy, epigrammatic sayings which mark the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptists are replaced by long and somewhat tedious discourses, whilst parables are wholly absent, the allegories of the True Vine and the Good Shepherd being the nearest approach to that mode of instruction.

For this contrast in style, which appears equally whether Jesus is speaking in Galilee, Samaria, or Jerusalem, no satisfactory explanation consonant with absolute historicity is yet forthcoming. Moreover, the same style pervades the entire Gospel, so that whether the speaker be Jesus or the Baptist, or whether the writer is giving to us his own reflections, the same literary forms and vocabulary appear, with the result that it is sometimes extremely difficult, *e.g.* in the third chapter, to know where the discourse of Jesus ends and the meditations of the Evangelist begin. On the theory that the latter is John, critics have been forced to assume that original sayings of Jesus and of others have lain so long in the apostle's mind, and have been the subject of such frequent meditation, that not only has a deepened significance been discovered in them, but primal utterance and subsequent reflection have become fused and indistinguishable, and both of them, cast in the matrix of John's own forms of expression, have been assigned to the days of the historic ministry.

The **subject matter of the discourses** is equally perplexing. The divergence from the Synoptic record is not simply at the circumference of our Lord's teaching, particular ideas such as Eternal Life or the Second Coming being presented in a new light, but at the very centre. The two ruling ideas of Christ's message in the Synoptists are the Kingdom of God and the Divine Fatherhood—

allusion, whether by explicit utterance or by suggestion, to the dignity of our Lord's Person being quite a secondary feature. But in the Fourth Gospel, whereas the Kingdom is only the subject of a few casual sayings, the theme of repeated discourses is the Person of Christ. It is significant that the emphatic "I," which, as used by Jesus, is found in the three Synoptists only 34 times altogether, occurs 117 times in John. What this means is that the centre of gravity is shifted. John is writing with a special *motif*, his object being, as the very language of his introductory Prologue suggests, to exhibit the Jesus of history as the Divine Logos manifested in human form and under conditions of time. Even the miracles related of Jesus have ulterior and dogmatic meanings. They are "signs," outward manifestations of an inner glory, and valuable because of the light which they shed upon Christ's Person. So the broad conclusion which the facts seem to compel, is that John's narrative, whatever be the measure of its correspondence with history, is shaped by dogmatic ends. The author's interest is less in events than in ideas. In so far as he wishes to supplement the Synoptists, it is less by supplying us with new events or sayings in the ministry of Jesus than by taking us behind that earthly life so that we see it in the setting of eternity, and behold external events as but the embodiment of spiritual realities. The truth which is John's objective is truth of belief rather than that of historic fact. Of course many

will feel that the belief stands or falls with the history, and on that point it might be shown that the leading ideas of the Fourth Gospel exist either explicitly or implicitly in the Synoptic record. But what we need to apprehend is that John's whole narrative has dogmatic significance, and that it is less a new biography of Jesus than an interpretation of Him which the Evangelist is seeking to give to us. Under his guidance we pass from the outer shrine into the holiest of all.

This view, however novel it may seem, is really a reversion to a primitive judgment, for among the earliest traditions concerning this Gospel is one assigned by Eusebius to Clement of Alexandria, and to the effect that "John, last, having observed that the bodily things had been set forth in the Gospels, and exhorted thereto by his friends, and inspired by the Spirit, produced a spiritual Gospel." Now "bodily" and "spiritual" in that quotation are technical terms, representing in the school of Alexandria the antithesis of "literal" on the one hand, and "figurative" or "allegorical" on the other. A similar view is attributed to Origen and Epiphanius, and the perception of this may account for the welcome which the Fourth Gospel received from the first. We, therefore, shall best learn what John wishes to teach us if, putting ourselves at his point of view, we cease to ask where in the record the chronicler gives way to the literary artist, and seek pre-eminently,

in both narrative and discourse, for the ideas of which he meant them to be the expression.

What those ideas are the Evangelist himself confesses. "These are written," he says, "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name" (xx. 31). In other words, this Gospel is intended by its writer to serve **certain dogmatic and practical ends**. John is a "tendency" writer. His aim is to establish a conception of Jesus as the Messiah of Jewish expectation and the Son of God, and in that way to promote the religious life of his readers. This Gospel, therefore, if not a theology, is at least a contribution towards one, and it is thus that we must interpret it. In doing so we are taken into the heart of an interesting situation. For one assumption which we are justified in making is that the Evangelist was making a direct appeal to the conditions in which he lived. To think of this Gospel as the product of some saintly recluse, or as embodying the devout meditations of a soul dwelling apart from men and absorbed in its own reflections, is to make it strangely unlike the rest of Scripture, and to leave unexplained the welcome with which it was received. Its value lay in the fact that it addressed itself to the immediate historic situation. A credible tradition reports Ephesus to have been **the birthplace of this book**, the date of its composition being put by critics anywhere between the years A.D. 80 and 150, though a large mass of opinion inclines to

the last decade of the first century or the opening decade of the second. Ephesus was one of the great cities of the ancient world. Famous as the seat of the worship of Diana and as the head of a Roman province, it was one of the gateways of the East; it was not simply a channel for trade, but a meeting-place of the faith and culture of Oriental and Greek. Ephesus was the world in microcosm. To translate the Gospel, therefore, into a speech which seemed appropriate to Ephesus, was to create for it a language meet to be universal.

It is to a cosmopolitan audience that the Evangelist makes his appeal. Jew though we believe the writer to have been, the fact that he explains Jewish customs and translates Jewish terms shows that **he writes mainly for Gentiles**. One of the problems of this Gospel is the way in which the opponents of Jesus are repeatedly referred to as "the Jews," the disciples being put into contrast with them in xiii. 33. Moreover, in such expressions as "your law" (viii. 17), "their law" (xv. 25), Jesus is made to speak like one standing outside the Jewish race. It is difficult to carry this mode of speech back to the earthly ministry, but it becomes perfectly intelligible if taken as reflecting the situation when the Evangelist wrote. Then the rupture between Christianity and Judaism had become complete, and the new society, which at first had been threatened with absorption into Judaism, had emerged not only distinct from it, but

finding in Judaism its chief enemy. All hope of a general ingathering of Israel to Christ was past, and hence even Jews like John looked for a new Israel constituted by spiritual affinities, from which those whose bond with the great leaders of Israel's past was simply racial would be excluded. Surely this is the point of such sayings as "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham," and "If ye believed Moses, ye would believe Me" (viii. 39, v. 46). The "Israelite indeed" was to be found within the shelter of the Christian Church.

It is claimed, too, that **conditions later than those of Christ's ministry** are reflected in the controversies between Him and "the Jews." In the Synoptists it is Christ's attitude to the Law and its ritual, and especially His freedom in the observance of the Sabbath, which gave rise to conflict. But in the Fourth Gospel all conflict, save for an echo of the Sabbatic controversy, gathers round the person and claims of Christ. The lowliness of His birth, the fact that He came from Galilee, His failure to win the adherence of the religious leaders of His nation, His betrayal by one of His disciples, and His crucifixion as a malefactor—these were natural objections for Jews to urge against the Messianic claims of Jesus when, after His ascension, they were boldly proclaimed by the Church throughout the Jewish world. They were precisely the objections which (the Talmud and opponents of Christianity such

as Celsus being witness) were the stock-in-trade of Jewish antagonism. More than once, probably, John had had to deal with them in the course of his ministry, and in his Gospel he supplies them with their final refutation.

The Evangelist writes, therefore, as one who has but small hope of the conversion of his own countrymen. His aim is not so much to win them as to expose them, to set their opposition to Jesus in its true light before the world, and thus vindicate the career of Christ. If there is any softening of his hostility to Judaism, it is when he refers to the Baptist, who, is always spoken of with respect, though also he is throughout consistently depicted as recognising his inferiority to Jesus. Baldensperger exaggerates the significance of this feature when he makes it the pivot of the whole narrative. But it had a meaning, and if there still lingered a Baptist party at Ephesus (see Acts xix. 3), it may have been with the hope of securing its fusion with the Christian Church that John was so careful to exhibit the Baptist as inferior in status to Jesus. But if, with that exception, John turns from the Jewish world, it is in the hope of capturing that of the Gentiles. After all, the Fourth Gospel is the least Jewish of the Gospels. Jewish in some measure it was bound to be, for the writer, himself a Jew, had to depict the fundamental ideas of a religion which, however much it transcended Judaism, had therein its roots. But Palestine is but

platform and background. Jesus Himself, as John describes Him, belongs to a larger world, and we are only taken back to history that we may see behind and beyond it. Jesus, though apparently moving in time and space, is in reality above such limitations, and it is His universal, because eternal, nature and functions which constitute the essential message of the Fourth Gospel.

This view of it is sustained by its terminology. The key to the book is to be found in the Prologue, where the Logos or Word of philosophical speculation is identified with the historic Jesus. In that strange term, placed thus in the very forefront, and by the very abruptness of its introduction proving itself to be a familiar element in the thought-world of those whom John was seeking to address, we have an attempt to launch Christianity into a wider world than it had hitherto reached. Just because he had lost hope of the Jews, the Evangelist turns with wistful eyes to the Gentiles, and he speaks to them in the familiar language of their speculations. For it is to the intellect of the Gentile world that John is eager to find a door of entrance, and so he translates his message into terms of heathen culture, because he felt that in Jesus they found their true realisation. Truth is always greater than its form, and the very vitality of truth lies in the fact that it can adapt itself to new modes of expression. A faith which cannot change its intellectual statement is

either dead or dying. The true is also the eternal, for it dies to one mode of expression that it may reappear in another, and of truth, as well as of the redeemed spirit, it holds good that it can take to itself new forms, and that God giveth it a body even as it pleaseth Him. At the same time **the philosophical interest** of the Evangelist is not primary but secondary; in other words, current philosophy is resorted to more for terms than for ideas. So far as John's debt to the Logos philosophy of Philo is concerned, close investigation has shown that there is no very sustained correspondence between the two thinkers. In outstanding ideas and terms they agree, but below the surface they part company, the omissions of John being, as Dr. Drummond has shown, too numerous and significant to suggest abstruse acquaintance on his part with Philo's philosophy, or indeed any larger knowledge of it than could be gleaned from personal intercourse and discussion with cultured Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus itself. The Logos idea was in the air much as "evolution" is to-day. And just as we can imagine a man whose prime interest was theology, having but a popular acquaintance with evolution, yet seeking to gain the ear of men with scientific interests by re-uttering the fundamental truths of theology in terms borrowed from evolutionary science, so did John, realising that there were certain basal ideas in which the two disciplines were agreed, declare Christian truth in the language of heathen

philosophy. It was a noble and a necessary thing to do. The affinities between Christian thought and Greek culture needed to be recognised, and so yoked to the service of truth as to capture for Christ the best minds of heathendom.

Moreover, the terms which John employs to set forth the activity of Christ belong to a wider world than Judaism. Jesus comes bringing "light" and "life," and the response which He demands from men is "knowledge" and "faith." In the elaborate use made of these terms in the Gospel, together with its dualism, and notably its conception of the "world," scholars have detected a friendly approach to another product of Gentile culture, viz. the scheme of religious thought which, because of the value placed by it on *gnosis* or knowledge, is known as Gnosticism. Rooting itself in an assumed antagonism between matter and spirit, Gnosticism elaborated a doctrine of angels and of Divine emanations, of whom Jesus was accepted as one, to serve as intermediaries between God and the world. In so far as Jesus was Himself Divine, it was felt necessary that His assumption of human nature should be docetic rather than actual, the Divine Logos only entering the man Jesus at the Baptism and deserting Him prior to the Cross. Redemption, too, which meant the release of the spirit from bondage to the flesh, was only possible through knowledge of an esoteric type, including such a perception of the Divine nature as could be mediated

only by one who was Himself Divine. To the Gnostic, therefore, "knowledge" was initiation into a purely intellectual discipline, and was open only to the cultured few. What was the attitude of this Gospel to that type of thought? That there was some relation between them is suggested by the conflicting theories which have prevailed, one that the Gospel was a tract against Gnosticism, another that it was actually written by Cerinthus, a prominent Gnostic whom John is said to have opposed. We have evidence from the Epistles of John and that to the Colossians, as well as from hints in the Apocalypse, that there was even in the first century incipient Gnosticism in the Christian Church in and near Ephesus. The time came, towards the end of the second century, when the Church repudiated Gnosticism and all its works, but, when John wrote, its ideas, being but partially developed, found a certain hospitality within Christian circles. Yet it by no means follows that the Fourth Gospel is a Gnostic tract, or, as Schmiedel believes, the work of a writer who came to Christianity by way of Gnosticism. Why, if the author of this Gospel be a Gnostic, is he so silent as to angels? Why is he so careful to note experiences of Jesus which point to His possession of a real human nature? Why does he refuse to exclude God from the world, and assign creation, not to some angelic demiurge, but to the Logos Himself, the immediate representative of

God? Why, even when he speaks of knowledge and faith, does he so sedulously avoid the nouns, which were the familiar Gnostic watchwords, and so invariably employ the corresponding verbs? These differences are not accidental. They represent the tolerant temper of a Christian thinker who, recognising some modicum of truth in Gnosticism, sought to harness some of its terms to Christian service, doubtless hoping thereby to gain the ear of men whose Gnostic sympathies made them indifferent to Christianity as ordinarily presented.

Yet John, with all his willingness to cast Christian thought into new forms, remains firmly loyal to its substance. His faith is born, not of the mists of speculation, but of the facts of experience. He is so convinced a theologian simply because he is so great a Christian. He wrote when the generation which had known Jesus in the flesh had almost passed away, and the primal enthusiasm, which had carried the Church forward in its triumphant career, had to some extent spent itself. The Jewish controversy, with the resultant breach between Judaism and the Church, lay behind. Moreover, the expectation of Christ's speedy return, though still cherished, was growing fainter with the delay in its fulfilment. Evidently the end was not yet, and the Church, confronting the future, needed to be braced for new tasks and triumphs. So John, realising that the

hope of Christianity lay with the Gentiles, and that, in addressing them, the Gospel must appeal not simply to their conscience, but to their thought, translated Christ's message, as he had come to know it, into terms congenial to the Gentile culture of the time. Naturally this view implies that there is in this Gospel a considerable subjective element, but on that point criticism is practically agreed, the only matter of debate being its extent. The Fourth Gospel is "an inner life of Jesus"; it embodies not only recollection but interpretation, it is Christ's message brought up to date. The Christ who speaks is not simply the Teacher of the earthly ministry, but the eternal Christ, the glorious Figure who walks amid the candlesticks, and, though glorified, speaks still through His servant to the churches. It is that conviction on the part of the Evangelist which accounts for and justifies the biographical form in which the entire message is presented. The actual writing of this Gospel came at the end of a long and almost unconscious process. The actual words of Jesus, lovingly cherished, had been wrought over by the profound meditation of a mind not sunk in its own abstractions, but stimulated at once by the facts of experience and by the friction of the speculative world in which John lived. More and more had he come to see in Jesus the response to the needs and thoughts of that world, and quite naturally in his lips the Gospel assumed a form in which that fact

was expressed. Truthfully does Browning make John say :

“ Much that at first in deed and word
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,
Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,
Guarded and guided still to see and speak,)
Of new significance and fresh result ;
What first were guessed as points I now knew stars.”

So, whilst the Synoptists give us the facts of Christ's life, John introduces us to their inner meaning. He gathers up his sense of the worth and work of Jesus into a presentation which, just because it is so intimate and spiritual, appeals to the head not less than to the heart, as the crown of New Testament literature.

B.—THE PERSON OF CHRIST

The central place which Jesus occupies in this Gospel makes it fitting that our study of its theology should begin with **the doctrine of His Person**. If, as seems natural, the Prologue is to be taken as outlining the theme of the Gospel, the purpose of the writer is to identify Jesus with the Logos or Word of philosophic speculation. The Logos is described as eternally existing in the circle of the Divine nature, related to God, yet distinct from Him, and serving as His agent in creation and in the illumination and redemption of men.

It is in the saying, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," that the transition is made from the Logos of abstract speculation to the Jesus of history, with whom thenceforth the narrative is wholly concerned. Hence, though the term "Logos" does not recur, the conception is always in the background, and the burden of John's effort is to show that all the Logos attributes and functions, notably the mediation of life and light to men, are focussed in the incarnate Jesus, who satisfies, therefore, the rational as well as the religious needs of man.

The term "Logos," introduced with an abruptness which argues its familiarity to John's readers, was a gift to the Christian vocabulary from **Greek philosophy**. Having the double meaning of "reason" and "word," it was first used (by Heraclitus of Ephesus) to denote the rational principle which was seen to be exhibited in nature. In that impersonal sense the term was transmitted through Stoic philosophy to Philo, a learned Jew who flourished at Alexandria early in the first century. Plato had also used the term in the plural to express the various super-sensible ideas—the thought-models, so to speak—in harmony with which, conceived as separately existing, the actual had been made. On the philosophic side Philo unified these two conceptions, so that to him the Logos was transcendent as well as immanent, this double view being the easier because the term by its twofold meaning suggested reason both as an abstract

principle and as expressed in speech. To Philo also, as he was a Jew, the Logos idea brought relief to the religious situation. Under the influence of legalism, Jewish thought had come to construe the holiness of God in terms of materialism, so that the idea had grown up that only by God's utter separation from the world could His purity be secured. Direct contact with the world being thus denied to God, the need was felt for some intermediary to act on His behalf, with the result that in Job and the Book of Proverbs "Wisdom" becomes the Divine agent in creation, whilst late rabbinic exegesis went so far as to substitute the "Word of God" for the Divine name in passages of the Old Testament where direct action is ascribed to God. So in Philo two currents, Greek and Jewish, blended, and the Logos idea was enriched in that it came to denote the entire outgoing of the Divine activity, and hence had a dynamical as well as a rational side.

With Philo, however, the Logos, even when he speaks of it in personal terms as "Son of God" and "only begotten," never seems to have been more than a vivid personification of the abstract activity of God. It is not so with John. He comes to the idea, not by the path of speculation, but by that of experience. He anchors himself in historic fact, and makes that control his metaphysic. Anxious though he is, therefore, to meet philosophy on its own ground, **his starting-point is**

the historic Jesus. He is a Christian first and a philosopher afterwards, with the result that he is no thorough-going Philonist. Fact with him dominates theory, and hence, being convinced that the Jesus of history fulfilled all the functions ascribed by philosophy to the Logos, he does not hesitate to modify the philosophic conception in two directions, viz., he assigns to the Logos a human nature and a living personality. To him the Logos is no abstract rational principle or the personified outgoing of the Divine activity, but is a Divine Person manifested under human conditions. In his assertion, "The Word became flesh," the emphasis of his thought is on the predicate. Yet, strange to say, one charge levelled against John is that, in the interests of the Divine nature of Jesus, he obscures the representation of His humanity. The charge is plausible in that the Evangelist omits to relate the Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (though in i. 32 the former event is implied), and is silent as to the agony in Gethsemane and the cry on the Cross. But when these deductions are made, there is left to us One who is wearied and thirsty, weeps at Lazarus' tomb, inquires its whereabouts, and, ere He calls Lazarus forth from it, prays to His Father, doing on that occasion for the bystanders' sake what the words "I know that Thou hearest Me always" prove to have been a regular practice on the part of Jesus. Granting, therefore, that the Synoptists give us a fuller presentation of the humanity of Jesus, sufficient is said in the

Fourth Gospel to show that its writer stood at the same point of view.

He writes, however, in **the interests of a larger faith.** The titles "Christ" or "Messiah," "Son of Man," and "Son of God," which are applied to Jesus in the Synoptists, occur also in this Gospel, but in a different proportion. As regards the Messianic office, not only does Jesus on one occasion definitely claim it (iv. 26), but the Baptist and the earliest disciples, as well as Peter later on in Christ's ministry (vi. 69), recognise Him as fulfilling it. In controversy with "the Jews" the Messianic dignity of Jesus comes under discussion, and in one passage (vii. 25-52) various objections are urged against the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, *e.g.* that there was no mystery about His advent (ver. 27), that He came out of Galilee, and was not known to be of Davidic descent and a native of Bethlehem (vers. 41, 42). It seems somewhat strange, in view of the nativity stories in Matthew and Luke, that neither Jesus nor the Evangelist says anything as to the last objection. The probability, however, is that it was felt to be immaterial. The fact is that the term "Messiah" was never big enough to describe Jesus even as the founder of the Kingdom of God. It was too national, and, in view of its history, too unspiritual, to define Him. Hence, though Jesus adopted it, because He felt that He corresponded to a Divine promise and a national hope, He read into it a spiritual content, and on that higher plane

conducts the controversy concerning it, making no attempt to answer objections which only had weight on the plane of an external conception of the Messiah and His work. What he points to as His credentials is the consciousness that He had come from God, and that he had in Himself that which would satisfy the higher needs of man. The objections of His critics are not so much refuted as transcended.

As regards the title "**Son of Man**," the Synoptic usage is reflected in John in that it occurs consistently as a self-designation on the part of Jesus, and appears, moreover, in much the same connections, the "Son of Man" being spoken of as lifted up on the Cross, exalted to the throne of God, and appointed to execute judgment. Just, too, as in the Synoptists the "Son of Man" forgives sin, and seeks the lost, so in John (vi. 27) He bestows eternal life, this gift being mediated by participation in the flesh and blood of the "Son of Man" (ver. 58). The meaning and derivation of "Son of Man" are problems of criticism, but the most likely view is that it was a veiled Messianic title recalling the symbolic figure "like unto a son of man," who in the visions of Daniel receives the Kingdom. It lays no emphasis, even in John, upon the humanity of Jesus, but simply asserts that Jesus, in spite of His lowly guise and the humiliation of the Cross, was in function and destiny identical with that glorious being whom prophetic vision had foreseen. Here John and the Synoptists are at one.

Not so, however, with the remaining title, "Son of God." Whether in its full form, or abbreviated as "the Son," it occurs but rarely in the Synoptists, and there, *e.g.* in the Temptation, means little more than the Messiah viewed as a special object of the Divine favour, or as the antithesis to "Father" (Matt. xi. 27), expresses the ethical oneness between Jesus and God. In its use in the Fourth Gospel the first point to be noted is that it is the distinctive self-designation of Jesus. Nevertheless in some passages it simply recalls the Synoptic meaning. In x. 37, *e.g.*, as the context shows, Jesus claims that the title is applicable to Himself because He possesses a Divine commission. There, and again in xi. 4, where the glorifying of the "Son of God" is explained later (ver. 42) as a belief, created by the resurrection of Lazarus, that God had sent Jesus, the title is virtually equivalent to Messiah, as it is also when used by the Baptist and Nathanael (i. 34, 49). In other passages the ethical, as distinct from the official, sonship is expressed, and stress is laid upon the spiritual intimacy and moral union existing between Christ and God. "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth" (v. 20). "If I judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me" (viii. 16). So constant and complete is this union of thought and will that it is as if the two personalities had become interfused in a way that only mystical language can express. "Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee"

(xvii. 21). The property of each had become their common possession. "All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine" (xvii. 10). This absolute identity on the ethical plane is further declared in the great sayings "I and the Father are one" (x. 30), and "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (xiv. 9). It accords with this view that Jesus uniformly assumes towards God the attitude of dependence. His teaching and works, so He declares, are all derived, not original; they are given by the Father through the Son. Jesus speaks to men all things that He "has heard of the Father." "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing" (v. 19). "The words that I say unto you I speak not from Myself, but the Father abiding in Me doeth His works" (xiv. 10). Out of this sense of dependence sprang the confession "My Father is greater than I." Hence it is no surprise to find that Jesus prays to God, identifies Himself, where worship is concerned, with His Jewish brethren (iv. 22), and even pictures Himself as praying to God in His future glory (xiv. 16). The being so far disclosed by the term "Son of God" is one who on the ethical plane had drawn wonderfully near to the heart of God, and was conscious of such absolute devotion to the will of the Father as made Him, though a man, in a unique sense the Son of God's love.

Yet what we are forced to ask is whether this exhausts the Johannine presentation of the sonship of Jesus.

Are we not taught that this ethical sonship was rooted in a deeper oneness of a metaphysical character—in an identity of essence, so to speak, between Jesus and God? We may begin with the conception of John himself as it is set forth in the Prologue. One undisputed contention is that the Evangelist identifies Jesus with the Logos, who evidently belongs to the Divine order. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Pre-existence, the fellowship with God of One who was Himself an integral part of the Divine nature—these are the positions there affirmed. Hence Jesus, as John views Him, is a being of a new order. The epithet “only-begotten” (i. 14) marks Him as in point of origin, and, therefore, of quality, separate from men, among whom He moves as the source of life and light. Certain affirmations found in the body of the Gospel on the lips of Jesus Himself point in the same direction. Jesus repeatedly speaks of Himself as “sent” by God, or “coming forth” from Him. He has “come down” from heaven, and has yet to ascend “where He was before.” He prays for the glory which He had with God “before the world was,” and in another striking saying tells His critics: “Before Abraham was, I am,” a declaration which in its very form seems intended to express an eternal existence. Similarly, in the conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus explains His familiarity with heavenly things as due to His previous life in the heavenly places, and the Baptist

ascribes Christ's priority over himself to a priority of existence (i. 30). Some of these statements, *e.g.* those which speak of Christ as "sent" by God or "coming forth" from Him, can be interpreted as merely denoting a Divine commission, but others cannot be thus easily resolved, nor does the theory of a merely ideal pre-existence naturally fit the language. Beyschlag and Wendt favour this interpretation, and it is quite true that such a conception was not foreign to Judaism. The Temple, Jerusalem, and the Kingdom of God were thought of as existing in heaven prior to their manifestation on earth. In the same way the Messiah, so it is claimed, though actually non-existent, existed as a thought in which God delighted, before Abraham, or even the beginning of creation, and this view is all that the language of the Fourth Gospel requires. But, to take simply one passage, the saying about Abraham was in answer to an objection that Jesus, though not fifty years old, had spoken as if He had seen Abraham, who had lived centuries before. What possible bearing has His answer upon that objection, if Jesus meant that He only existed in those far-off days as an idea? And why, on that view, were the people who gave Christ's words a literal meaning allowed to go uncorrected? Hints of pre-existence are not wholly absent from Christ's words in the Synoptists, *e.g.* He speaks about David's son being also David's Lord. And in the Fourth Gospel the natural interpretation of the sayings under discussion, especially in view

of the definite language of the Prologue, is that the earthly life of Jesus is regarded as an interval in a heavenly existence out of which He comes and to which He returns.

As regards **the moral perfection of Jesus** the absence of sin is affirmed, *e.g.* in the challenge, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" But far more important than that negative condition is the positive presence of goodness which, within the range of His moral probation, Jesus exhibited in absolute degree. "I seek not Mine own will," He says, "but the will of Him that sent Me." "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him." Clearly, therefore, it is in the last analysis a being of a unique order which this Gospel presents to us. The human nature which Jesus indubitably possesses only partially explains Him. Other men are "children" of God, but He is "the Son" in the absolute sense, and God is "His own Father," the two possessing in the mystery of the Divine nature a bond between them which passes beyond the ethical into the metaphysical. This explains the mysterious aloofness with which Jesus moves among men, as if the light of other days shone in His eyes, and His thoughts dwelt in that other world which was His true home. By such a presentation of Jesus does John fill out and unify the partial conceptions of Jesus which previous thinkers, *e.g.* Paul and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, had furnished. To him more than to any other New Testament writer we owe the doctrine

of the divinity of Jesus, so that his Gospel has justly been described as "the Gospel of the Incarnation." It is quite true that John leaves some questions unanswered. He is silent as to the mode in which the Divine and human natures became blended in Christ; he says nothing (save in a doubtful variant of i. 13) concerning the dogma of the supernatural birth, neither does he tell us what limitations the Logos submitted to on His entrance into a human form. All that John does is to put the two natures side by side in Jesus, leaving subsequent reflection to determine the mode and conditions of their coexistence. He does this because he is only incidentally a philosopher, or even a coherent thinker. He approaches Jesus from the side, not of speculation, but of experience. What he knows as a matter of experience is that in Christ God has come nigh to him, and has made upon him so wonderful an impression that only the Divine category seems to befit Jesus. Hence, whilst John summons many witnesses to testify to the greatness of Jesus—the Baptist, the Old Testament, the words and works of Christ—the final witness is the authentication which the Father has given to the Son in the Divine power which has marked the impact of Jesus upon the world. The Christian movement, as it unrolled its wondrous story before the apostle, demanded for its explanation a Christ, as its Founder and Sustainer, who came out of the very bosom of God, and tabernacled among men as God manifest in the flesh.

C.—GOD AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The theory that the Fourth Gospel is simply the **grafting of Philo's ideas** on to the Christian stock breaks down, when we consider its doctrine of God. On different grounds, philosophical in the case of Philo, religious in that of Palestinian Judaism, which regarded holiness as involving separation from matter, the notion of God as transcendent had become prevalent in the first century. But a God wholly transcendent is also unknown, since there are no relations between Him and the world which can become the medium of His self-manifestation. Philo perceived this difficulty, and hence in his philosophy it is the Logos who through patriarch and prophet acts as the sole medium of Divine revelation to man. That idea reappears in this Gospel. God is defined as "Spirit," by which term is meant that God is lifted above the limitations of space and time, and, being immaterial in substance and imperceptible to the senses, is most akin to that invisible element in man, the attitude of which to God is the soul of worship (iv. 24). God being thus outside the world known to the senses, no man has ever seen Him, and He can simply be known through the only-begotten Son who has revealed Him. Jesus is "the Way," and only by Him can men come to the Father.

Now in this claim there may be nothing more than the Synoptists report Jesus as affirming of Himself in

the words, "Neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." It cannot be denied that in Jesus we have a conception of God which is unique, and that the name "Father," as defined by the filial consciousness of Jesus, represents a doctrine which is both new and final. The glory of Jesus among the prophets of mankind is that He has shown us God as "the Father." Moreover, in so far as we view the Logos as a Divine principle of revelation which, eternally active, simply attained fullest utterance in the historic Jesus, we may regard all truth as mediated by His activity, so that every worthy conception of God which came to birth in seers and prophets, outside Judaism as well as in it, was but the unrecognised product of "the Spirit of Christ which was in them." But we cannot be sure that John took this comprehensive view. To him Jesus seems to be the sum-total of revelation, so that God can only be known as He is known through Christ. Yet at this point alone has John affinity with the Logos doctrine of Philo. The Father, of whom Jesus becomes the revealer, is **not simply a transcendent God**, aloof and passionless. No! He loves the world, gives His Son for its redemption, raises the dead and quickens them, draws men to Christ, is immanent in the believer, and, speaking generally, is ceaselessly putting forth energy in a way which justifies a similar activity on the part of the Son. "My Father worketh hitherto and I work."

Even the phrase "holy Father," like the cognate expression "righteous Father," only lays stress on the ethical perfection of God. The notion of holiness as meaning simply separation from the world is absent when the holiness of the Divine Father becomes the plea on which the high-priestly Christ pleads, not for His followers' separation from the world, but for their protection from its evil (xvii. 11, 15). And finally, we see again and again that the controlling element in God, as John presents Him, is love. But what does that conception imply but the ceaseless forth-going of the Divine to the human, the constant entrance of God into relations in which His love may find satisfaction as it enriches and saves?

The Johannine **doctrine of the Holy Spirit** requires lengthier examination. Part of the prophetic forecast concerning the Messianic time was, that it would be marked by a great access of the Divine activity described as an "outpouring of the Spirit." The Spirit, moreover, was associated with the Messiah Himself. Both of these ideas find a place in the Johannine doctrine. To begin with, though John supplies no account of the Baptism of Jesus, the Baptist is made to refer to it as marked by the descent upon Jesus of the Holy Spirit (i. 33). Evidently that was regarded by the Evangelist as the central element of the rite in its significance for Jesus—the reception by Him of the Divine equipment for His Messianic career. It may have been John's wish

to emphasise the spiritual chrism as also the central element in Christian baptism. At all events it is significant that, whilst entrance into the Kingdom of God is made by Jesus in His talk with Nicodemus to depend on birth "of water and the Spirit" (a phrase which, as most interpreters are agreed, refers to baptism on its two sides, the formal and the symbolical), emphasis is laid on the activity of the Spirit as alone giving worth to the ordinance. Only as the outward rite is attended by the inward reception of the Spirit does it pass from a religious form into a means of grace. So far as Jesus is concerned, the intimate communion of thought and will existing between Him and the Father is frequently referred to, but only once is the Holy Spirit associated with it. In what is clearly one of John's own meditations (iii. 31-34), the message of Jesus is described as concerned with "heavenly things," which one who is of the earth, even though he be a prophet, cannot declare save with the limitations which attach to his earthly origin. But Jesus is a native of the sphere to which the heavenly realities belong, and, therefore, is above all other seers and prophets, since He speaks of what He has seen and heard, His moral and intellectual faculties being quickened in this act of communication by the endowment of the Spirit without measure. Thus does John set Jesus apart, and beholds in Him and His teaching a plenary activity of the Holy Spirit.

And that which belonged to Jesus during His

ministry is **passed on by Him to His Church.** The conceptions of this Gospel on this subject are extremely definite. So absolutely restricted at first to Jesus Himself is the Holy Spirit, that a saying about rivers of living water (vii. 39) is interpreted by the Evangelist as referring to the Spirit, which, he says, "they that believed on Him (*i.e.* Jesus) were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." In perfect accord with this view is the teaching in the Upper Room that the coming of the Holy Spirit was dependent on the departure of Jesus. "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you" (xvi. 7). Not until after the Resurrection, when the process of Christ's separation from the disciples and of His glorification had already begun, does Jesus breathe upon them, and say, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." When we see that that passage occurs in close connection with a description of what were to be the functions of the Church, viz. the discipline of its members and the mission to the unsaved world, it is not strained exegesis to infer that it is the actual endowment and tasks of the early Church which are there vividly receiving prophetic description. The broad fact remains that the Spirit is regarded as belonging to the Church only after the glorification of Jesus. He takes the place of the absent Christ. In so far as the Spirit was with the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus, He was only with

them as He was operative in Christ. Such, at any rate, seems to be the meaning compelled by the distinction of both tense and phrasing in the words, "He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (xiv. 17). He who even then dwelt with the disciples, because He was present in the Master with whom they lived, was to pass from an external Power embodied in Christ only to an inward Presence existing in all His followers.

It is upon these two things—the inwardness of the Spirit, and the restriction of His indwelling to the Church—that emphasis is laid. The world cannot receive Him, because it lacks affinity for Him; "it beholdeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." He belongs simply to the Church because His reception (spoken of sometimes as if it were that of the Father and the Son) is morally conditioned; it is possible only to those who love Christ and keep His words. Action upon the sinful world is contemplated, for He is to bring to it conviction concerning sin and righteousness and judgment, but this action is not from within, but from without; indeed it is the Holy Spirit present in the Church and fortifying its witness which is thus to convict the world. The Spirit dwelling in Christ was subsequently to have His earthly home in the Church, which thus in its organic form represented a second Incarnation, that final tabernacling of God with men of which it could be said, "He shall abide with you for ever." Taking the place of the departed Christ, the Spirit was to be to the disciples all

that Christ had been, "another Comforter" or Paraclete, standing by their side to defend them when imperilled, turning their sorrow into joy, enabling them to do the "greater works" seen in the spiritual transformations of the apostolic age, and guiding them into all truth concerning Him whose disciples they had been. Of all the functions of the Spirit the last is viewed as supreme. The Paraclete is "the Spirit of truth," and His main work is prophetic, viz. the interpretation of Christ. "He shall take of Mine," says Jesus, "and reveal them unto you." Not only was He to bring all things to remembrance, but the disciples were to see in sayings and deeds of Jesus a meaning which had previously escaped them. And to illumination of the past was to be added foresight of the future, for, said Jesus, "He shall announce to you things that are coming." Yet never is the Spirit an independent witness speaking of Himself, but, for the past, He repeats the message of Jesus, and, for the rest, Jesus now declares from heaven through the Spirit the "many things" which He could not speak on earth, for "all that the Spirit heareth that doth He speak." Hence all new truth concerning Christ and His redeeming purpose into which the Church entered after His ascension was viewed as the gift of the risen Christ, continuing from heaven His earthly ministry. To the Church He who was the theme of its Gospel was also the maker of its theology.

Such, at any rate, was the view of John, and those who

see in the discourses of this Gospel John's own reflections fused with recollections of what Jesus had said, yet all without qualification put into the lips of Jesus, regard that mode of expression as not so much a literary artifice, as a courageous and sincere application of the view that the whole had come from Christ; it had been spoken to John, either to his ear or in his heart, by Jesus Himself. That brings us to what seems a **certain confusion of thought** in John's presentation of this view. In most of the sayings in the Upper Room the Paraclete is apparently distinct from Jesus. He is "another" Comforter, *i.e.* another being of the same order as Jesus Himself. Sent by the Father at the entreaty of the Son, He comes to fill the gap caused by the withdrawal of Jesus. Yet, on the other hand, there are certain sayings where the new visitant is identified with Jesus. "I will not leave you orphans," says Jesus, "I will come to you." "We will come to Him," He says once again, there uniting the Father with Himself in the indwelling of the Spirit. In the saying "I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it" (xvii. 26), the natural reference in the future phrase is to the added revelation which the disciples were to receive in the dispensation of the Spirit. How is this apparent inconsistency of statement, which meets us elsewhere in the New Testament, *e.g.* in II. Cor. iii. 17, to be explained? We think that the explanation is to be found in the New Testament view of the Spirit as absorbed with the

continuation of the work of Jesus. He is not pictured as discharging independent functions. He simply continues the interrupted ministry of Jesus, keeps green the memory of what He said and did, expounding its deeper significance, and at the same time supplementing it in word and deed. The Old Testament idea of the Spirit as the underlying principle of life in man and the universe disappears, or is transferred to the Logos, and the Spirit, withdrawn from the world, moves wholly within the Church, and there is so engaged with the person and history and purpose of Christ that to the consciousness it is as if He were Jesus over again, Jesus hidden from men's eyes that He might enthrone Himself in their hearts. It is in this identity of function that we must seek the explanation of the apparent identity of agent.

That this identity, however, is more than apparent it would be presumptuous to say. John's language, unless we are to withhold from words their natural meaning, seems to point to distinctions of a personal kind within the Godhead. The Holy Spirit **passes from an Influence to a Person**, for not only is He represented by the masculine personal pronoun—an unusual usage, which cannot be hastily dismissed as a personification—but the functions of teaching, &c., ascribed to Him are such as fall properly within the sphere of personal activity. Moreover, as we have seen, the Logos, identified with the historic Jesus, is expressly declared to be "God." Hence there is, according to this Gospel, a plurality in

God, a threefoldness which, none the less, was felt to be compatible with monotheism, for the Father is referred to as "the only God" and "the only true God." How the Evangelist held and harmonised the two conceptions he does not say, any more than he speaks concerning the Spirit's relation to the Logos or to the world prior to the Christian era. But if John leaves some of our questions unanswered, the explanation is that, whilst formulating a theology, he is still more **declaring an experience**. It is less the philosopher who speaks, than the Christian furnishing philosophy with the raw material for the construction of a final synthesis. Starting with his monotheistic faith, the writer feels that the God of his nation had come nigh to men in Christ in a manner so vivid and unique that nothing but a conception of Jesus as Himself Divine seemed to fit the facts; in Him God Himself, and not simply a Divine messenger, had appeared among men. Nor was this all, for to their experience of God in Christ there had been added another manifestation, subtle, pervasive, so like in power and quality to that which the Church had known in Jesus, that it also demanded to be conceived as personal and Divine. So spake the voice of experience. The Church, worshipping the holy Father, felt that it had been founded by a Divine Son, and was the home and sphere of a Divine Spirit. It was for theology, with philosophy as her handmaid, to work up these facts of experience into a scheme of thought which should

possess unity with itself and with the religious history of Israel and the race. A beginning was made towards that synthesis when John identified the Jesus of history with the Logos of philosophy. But the entire problem was too great and complicated to be solved at one stroke. It remained for minds more deeply versed in philosophy than was John to give to his doctrine of God that scientific formulation which, after much controversy, was essayed in the great councils of the Church. But the doctrine itself, founded, as it was, upon experience, was part of the evangelical deposit which the Church received, and, because she could not doubt the experience, she felt no serious disposition to doubt the explanation which John had attached to it. Her business, so she felt, was not to question what she had received, but to expound and defend it. In this way only does post-canonical literature exhibit advance upon the doctrine of God which is furnished in the Fourth Gospel.

D.—THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

To express the blessings of salvation John employs a distinctive terminology the nature of which will be examined later. When we ask whether those blessings are regarded as open to all men, the answer cannot be hastily given. There are sayings in the Fourth Gospel which **suggest a universalism** as complete as that which we find in the Pauline Epistles, and thought obviously

moves in an air freer than that which prevailed when Paul fought his great battle against Jewish exclusiveness. Not only does Jesus without protest seek converts among Samaritans, and rejoice at that ingathering of the Gentiles of which the eagerness of some Greeks to see Him was a prophecy, but He openly declares that He has other sheep, not of the fold of Judaism, and that His intention is to gather them in, so that Jew and Gentile may constitute "one flock" under "one shepherd." The death of Jesus was intended to effect that consummation (xi. 52). When, again, we are told that God loved the world, and in proof thereof gave Christ "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish" (iii. 16), universalism seems unequivocally expressed. But whilst salvation passes obviously beyond all racial limitations, and is not the monopoly of a single nation, the possibility of its realisation by all, which alone can give it real universality, will depend upon how far men are able to meet the conditions on which its bestowal depends. To examine the teaching of the Fourth Gospel on this point is our next task.

One characteristic of the Johannine writings is that truth is set forth through **the medium of contrasts**. There runs through them what has been called an "ethical dualism." "Light" is set over against "darkness," salvation is a passage from "death" to "life," the little community of Christian disciples is sharply distinguished from the "world," "things below" are contrasted with

“things above,” “flesh” with “spirit.” Of these antitheses the most important for our immediate purpose is that of **the Church and the world**. There are two Greek words, both rendered by “world” in our English Bible, and both representing the existing order of things, but doing so from different points of view. One term, reproduced bodily in our word “cosmos,” answers to a characteristic Greek conception by which the visible framework of nature, whether embracing the entire universe or simply the earth, was viewed pre-eminently as the embodiment of order. The other expressed the favourite Jewish view, which, surveying reality under the categories of time and spirit, preferred to speak of æons or epochs, the existing order being ethically and temporally conceived. The prevalent term for “world” in John is “cosmos,” and into it there have been brought limitations of its original usage. In only a few phrases, *e.g.* “before the world was,” or “before the foundation of the world,” can it be said to comprehend nature as well as man. In general it follows a restriction, first manifest in Alexandrine Greek, by which it denoted mankind viewed as a society organised on a rational and moral base. Such was the “world” which God loved (iii. 16), and into which the Logos came as its light. But a still more restricted view remains. One of the familiar conceptions of the New Testament is that what we term “the forces of evil” have an organised form. They constitute a kingdom having Satan as its prince,

with invisible powers of the air, in various grades and ranks, marshalled under his leadership, and leagued with men on the earth, the peculiar sphere of Satan's activity, through whose hostility to goodness and truth evil finds its supreme manifestation. Hence the "world" comes ultimately to mean the anti-Christian, and even non-Christian, forces and personalities of the time, and so stands as the natural antithesis of the "Church." Our difficulty in realising this sharp contrast arises mainly because we do not read ourselves back into New Testament conditions. Living, as we are privileged to do, in a society which, even where it is not professedly Christian, pays large homage to Christian ideals, we fail to realise the different conditions which prevailed when every community of Christians was like some outpost in an enemy's country, set in an environment of Jewish hostility or heathen corruption, planted in a society which was either bitterly hostile or contemptuously indifferent, and was absolutely alien in faith and practice and ideals. Under such circumstances it was only to be expected that the cleavage between the Church and the "world" should be decisive and complete.

It is the "world" thus conceived which appears repeatedly in this Gospel, the term occurring eighty times in John, as against only twelve instances in the Synoptists, where, except in one doubtful passage (Matt. xviii. 7), the predominant Johannine meaning is absent. **A kindred conception** is seen in another Johannine anti-

thesis—that of “light” and “darkness.” It is under the latter figure that the kingdom of evil is described by Paul as well as John. But this term, too, has an ethical rather than an intellectual connotation. It denotes the realm, not from which the revealing light is withheld, but where it is ineffectual. “The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness did not lay hold upon it” (John i. 5). Men who assume this attitude to revelation abide in darkness, and do the deeds of darkness, and are in league with those whom Paul, in a phrase which combines the two antitheses already referred to, are “rulers of this world of darkness” (Eph. vi. 12), the spiritual personalities which hold sway in the kingdom of evil. It is this darkness of practical unbelief—spoken of sometimes, therefore, under the figure of spiritual “death”—which the Logos came to dispel. The “life” which was in Him had revelation as its function; it was “the light of men.” Its manifestation was with a view to revelation. Hence John speaks of the historic Jesus as “the true light,” the only light that had full correspondence with reality, and of Him he says, in what is probably the correct translation of i. 9, that He “by His coming into the world lighteth every man,” just as Jesus, expressing a corresponding idea, is reported as saying, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” But this does not mean that the light actually dispels the darkness. The natural analogy fails at this point, and the picture John

gives to us is that of Jesus coming to a world so involved in evil that darkness wraps it in, a darkness which consists not simply of an intellectual blindness, but of a radical perversion of will, with the result that, though the light shines, the darkness rejects it. Hence, in a saying that is probably one of John's own reflections, we are told that "the light is come into the world," and that men, because their deeds were evil, "loved the darkness rather than the light," with the consequence that the coming of the light had for them issues of judgment and condemnation (iii. 19).

Such, then, as John surveys the situation, was the sharp cleavage running through human society. It has already been pointed out that we find it difficult to make the gulf between Christian and non-Christian as absolute as he appears to do. The immediate problem, however, is whether he recognises any possibility of passing from the world to the Church. For one charge levelled against the Fourth Gospel is that **it despairs of the world**. The charge derives some specious colour from the words found in iii. 20, 21. There we are told that the man who habitually does evil things hates the light, and shrinks from the conviction which approach to it would involve, whilst he who does the truth comes to the light, to find in it the seal of approval upon his past deeds. In these and other words some critics have detected an ethical fatalism. We seem to be taught that Jesus comes to reveal the moral quality of men

rather than to change it. A select few are drawn to Christ by spiritual affinities, because already they "are of the truth," or "hear the truth." They are the sheep who know the Shepherd, and are known of Him, and by a spiritual instinct follow Him. But even their coming, so it is claimed, has in it an arbitrary element. They come to Christ because the Father draws them, or they are the Father's gift to the Son, or the objects of Christ's gracious choice. But are these expressions necessarily fatalistic in meaning? Need they imply more than that a man's place in Christ's following, instead of being the result of caprice or accident, is in harmony with spiritual law, and is an expression of it? That in the working of this law there is a mysterious and seemingly arbitrary element will be granted by all who see how far, as regards both original nature and environment, things are ordained for us, so that our very freedom is hedged about with limitations.

Whether all play of the human will issuing in moral change is excluded, will appear as we proceed. For over against those who "are of the truth" John puts the sinful world which, habitually doing evil, hates the light and refuses to come to it. Between the two classes there seems to be an impassable gulf. The world, alienated from the truth, is so hopeless that Jesus does not even pray for it (xvii. 9). His sole concern is for the elect company who, belonging originally to God, have been granted by Him to Christ (ver. 6). In this

presentation we seem far removed from that optimism with which the Jesus of the Synoptists sees good even in the worst, and, because all are recoverable, seeks all, and despairs of none. But is the difference as fundamental as some have supposed it to be? Is there not a sense, *e.g.*, in which the **judgment** for which Jesus comes into the world **has redemptive significance**? Is not judgment often the beginning of salvation? It is true that, to those who already love the truth and do it, the presence of Christ means no condemnation, for they move to Him by moral affinity, and receive from Him the deepening of what they already are. But the evil man must first know his sin, ere he will forsake it. He may not come to the light in the sense that he voluntarily seeks it, but the light comes to him, and, just as the presence of Christ woke up in the heart of Zacchæus a sense of sin, so may judgment be the forerunner of salvation. But though necessary, it is only initial, and it is as meaning that judgment was not Christ's final word, but salvation flowing out of judgment, that we can harmonise the sayings in which He sometimes affirms that judgment was, and again, as compared with salvation, was not, the purpose of His coming. In the presence of Christ men knew themselves for what they were, and thus took the first step towards becoming what they should be.

Other considerations show that the existing state of men, and even of the "world," was not to be the final

one. The very disciples had once belonged to the world, but had passed out of it by the choice of Christ or the gift of God (xv. 19, xvii. 6). A passage from the "world" to the Church had, therefore, once been open, and that it was not yet closed appears in the fact that Jesus speaks of His disciples having a mission to the world akin to His own, and contemplates those who would believe through their word (xvii. 18, 20). It is suggestive also that Jesus, in looking forward to the Cross, sees in it the crowning judgment and defeat of the world. In that consummation of His rejection, the unbelief, which was the world's gravest sin, was to stand so manifest to the world itself that Christ's defeat would really be His victory, since "the prince of this world" would be cast out of his dominion, and the Cross itself, set in the framework of the glory which was to follow, was to multiply indefinitely the influence of Christ. "I," says He, "if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself" (xii. 32). It is as if His glorification through the Cross would, as Jesus viewed it, release the "world" from the malign power which held it in thrall, and set free in Christ new powers of redemption, so that none would finally resist His attraction. Another consideration pointing to the salvability of the "world" is that the Holy Spirit has a mission to it. He is to bring home to it the sin of its unbelief, to make plain as regards Christ the righteousness which has been sealed by His exaltation to the Father, and to disclose the

judgment and overthrow of the world's prince which appear in the death and glorification of Christ. What meaning could such a mission have if it did not contemplate redemptive issues? Surely the thought of Jesus is that conditions were on the eve of being created by the world's own action which would make for its salvation.

A similar conclusion follows from the antithesis of sons of God and sons of the devil. "Ye," says Jesus to His opponents, "are of your father the devil" (viii. 44). But there is no conflict between this saying and the Synoptic teaching concerning the universal Fatherhood of God. What too many fail to see is that, though God is the Father of all men, all men are not necessarily His sons. Fatherhood and sonship are conceptions which move on the ethical plane; they are concerned with moral attitude and disposition, and so, whilst God always has the fatherly disposition towards man, man often lacks the filial spirit towards God. Nay, judged by moral affinities, men too often are children of the devil rather than children of God, and the desires of their father they choose to do. But there, again, a passage is open from the one relationship to the other, and the mission of Christ was not simply to tell men what they were; it was to make men other than they were. Moral affinities can be changed, for even of the spiritually dead Jesus does not despair. Spiritual death can be vanquished by the gift of life which He brings in overflowing measure. "The hour now is," He says

with exultation, "when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God ; and they that hear shall live " (v. 25). Finally, what is the symbolical teaching contemplated by the stories of the raising of Lazarus and of the healing of the man born blind and of the sufferer at the Pool of Bethesda, if it be not that no sinful man need remain as he is, but that the most desperate state of soul is one for which the Christ of this Gospel has grace and salvation ?

E.—THE WORK OF CHRIST

One broad distinction between the Pauline Epistles and the Fourth Gospel is that, whereas to Paul the death of Christ was the very heart of the Gospel, so gathering into itself the purpose of the Incarnation that the public ministry of Jesus receives but meagre attention, John, on the other hand, places no such emphasis on the Cross. Its relation to sin is not absolutely ignored, for the Baptist refers to Jesus as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," whilst some critics have detected a theological motive in John's apparent revision of the Synoptic chronology, as regards the day on which Jesus was crucified, in that the Evangelist wishes to identify Him with the paschal lamb, thus endorsing Paul's words: "Our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ" (I. Cor. v. 7). The notion of Christ's death being an atonement for sin is, on that view, not absent from John's thought. Nevertheless he

shows no fondness for so depicting it. He prefers, first of all, to put it in line with the previous ministry, and to exhibit it as the culmination of Christ's life. To depict the Cross as the main purpose for which Jesus became incarnate hardly accords with the language ascribed to Jesus on the eve of His passion: "I glorified Thee on the earth, *having accomplished* the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (xvii. 4). The Cross, as the Fourth Gospel exhibits it, is but Christ's fidelity to His vocation carried to the ultimate. Jesus dying is but the Shepherd laying down His life for the sheep, or the Master giving to His friends the highest manifestation of His love. In so far as the Cross has a distinct meaning, it is, secondly, the glorification of Jesus. With its shame banished to the background, it is the lifting up of Jesus from the earth, the beginning of that exaltation in which, like a spiritual magnet, Jesus would draw all men to Him, and gather into one family the scattered children of God. Like a grain of wheat which perishes but to renew itself in ampler fashion, Christ's death, viewed as the first stage in His withdrawal to the unseen, meant release from the limitations which had beset Him in the incarnate state, and entrance upon unexampled glory and might.

It may be that John was less disposed to put special emphasis upon the Cross, because to him the whole career of Jesus had such deep significance. To him **incarnation** is a larger idea than atonement. His

normative idea is that of Jesus as the self-revelation of God. Sin, therefore, which is illustrated in this Gospel by the growing estrangement of the Jews from Jesus and their ultimate rejection of Him, is in its gravest and inclusive form unbelief in Christ. Jesus being what He was, the unveiling of God Himself to man, how could there be deeper guilt or greater perverseness than to turn away from perfect truth and holy love, to have God reveal His glory to men, and yet for them to be blind to it or despise it? Sin became blacker when men sinned against light such as that, and it was the grief of Jesus that the revelation by which He sought to save men only involved some in deeper guilt. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin" (xv. 22). **John's exposition of sin** may seem meagre, but the secret is that he is simply concerned with sin as it stood expressed in the world's attitude to Jesus. In the way of revelation He was the best that God could give us; for, unlike prophets and lawgivers who had but spoken in God's name, or the Baptist, who, at the most, had been only a witness to the Light, Jesus was the Light itself; He was "the Truth," the ultimate reality of things brought within human comprehension, God Himself revealed in human flesh. And being the best, He was also the last, for even such further truth as the Spirit would furnish was, as we have seen, simply concerned with the fuller exposition of that historic revelation which had already

been given. So the whole theology of this Gospel is Christo-centric, and since its central truth is Jesus the Incarnation of God, all other ideas, sin included, are construed in relation thereto, and the only sin which concerns the writer is the rejection of Christ. To see Him, and yet not believe in Him—that is the sin of sins.

We see, therefore, why no special stress is laid upon the death of Christ. Instead of approaching the Cross by way of the Law and sin, as Paul does, John seeks a synthesis which will cover the whole earthly life of Jesus, and this he finds in the notion of incarnation. Jesus was the Divine Son living under human conditions that He might reveal God. Hence the humiliation of that life is lost in the glory which John sees continually breaking through it. It is consonant with this interpretation that the two main categories under which the work of Jesus is described are those of light and life. He is **the light-bringer and the life-giver**. The two ideas are combined in the somewhat difficult saying concerning the Logos: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men," *i.e.* the activity of the Logos was manifested in the sphere of revelation. But if that be so, is the light which belongs to what we call natural religion included, or is the reference simply to the revelation brought by the Jesus of history? Tempting as is the former interpretation, two sayings already referred to, one a saying of Jesus: "As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world," and the other a description

of Him as "the true light which by its coming into the world lighteth every man," appear to favour the latter construction. In other words, John is not surveying the whole movement of revelation; his gaze is restricted to that portion which was mediated by Jesus. That is so perfect and direct that to John nothing else counts. Just as Abraham's joy was in foreseeing Christ's day, so even the Old Testament is valuable only in so far as it testifies of Christ. Contrasted with the Law which was given by Moses, are the "grace and truth" which came by Jesus Christ (i. 17). Hence to John revelation is summed up in Christ. "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

But whether Jesus calls Himself Light or Truth, what He means is that, where God is concerned, He brings men into touch with reality, He has the power to impart true knowledge. His unique relation to God, and the fact that He is a native of that sphere to which "heavenly things" belong, give Him supreme qualifications to reveal God. And how valuable is the service which Jesus thus renders to men! Goodness may not in this Gospel be identified with knowledge, but they are closely allied. In the recognition of God as He stands unveiled in Christ, is for John the beginning of new life in the soul. It is by knowing the truth so disclosed that men become free with the freedom belonging to a son, in contrast to the bondage attaching

to a slave (viii. 32). That life of sonship, again, is possible "to them that believe on" Christ's name (i. 12), *i.e.* yield themselves to all that is implied in the revelation which He brings. Most interesting, too, is the power which again and again is assigned to the words of Jesus. They judge the disobedient, cleanse the hearts of the disciples (xv. 3), and are life-giving. "Life eternal," says Jesus, is "that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (xvii. 3). Upon such a saying as this those who see in this Gospel simply an interpretation of the Christian faith in terms of Gnosticism base their conclusion. To the Gnostic the deliverance of the soul, which was primarily release from bondage to matter and the senses, came simply through a knowledge of itself as divine, such a perception being beyond ordinary men and possible only to an intellectual aristocracy. But John is far removed from this worship of mere intellect. If he borrows Gnostic terms, he puts into them his own meaning. When he represents Jesus as saying, "If a man keep My word, he shall never see death" (viii. 51), much more than mere apprehension of His teaching is implied. He speaks of His words "abiding" in men; He calls men to "come to" Him, to "believe in" Him—phrases which denote a moral attitude, such an acceptance of both the message and the Messenger as ensures that the truth becomes a conviction by which men live. It is in a knowledge issuing in life and a

faith justifying itself by works, and not in the arid intellectualism of Gnosticism, that this Gospel grounds our salvation.

Similarly Jesus is **the giver of life**. Once again the Evangelist is interpreting Christ in terms of experience. As surely as Jesus had brought to men a new revelation, so had He been to them the source of a new moral energy so marvellous that the Christian experience constituted thereby had, in contrast to the previous state, been a passage from death unto life. To describe such an experience the word "life" had already been consecrated by Hebrew usage. "Life," as the Old Testament employs it, is a rich term, including bodily life, for the concrete thought of the Hebrew did not contemplate a disembodied existence for man, but regarded life, whether here or hereafter, as belonging to personality in the completeness of body and spirit. But the "life" so expressed was ethically conceived, being supremely the man set in true relations to the living God. How Paul took over this idea and put it to Christian use is seen from the most cursory study of his Epistles. He realised what new powers of service and moral achievement had come to his nature through the impact of Christ upon it. To be a Christian was to enter into "newness of life," to become "alive unto God in Christ Jesus." Even the death and resurrection of Jesus became but symbolical of an experience in which the new humanity constituted by Him died to the

sinful principle and rose into the victorious life of righteousness. John takes us to the same goal by a slightly different route. In his Gospel "life" has mainly the rich ethical meaning which was a bequest from Judaism. Some expositors, *e.g.* Prof. Scott, detect in it, in addition, a quasi-metaphysical element, due to the Evangelist's contact with Greek thought. As the Father had life in Himself, so had He given to the Son to have life in Himself, that He might impart it to man. That this life is in some way different from what men possess by nature is indeed suggested by the fact that it is by a new birth that men enter upon it. But that this implies the communication to man, as by some spiritual magic, of a share in the Divine essence we are by no means persuaded. The freedom and joyousness of true ethical relations—that to the Jew was "life"; and the language of this Gospel is satisfied if we take "life" to mean the soul abiding in joyous and harmonious fellowship with the living God.

Of this life the Fourth Gospel knows **no source but Christ**. He is the central stem upon which the disciples, as branches of the vine, depend. And here, once again, emphasis is laid upon knowledge. To John the first step in religion is to recognise Jesus for what He is—the sent of God and the revelation of God. There are no half-tones in John's picture. He takes no account of the light belonging either to natural religion or to heathen faiths. To him distinctions are sharp and

simple. There is the world on the one hand, which does not know God at all (in viii. 55 even the Jewish opponents of Jesus are also declared to be in this state of ignorance), and there is Jesus knowing Him and alone revealing Him to men. He, therefore, who would come into real fellowship with the Father must come through Christ, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." There was no other path. He was the Door of the sheep. All who had come before Him, purporting to discharge His functions, were "thieves and robbers." A uniqueness in the sphere of revelation so surpassing as to amount to positive loneliness is the element in Christ which, according to John, makes a right view of Him so important. How important it is we may learn from the fact that knowing and believing are used almost indifferently, e.g. in xvii. 3, xx. 31, to express the condition on which "life" is bestowed, or the two notions are conjoined, as in the saying: "They knew" (better as inceptive aorist, "they learnt, apprehended") "of a truth that I came forth from Thee and they believed that Thou didst send Me" (xvii. 8). It is in harmony with that representation that, as the result of Christ's manifestation of His glory at Cana, "His disciples believed on Him" (ii. 13), and that the miracles generally are presented as "signs," and, instead of being, as in the Synoptists, a response to faith, are creative of it. Even then **faith is more than knowledge**, if by the latter is meant a bare assent to certain intellectual conceptions.

Faith is not only the recognition of reality, but the adoption towards it of an appropriate moral attitude. Notwithstanding the emphasis which John places upon a right view of Christ as the manifestation of God, that is to him only a first and necessary step towards such an attitude of the entire moral personality to Jesus as shall embrace devotion to His person and obedience to His words. Knowing has to find its befitting complement in being and doing.

One other matter, too important to be ignored, remains to be discussed. In the famous discourse on the Bread of Life, Jesus, in a saying introduced by a solemn "Verily, verily," declares: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have not life in yourselves" (vi. 53). The idea conveyed by those words is significant; indeed its assertion was the main reason why John told once again the story of the Feeding of the multitude. Yet the language suggests that more than that miracle is in view. Criticism leans strongly to the conclusion that the figures of eating Christ's flesh and drinking His blood, which do not naturally spring from the miracle of feeding, have in view **the two elements of the Lord's Supper**. It has been remarked that John gives us no account of the institution of that sacrament. What he wished the Church, however, to understand by it is supplied here. Briefly, his endeavour is to draw the Church away from the outward form to the inward meaning. What the Lord's Supper was to mean, if it

was to possess any value, was not the mechanical reception of certain emblems, but a mystical appropriation of Christ Himself, who, as the author of spiritual life, was also its sustainer. Just as in baptism, as we have seen, John insists that it is the operation of the Holy Spirit attending it which alone gives it efficacy, so it is the appropriation by the believer of Christ, the living Bread, which is the essential thing in the Lord's Supper. How far this teaching was meant to be a correction of unspiritual ideas concerning the Sacraments which had grown up in the Church, we need not stay to discuss. Two things are evident: first, that John vindicates, as against mere formalism, the supreme place of the spiritual as the condition of grace, and next, that Christ is always the vital principle of Christian experience. It is only such a union with Christ as involves the constant nourishment of the human soul with His life that is the source of spiritual vitality. "He that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst" (vi. 35)—there, in terms not so obviously reminiscent of the Lord's Supper, the idea is once again set forth that the mystical union of Christ and the believer mediated by the great surrender of faith is the way of life. For thus to yield ourselves up to Him is to find our nature fed from a Divine source, and so wondrously quickened that it is as if He who is our law without had become our dynamic within. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

F.—THE LAST THINGS

One fact concerning the eschatology of the Synoptic Gospels is that it fits into a framework which nearly two centuries of Jewish thought had made traditional. The **central episode** round which the whole drama revolved was the inauguration in glory of the Kingdom of God. Various conditions had led to that event being conceived as happening after an apocalyptic fashion, *i.e.* the Kingdom was to be suddenly established by the dramatic intervention of God from heaven. According to the Synoptists Jesus taught that He would play an important part in that crisis, for He speaks of the Son of Man "coming on the clouds of heaven," or "coming in His Kingdom" or "glory,"—phrases which point to a dramatic reappearance of Jesus from that unseen world to which He had gone. Hence the effective establishment of the Kingdom and the Return of Christ are associated events. With them were connected Judgment and Resurrection, for these had relation primarily, not as in our thought, to death and the future life, but to that new age or world-period in which the Kingdom, finally set up by God, was to be an accomplished fact. To it Judgment was a necessary preliminary, since the living needed to be sifted in order to determine who were meet to "inherit the Kingdom," and who, by reason of transgression, deserved to be excluded from it. The dead too, had to be raised—the righteous that they

might enjoy the fulfilment of the hopes which death had frustrated, the wicked that they might taste the bitterness of exclusion from the new era of bliss. Hence the Synoptists speak of "the day of Judgment," or "that day," or "the last day," by this final phrase being meant the closing day of the existing æon, "the end" or "consummation of the age."

The Synoptic presentation of the Last Things falls, therefore, into a coherent system, and our first inquiry must be whether **this traditional framework reappears** in the Fourth Gospel. The answer is that it does. The Return of Christ, Resurrection, Judgment—all are there. In several passages "the last day" is explicitly named as the occasion of both Resurrection and Judgment. Moreover, the difficulty which the last chapter of this Gospel—an appendix due probably to the disciples of John—suggests as existing in the Church because, in spite of what seemed to be a promise by Jesus that the apostle should live to see His return, John had died, or seemed likely to die, before it took place, shows that the belief in the visible return of Jesus still lingered in the Church at the end of the first century. That difficulty proves also, as we may note in passing, that a return of Jesus to the believer at death does not, any more than His return in the Spirit at Pentecost, satisfy His promise to the disciples: "I come again, and will receive you unto Myself." But side by side with the traditional eschatology there is another in which the old terms are

used, but with a transformed, because spiritual, meaning. Only rarely does John refer to the Kingdom of God, but it is significant that on the two occasions on which the phrase is ascribed to Jesus, the familiar conception denoted by it is spiritualised. In the conversation with Nicodemus the Kingdom of God is a spiritual order into which admission is procured by a birth from above, whilst before Pilate Jesus disclaims the idea that His Kingdom is "of this world," and, therefore, created and defended by material force. No! it is a realm over which He is King who, as witness unto "the truth," brings those who hear Him into the sphere of the spiritual and the real (xviii. 36, 37). In this Gospel, therefore, the Kingdom is a spiritual and present reality.

This conclusion is sustained by several converging lines of evidence, one being the frequent use which John makes of the phrase "eternal life." In the Synoptists the experience so defined belongs to the future, "eternal life" being not so much endless existence, though the notion of unending duration lay in the background, but the glorious experience which man would enjoy in the coming age, *i.e.* in the future and perfected Kingdom of God. Paul modifies that conception only so far as to insist that the Christian already possesses in his present endowment of the Spirit "an earnest of the promised possession," and that the eternal life of the future is the harvest of a man's present sowing to the Spirit. But John carries the conception one step further. To him

“eternal life” is an experience to which men are admitted here and now. Not that the Synoptic and Pauline idea is wholly absent. The “living water” which Jesus gives wells up in the recipient “unto eternal life,” *i.e.* it has “eternal life” as its final outcome. The reaper gathereth fruit “unto life eternal.” “He that hateth his soul in this world,” says Jesus, “shall keep it unto life eternal.” But that is not the predominant view. John’s startling contribution to Christian theology is that the entire cycle of the Last Things is **spiritualised and brought into the present**. Christ, instead of having yet to come, was already present in the ministry of the Spirit. Abiding as a spiritual presence in the heart, Jesus still led men into the truth, speaking no longer “in parables” (xvi. 25), but declaring God so openly that those who had never seen the Lord were not less favoured than they who had. “Blessed,” says Jesus, “are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (xx. 29). If such disciples saw, it was with spiritual vision, for it is such a transference from outward gaze to inner perception which Jesus contemplates when He says, “A little while and ye behold Me no more”—there disappearance from physical sight is denoted, for the verb “behold” denotes gazing as at a spectacle; “again a little while, and ye shall see Me”—that is the new and spiritual sense of His presence which was to replace the old physical relations (xvi. 16). Professor Scott suggests that the perplexity which, in the context to

that passage, is attributed to the disciples is, together with the question of Judas, "Lord, what is come to pass that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" a rhetorical device employed by the Evangelist to voice difficulties on this subject felt by the Church of his time. "The solution of all your difficulties," he seems to say, "is to realise that the Return of Christ is spiritual, it is His abode in the hearts of His followers, His activity in the Church. There, in a manifestation unseen, and to Christians universal, is the true Parusia of Jesus."

One passage, "I come again, and will receive you unto Myself" (xiv. 3), is admittedly difficult to interpret. What is the nature of the coming there described, and of the fellowship with Christ which ensues? Paul's teaching offers no sure clue to the problem, for, whilst in an early epistle (1 Thess. iv. 17) meeting the Lord and being ever with Him are connected with Christ's dramatic and visible reappearance, in one of his latest letters (Phil. i. 23) "to be with Christ" is something the apostle hopes to attain through death. It has been pointed out that, in the context of xiv. 3, the way which Jesus is about to take, and in which, therefore, if the disciples would be with Him, they must follow Him, is simply the way to the Father, and hence it has been urged that nothing more is meant by being with Christ than sharing His deep insight into, and fellowship with, God. In that case "I come again" refers simply to a spiritual

Parusia, Christ present in the teaching Spirit. But one is bound to add that such an interpretation of the words does not seem obvious, and it seems preferable to admit that here and in the appendix we have the Synoptic idea of a visible return of Jesus, the notion appearing elsewhere in this Gospel being that of a return which was invisible and spiritual. At the same time we are not compelled to infer, as some scholars do, that the two ideas represent separate layers of tradition, one conservative and the other advanced, but only one of them Johannine. Different as the conceptions are, they are not incompatible with each other. A spiritual presence of Jesus existing now does not necessarily rule out the notion of a visible return in the future, and one can imagine the two ideas being, when first grasped, regarded as supplementary to, rather than contradictory of, each other, and so being tolerated side by side. It is often by supplementing old truth, rather than by abruptly substituting for it the new, that men gradually pass to a transformed conception. So do we find it in the eschatology of this Gospel, and it has been the disappointing delay, more than once referred to in the New Testament, in the visible return of Jesus which has ultimately caused many thoughtful people to substitute for that expectation the notion of a Christ already present through His indwelling in the Church. They have learnt to see in that, and not in some spectacular appearing on the clouds of heaven, "the real presence" of their Lord.

A similar spiritualising of the other features of eschatology appears in this Gospel. Resurrection, whilst future and bodily, is also present and spiritual. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" (v. 25). Jesus even now is "the resurrection and the life" (xi. 25), making dead souls to live with a life which is "eternal," so that they who believe do not come into judgment, but have passed out of death into life (v. 24). Obviously Jesus has in mind in these and similar sayings more than escape from, or survival of, physical death. The latter idea is included, in the sense that the Christian's existence after death in the fulness of his personality is even now guaranteed. But such an assurance is the corollary of that moral quickening which contact with Christ has given to the entire nature, and in virtue of which the man lives a timeless life, and has been lifted to a realm where death is ineffective. Faith in Christ has so quickened his entire personality that the dissolution of the body has become a negligible incident, and the man can be spoken of as never seeing death (viii. 52, xii. 25). Nothing avails to break the continuity of life. Judgment, again, is present as well as future, every presentation of Christ to men compelling the assumption by them of an attitude in which moral condition is declared. It is with such representations that John supplements the existing eschatology. Doubt

may excusably be felt as to whether a consummation with the accessories which apocalyptic pictured, describes fully the way in which the present order of things will move on into the ideal. A visible return of Christ, the resurrection of the body placed in the grave, and a spectacular judgment of the race, are conceptions which, literally interpreted, do not seem so necessary to us as they were to the Jew. But the beliefs to which John lifts us, viz. that man only lives in reality as he lives in fellowship with the will and Spirit of God; that the present joins hands with the future in the sense that our final state will be but the present movement of the personality carried forward to its goal; that judgment even now registers itself in our nature; that the true resurrection is the escape of the soul from the trammels of the flesh and the bonds of materialism into the lofty spiritualities of faith and love—these beliefs represent **the ultimate facts of religion**, and are “things that cannot be shaken.” John, it is true, could not altogether emancipate himself from his inherited conceptions, and so in his writings we have the old view left mechanically side by side with the new, and no real attempt is made to harmonise them. But the fact remains that the new view is there, and that the New Testament itself, therefore, releases Jesus from the limitations of Judaism, translates Him into the universal sphere, and sets Him before us in the end as a great Captain of Salvation,

so far away from us that He embodies the ideal, and yet so near to us in love and grace, and in the mystical intermingling of His Spirit with ours, that even now our feet move towards the ideal, and in what we have and are through Him we have the assuring guarantee of the much more that there finally shall be.

CHAPTER II

THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

So far as these Epistles are concerned, **the problem of their authorship** may be very briefly dismissed, because most critics are agreed that they emanated from the same school of thought, and, indeed, from the same writer, as did the Fourth Gospel. This latter view is questioned by such eminent scholars as Pfleiderer, Schmiedel, and Martineau, whilst Wellhausen, who regards the Fourth Gospel as a composite work, has ventured the opinion that John xv.-xvii. and the First Epistle of John came from the same hand. There need, however, be no serious hesitation in subscribing, without Wellhausen's limitation, to the commonly accepted view. The appearance of the same key-words in both Gospel and Epistle; the resort to antithesis, already seen to be characteristic of the Fourth Gospel, and manifest in the Epistle in such contrasts as Light and Darkness, Love and Hate, Life and Death, the Brotherhood and the World; the resemblance in literary structure and style, which is too close for one document to have been simply a laboured imitation of the other—these are con-

siderations which point to unity of authorship. Indeed the interesting theory has been put forward that the Gospel and the First Epistle were composed and sent out together, the Epistle being a sort of covering letter supplementing the Gospel with such definite and practical injunctions as were demanded by the situation in the Church directly addressed.

The absence of any opening greeting or closing salutation has led some readers hastily to conclude that this Epistle was a treatise issued at large to the Church. But John's appeal to "my little children," his description of his contemplated readers, or sections of them, as "beloved," "fathers," and "young men," and his detailed acquaintance with their past history and present dangers, prove that he is **writing to a definite community**, which, if this letter was written at Ephesus, was in all probability one of the churches of Asia Minor. The danger with which it was threatened was the mischievous influence of certain heretical teachers who had once belonged to the Church, but had gone out from it to "the world," the non-Christian element in society, with which lay their true affinity (ii. 19). They seem to have been fairly numerous, and so poisonous in their influence that John, branding them as anti-Christ, declares that their appearance was in harmony with prediction, and only represented that outbreak of virulent opposition to the Church which was to usher in "the last hour" and the return of Christ. What their tenets were this

Epistle helps us to see. They denied that "Jesus is the Christ" (ii. 22), *i.e.* they denied the identity of the man Jesus with that Divine emanation which they called Christ; to use a phrase which is probably the true reading in iv. 3, they "annulled" or "dissolved" Jesus, *i.e.* broke up the unity of His historic manifestation, denying that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. The heresy referred to belonged to the **Docetic type of Gnosticism**, to which, as well as to Gnosticism as a whole, allusion has already been made (p. 15). Moreover, with error in creed was associated licence in conduct, for the false teachers exhibited also that libertine and antinomian phase of Gnosticism with which we shall make further acquaintance in the pages of Second Peter and Jude.

The Christians to whom John wrote seem to have been free from this virus. Thanks to their keenness of spiritual perception, due, as the Epistle says, to "an anointing from the Holy One" (ii. 20), they had seen its true malignity, and had thrust it forth. "I have not written unto you," says John, "because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it." Nevertheless pestilential falsehood was in the air which they breathed, and might, so insidious was its nature, find fresh access to the Church, so that not only does John advise his readers not to believe "every spirit," but "to prove the spirits," *i.e.* to keep a critical eye upon men who professed to be inspired teachers, but, believing that attack

is the surest defence, he makes a pronouncement upon the whole situation. And there is significance in his point of departure. He starts from the sure ground of experience. His answer to doubts concerning the reality of the Incarnation was **the reaffirmation of the apostolic witness**. "That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld and our hands handled" concerning the manifested Word of life "declare we unto you also" (i. 1-3). Faith finds its refreshing at the fountain of the historic facts. But how are they vouched for here? What is the precise reference of the "we" in the above passage? Obviously it includes more than the writer, for the singular form of the pronoun is found later, *e.g.* in ii. 7, 12, v. 13, where he alone is meant. It must, therefore, be the traditional and collective testimony of the Church, derived in the first instance from those who had lived in closest intimacy with Jesus, to which the quotation refers. More weight, of course, would attach to the declaration made therein if the writer himself had been one of the original witnesses, and his use of "we" predisposes us towards that conclusion. But, on the other hand, it does not, as would the singular, absolutely compel it, and it may simply be the well-founded and, "from the beginning," the continuous witness of the Church to the facts of Christ's incarnate life which is here solemnly reaffirmed. John feels that the surest safeguard against speculative error is that we should keep our grip upon

the facts of history. Faith is always imperilled when it drifts from its anchorage in historic fact.

It was because John discerned this peril that he feels moved to such strength of invective, calling the would-be perverters of Christian truth liars and even anti-Christ, direct and deadly antagonists of the faith. Their Docetic doctrine of a human Jesus upon whom the spiritual Christ descended at His baptism, deserting Him subsequently prior to His Passion, he meets by declaring that in **the Christian affirmation** that Jesus was the Son of God, the whole historic Christ was embraced; not simply He that came "by the water," *i.e.* was, as Docetism allowed, the recipient of the Baptism, but He that came also "by the blood," *i.e.* endured in reality, and not in mere semblance, the death of the Cross (v. 6). Nor was John content with a mere appeal to the facts on which the Christian Church had been built. The facts themselves had had a history; they had derived fresh momentum from the attestation of that spiritual experience which faith in them had again and again created. That is what is meant by the testimony of the Incarnate life—twofold because it includes the Cross no less than the Baptism—being supplemented by that of the Spirit, who, being the Truth, can only confirm that which is true. It is noteworthy that John's apologetic makes no use of the Resurrection. But, as from his Gospel we might almost expect, its place is taken by the Spirit, whose presence in the heart of be-

lievers is adduced as evidence that they are in vital union with the Christ from whom that Spirit has come (iv. 13). The historic Christ, as set forth in apostolic witness, had proved to those who had trusted in Him the power of a new life, with the result that the objective message had found confirmation in a subjective experience. Hence the faith of the Church builds not simply upon the witness of men, but upon the still greater witness of God (v. 9-12). And because attested fact is thus reinforced by inward experience, the apostle will hold **no truce with Gnostic speculation**. He feels that his own convictions must find a sympathetic echo in every one who "knoweth God" in such a way as to have vital experience of Him, for to "know" with the whole personality in the sense that, after the Hebrew idea, God is appropriated with the affections and the will as well as with the thought, was, in contrast to the cold and barren intellectualism of the Gnostics, John's conception of a true knowledge of God. Of the truth of his own convictions the apostle is so sure that he dares to make affinity with them the touchstone of truth and error, just as he is equally certain that the welcome which Docetic antinomianism found in anti-Christian circles branded its advocates as "of the world." "We," he says in bold contrast, "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."

Nor is he less emphatic when from the doctrines of these false teachers he comes to consider **their practice**. For these "intellectuals" set such store by their *gnosis* or "knowledge" as to believe that its possession not only constituted salvation, but rendered conduct a matter of indifference. The natural result was that error in thought was attended with shameless laxity in conduct. How corrupt Christianity must speedily have become, if that foul schism between belief and practice had been tolerated, John was quick to see, and he falls upon it with an unsparing vigour. Too much was at stake to permit of smoothness of speech. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "If we say that we have not sinned" (*i.e.* since our conversion), "we make God a liar, and His word is not in us." "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (i. 8, 10, ii. 4). The challenge in those statements is direct and uncompromising. John flings it out in such defiant assurance, because his ethical fervour has its ground in what he has found God to be in Christ. God is Light, and God is Love—those are **the two great affirmations** on which he takes his stand. Light undimmed by the least admixture of darkness symbolises the absolute purity and righteousness which meet in the perfect holiness of God. And if, as is the Father, so must also be His children—a premiss which underlies all John's reasoning—Light in God

must, negatively, exclude sin from man. Fellowship involved moral affinity. At present that affinity on man's part might be revealed in aspiration more than in achievement, but its perfect realisation awaited the Christian in the future. For when Christ, coming forth again from the unseen, is manifested, "we," says John, "shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is" (iii. 2). But even whilst the Return only gilded the horizon as a gracious hope, Christians were to be moving towards that holy perfection which would then find its consummation. "Every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He" (*i.e.* Christ) "is pure." Of great significance in this context is the stress which John lays upon **the moral perfection of Jesus**. "Jesus Christ the righteous," "In Him is no sin,"—such is the apostle's picture of the Typal Man. For though Paul's conception of Christ as the Second Adam, the Head of a new, because redeemed, humanity, is not formally present in this Epistle, it is there in idea. Christians are described as those who have been "begotten of God," with the result that the Divine germ within them is bound to unfold in harmony with type, and that for man is exhibited in Christ, "the first-born among many brethren." In what is at first a startling passage John says, "Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because His seed abideth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God" (iii. 9). And again, "Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not"

(iii. 6), a saying in which we have recalled in idea, though not in terminology, the Pauline doctrine of the mystical union between the believer and his Lord. The teaching of these and similar passages presents difficulty until we see that John is construing Christian conduct in the light of the ideal, and doing so justifiably, because only he can claim to be a Christian who in effort and aspiration is steadily set towards the achievement of that ideal. The tense of the verb "sin" in the original of the sayings quoted is significant, for, being present, it denotes **habitual transgression**, a life surrendered to sin. That John does not expect absolute freedom from sinful lapse in the saved man, is shown by the provision to which he points for the removal of such sins. He writes, it is true, that his readers may be helped to avoid sin altogether; but, inasmuch as occasional transgression is sure to occur even in the life of the best, he reminds them that the Christian, when he sins, has the hope of forgiveness, inasmuch as he has in the presence of the Father an Advocate or Paraclete who represents his cause. Christ, who thus acts on behalf of sinners, whether they be in the Church or without, can do so efficaciously, because He is a "propitiation" for sin *i.e.* He, in virtue of His infinite sacrifice, presents on behalf of the race a claim upon the grace and clemency of God (ii. 1, 2). The thought of Christ thus standing on man's behalf in the presence of God is curiously akin to the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where

Jesus, as the great High-priest of humanity, having passed with the blood of His sacrifice into the heavenly sanctuary, appears for us there before God. Thus sin even in the Christian may, on confession, be forgiven, and its defilement cleansed away (i. 9). But though occasional lapse is to be expected, patient tolerance of sin and habitual surrender to it are anathema to John. The man, he says bluntly, who claims to be in fellowship with the Light, and yet is at the same time walking in darkness, lies, and his life is an acted falsehood. Creed must work itself out in life, and spiritual fellowship must have its fruit in the "walk," the characteristic movement of a man's ethical activities. "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked" (ii. 6),—by the light of that clear principle John exposes and condemns the hypocrisy of a libertine Gnosticism masquerading in the garb of Christianity.

But **God also was Love**, and so he who claimed to be abiding in God must prove that his claim is true by himself living in the spirit of love. In this truth John emphasises the positive side of Christian duty. As one who had learnt the great lesson taught by Jesus in His disclosure of the Divine Fatherhood, he declares love to be the very essence of God, and the motive which prompted the manifestation in time of the Incarnate Son. In God's love, of which the gift of Christ is made the ultimate measure, there lies the originating cause of man's love to God. "We love, because He first loved

us" (iv. 19). And it is not only God we love, but man. Towards God, indeed, love is to grow until it is perfected, so that we, with all the fear which clings to an imperfect love cleared away, contemplate with unshrinking hearts the ordeal of judgment. But man is to be loved too. Indeed John knows no love of God apart from the love of man. The test by which we know that we have passed out of death into life is that "we love the brethren" (iii. 14). Having been the recipients of such a love as God has shown to us in Christ, "we ought also to love one another" (iv. 11). To see our brother in need and, whilst having the power to help him, to be so uncompassionate as to fail to do so, is an attitude, says John, with which any real love to God is incompatible (iii. 17). If we do not love the brother whom we see, we disprove thereby our love to the God whom we cannot see. "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also," for to love the God who begat involves that we love also those brethren of ours whom God has begotten (iv. 21, v. 1)—thus does John echo the teaching of his Master, and reaffirm the royal law of love. But he does so with limitations, for here, as in the Fourth Gospel, we have no hint that the Christian's love of his fellow is to travel beyond the circle of the Christian brotherhood. The world hates the Christian (iii. 13), and he, on his part, is exhorted to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (ii. 15). By

that command John certainly means that the Christian's love is to be turned away from the baubles of material good and the fleeting allurements of sensual gratification, because, being earthly, they "perish where they have their birth," and are no final satisfaction to an immortal spirit. It would, doubtless, be reading too much into the words to take them as meaning that Christians were not to love human beings outside the pale of the Church. But if love to such persons is not forbidden, neither is it enjoined. And if the apostle is so much less than his Master that, so far as explicit statement is concerned, the Christian's love in its human manifestation does not, in this Epistle, pass beyond the "brother" and the "brotherhood," we must take John's repeated insistence upon the necessity of such a love as suggesting that something, possibly the bitterness of religious controversy, had disturbed the loving unity of the Church, whilst the implicit exclusion of non-Christians from the circle of love will suggest how closely fenced round the early Christian societies were with an unfriendly world, and in what a hostile environment they had to live.

One more great term meets us in this Epistle, and that is Life—the word, often qualified by the epithet "eternal," by which John describes the state of salvation. Here again this letter joins hands with the Fourth Gospel in that "eternal life" as the gift of God is the Christian's present possession. The figure doubtless appealed to John, partly because the conception of

religion as an inward energy so fitly harmonised with those ethical interests which he was concerned to defend, for, wherever life is, it must yield appropriate manifestations. Sometimes the life of the believer is spoken of as due to the generative act of God, so that Christians are "begotten of God," or are "children of God," the Greek word which John delights to use in expressing this latter idea being not that which, as so often used by Paul, connotes the status and privilege of sonship, but that which suggests a likeness of nature between father and son. Salvation, as John regards it, is even more than a new status; it is a new nature. But in Christ is **the germ of this new life**, which He so typifies and embodies that sometimes the Christian's possession of it is attributed to the mystical appropriation of Him. "God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (v. 11, 12). How, then, we may ask, does John conceive the mystical union between Christ and man to be established and the new life begun? The answer is—by "faith." The principle that enables a man to rise victorious over the "world," *i.e.* over the forces of evil as they are contained in himself and in the organised antagonism of society to goodness, is his "faith" (v. 4), which brings into the soul the begetting activity of God. As to the content of this faith John hastens to tell us in the next verse that it consists in believing "that Jesus is the Son of

God." We are tempted at first to stumble at that definition, because it seems to make orthodoxy the condition of salvation. But so to narrow John's thought is to degrade and pervert it. To him the supreme value of the title "Son of God," as applied to Jesus, is the meaning and authority which it gives to His whole witness to God. If Christ is "the Son," then in Him there stands disclosed after an ideal and final form the nature, grace, and will of the Father. To believe, therefore, in His Sonship is to trust His witness, and to consent, with the will as well as with the mind, to all the obligations of love and obedience to which His witness commits us. Hence faith, thus understood, instead of being the exhibition of a cold orthodoxy, is really the upspringing Godwards of that warm and fruitful devotion which always rises in the soul, when in the face of the Son a man beholds the vision of the Father, and, seeing Christ, knows and loves God.

Such is in substance the teaching of this First Epistle.

The Second and Third Epistles demand but brief discussion, though from certain points of view they are extremely interesting documents. They are both written by one person, who styles himself "the elder," a designation which has led some critics to identify him with John the Presbyter of tradition, and to argue, on the ground of thought and style, that if he wrote these

two Epistles, it is to him also, and not to the apostle John, that we must attribute the First Epistle and the Fourth Gospel. But "elder" here, instead of denoting an office, may simply be a mark of age, as it seems to be in 1 Pet. v. 1, where, if office be also contemplated, such a position is intended as evidently was not incompatible with its holder being also an apostle. It is not impossible, therefore, that these two letters were written by the apostle John. What is evident is that their writer stood in a relation of authority to a group of churches, one of which is addressed in the Second Epistle. For though that letter is apparently sent to an individual, "the elect lady" named in ver. 1, there are critical considerations, derived from the Epistle itself, which have led many scholars to conclude that by that cryptic mode of address some Christian community is meant—perhaps, as Findlay suggests, the church at Pergamum. It is noteworthy that when John has got far enough away from his opening greeting to forget the "thou" "thy" and "thee" to which it committed him, he resorts at ver. 6 to the plural "ye," and never recovers himself again till he comes to the formal salutation at the close. But, waiving further discussion of that point, what seems possible is that certain brethren, going forth from Ephesus with John's approval to break up new ground by preaching the Gospel to the heathen, are entrusted with

a brief pastoral to some church, into the neighbourhood of which their evangelistic tour is likely to bring them. About the church in question John had reasons for anxiety. It, like all the churches in Asia, was threatened with perversion of doctrine and conduct through the activity of vagrant preachers of those heresies denounced in the First Epistle. The apostle was sure that the bulk of this church was sound, but his qualified expression, "I have found certain of thy children walking in truth," shows that he had not a like confidence concerning the whole. And so he reminds them of the old landmarks of faith, and calls them to Christian obedience and love. He sees the grave peril of all past achievement being undone (either his own or theirs, according to the reading we adopt in ver. 8), and the complete fruition of all their endeavours frustrated. "Look to yourselves" he cries in a warning which has in it the note of urgency. No doubt Gnostic error had appealed to some minds because it masqueraded in the guise of progress; it posed as "advanced" thought. But John, probably borrowing the very terms in which this claim had been made, declares that whosoever "advanceth" in a way that means cutting himself loose from the historic Christ, loses thereby his hold upon religion and God. The sort of progress which John understood was that which, as he tells us in his First Epistle (ii. 8),

meant a deeper understanding of the revelation already given, so that an old commandment seemed new when, as the twilight of comprehension passed into the full shining of the day, the old truth was seen to possess larger meaning. But that is progress in truth as distinct from progress out of it, and since the "advanced" thought against which John inveighs seemed to him to belong to the latter type, he sternly forbids this church to give the least welcome or toleration to its evangelists, warning any Christians who might infringe this prohibition, that thereby they would share responsibility for all the evil which might ensue. It is easy to see, as some do, the uncharitableness of a fanatic in this command to boycott the false teachers, but John's intolerance will seem pardonable to those who realise how subversive of both truth and morals was the heresy against which he fought.

The Third Epistle is undoubtedly personal in character, for it is addressed to Gaius, a Christian loyal to truth and apostolic authority, and eminent in the church to which he belonged. In it, however, there was a disloyal faction led by one Diotrephes, who probably was the local bishop. He seems in any case to have been fond of self-assertion, and ambitious for place and power. To the church over which he presided John had written a letter, probably the one which we now

know as the Second Epistle, but Diotrephes had made its arrival the occasion of an impertinent tirade against the apostle. Moreover, as regards the touring evangelists who brought it, he had not only, simply because they came from John, failed to give them, ere they resumed their journey, the temporary hospitality, the furnishing of which fell most naturally to him as the recognised head of the local church, but he had refused to let any one else supply it. Indeed he carried matters with such a high hand as to proceed to expel from the church those who were disposed to give the itinerant preachers welcome. No excuse for this existed in the evangelists themselves. Demetrius, who was their leader, is referred to as a man respected by all, including John himself, and the apostle expresses his gratification that Gaius had extended to the itinerants the hospitality which Diotrephes had withheld. Gaius seems to have been the leader of the loyal party in the church—"the friends" (ver. 14), as John in an arresting phrase describes them, sending to them a greeting from a similar group in his own church at Ephesus. This little letter is most interesting, not only because of the style in which it is composed, but because of the light which it sheds upon the inner life of an early church. Harnack has probably rightly diagnosed the situation when he says that this Epistle belongs to the time at which the monarchical system of church govern-

ment, by which an apostle or elder held authority over a group of churches, was breaking down through the growing eagerness of local churches, doubtless prompted sometimes, as in this case, by some ambitious men within them, to possess freedom from external control, and to enjoy self-government through their own local officers. The issue was ecclesiastical rather than doctrinal, and calls for no further comment.

CHAPTER III

THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

DR. SOUTH is credited with a saying concerning this Book to the effect that it "either found a man mad or left him so." Certainly, with the exception of a few chapters which have always been precious to devout readers, the Apocalypse, with its swift dramatic transitions, and its imagery of beasts and dragons and other bizarre figures, has been a **sore perplexity** to sober Bible students, whilst, on the other hand, it has proved a veritable treasure-mine to those who have a weakness for fantastic modes of interpretation. The Pope of Rome, Luther, Napoleon, have all, according to one or another exegete of this latter school, been pre-figured in this Book. Happily the scholarship of the last generation has given us release from these vagaries, and though it would be too much to say that all the problems of the Apocalypse are solved, we are much nearer to an intelligent grasp of both its nature and its message than we were. One thing which has

induced this happy result is that this Book has been linked up with other literature of the same type. It is a type peculiar to the Jew, and though, apart from stray sections in the Gospels, this is the only specimen of it in the New Testament, it claims the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament, as well as portions of the Books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Joel, whilst in the extra-canonical literature it is represented by such writings, among others, as the Book of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses. It was a peculiar product of the three centuries which began with 165 B.C. Its great characteristics are **the resort to vision** as the professed mode—it was not necessarily more—by which the message uttered was obtained, and **the use of a fantastic symbolism**. On this account it has been held that apocalypse represents the decadent stage of prophecy, and to some extent it may be true that the vision-form of expression implies an obscuration of that clearness of perception which we find in the prophets. But other explanations are much nearer the truth. A “revelation” in this special sense, or its equivalent “apocalypse,” means literally an “unveiling,” and it seems at first a curious name for a book which, as we read it, appears to “darken counsel” rather than to illumine it. But that is because we have failed to put ourselves at the proper point of view. An apocalypse, most happily described as “a tract for bad times,” was

written for a crisis in which the cause of right, owing to the weakness of its human adherents in face of the overwhelming might and pressure of their opponents, was in an abject and parlous state. So dire was the extremity that the only hope of the triumph of goodness lay in a speedy and dramatic intervention of God Himself, and hence the *deus ex machinâ*, an abnormal and effectual interposition of God, is an essential feature of an apocalypse. The assurance of such an intervention was likely to hearten those loyal souls who, seeing all too plainly the overwhelming odds against them, needed, if they were not to waver and fall, that conviction of the Divine reinforcement of their cause, which some seer in their midst was inspired first to see, and then in symbolic form to disclose. That form was in part a necessity of the situation. The seer had things to say which it was dangerous to put into plain speech—John, *e.g.*, dared not have said without disguise some of the truths which he wished the Book of the Revelation to convey—and so he resorted to symbolic expression, choosing, moreover, images drawn from the fantastic and the unreal, so that not only would a hostile reader, chancing upon the book, unsuspectingly dismiss it as a farrago of nonsense or a grotesque fairy-tale, but the reader contemplated by the seer would through the very grotesqueness of the imagery conclude that it veiled an ulterior meaning.

Such, then, was the type of literature to which the Book of the Revelation belongs. One conclusion which immediately flows from the foregoing considerations is that, instead of having reference to remote personages like Luther or Napoleon, it was **a message for the hour** and for a crisis then impending. The Book itself aids us to reconstruct the situation. It was written to seven Christian churches in Asia which had to sustain a malign pressure common, indeed, to Christians throughout the whole Roman world, but existing in provincial Asia to an aggravated degree. The evil was nothing less than the demand Rome was now making on all her subjects that they should worship the emperors, the living as well as the dead. It is Cæsarism with its claim to Divine worship which is symbolised by the beast with the seven heads bearing "names of blasphemy" (xiii. 1). Christians, under the stress of a changed situation, were being forced to reconsider their attitude to the imperial power. The time had been when Rome was in the main their friend, standing between them and the envenomed antagonism of the Jews. The result was that writers like Paul and Peter had counselled loyalty to the existing *régime* as to powers that were ordained of God. But a change became necessary when Rome itself in the person of Nero turned persecutor, shedding the blood of outstanding leaders such as Peter and Paul, and when subsequently, as a

test of loyalty, she imposed a Cæsar-worship which was abhorrent to every one of her Christian subjects. It would appear that in Asia, as compared with some provinces, the cult of the emperor was more elaborately organised, a regular priesthood (the second "beast" of xiii. 11 and "the false prophet" of xvi. 13) being associated with it. Hence Rome, seated on her seven hills, whether typified by "the beast," a fit embodiment of brute force and recalling Cæsarism as an object of worship, or symbolised by "the great harlot sitting by many waters" (the imperial authority being there in mind), who made potentates and peoples through a compulsory idolatry commit spiritual fornication (xvii. 1), is the foe with which in this Book the Church finds herself in mortal conflict. To have grasped that fact, and to realise that the Apocalypse was written to encourage Christians in unwavering loyalty to their faith by an assurance of their ultimate triumph, is to possess the key which unlocks the mystery.

The Book of the Revelation is, therefore, not prose but poetry, in the sense at least that it is a **work of inspired imagination** expressing in symbol and drama what, as its author felt, was the Divine judgment on the existing situation. One thing which scholarship has made plain is that the writer is **not wholly original**. He has used over again imagery which we find in Ezekiel, Zechariah, and other writers of apocalypse. Indeed

Gunkel, in a most important piece of criticism, went further, and treated this Book as a mass of symbolism having to a great extent its origin in Babylonian myths and folk-lore. But he is open to the objection that, should his theory of the primal source be correct, and apply as extensively as he imagines, the source of imagery is one thing, the meaning with which a Christian, or even a Jewish, writer chooses to employ it may be another. Moreover, for some of the symbolism, *e.g.* the seal-openings, the woman with child, the outpouring of the bowls, neither Babylonia nor the Old Testament supplies any credible parallels. They are Christian symbols, and the work of an imagination which, while not disdaining to borrow imagery from existing sources, had power to create its own, and to set the whole, both the original and the derived, to Christian use. In addition it is probably true that John has taken over pieces of existing apocalyptic which lay ready to his hand, and has with slight modifications inserted them in his work. Critics are not all agreed as to where we must find these insertions, but one place is probably chap. xi., where in ver. 2 the writer seems to expect that in the destruction of Jerusalem, viewed then as impending, the Temple was to suffer no injury beyond the capture and profanation of its outer court—an expectation which must be dated prior to A.D. 70. Chaps. xvii. and xviii. also appear to some critics to present a double

picture of Rome's downfall. In some passages it seems attributed to luxury and to the corruption with which Rome had tainted mankind; in others it is because of her persecution of the saints with whose blood she has become drunk. But to the present writer, if the "fornication" charged against Rome be, as the Old Testament would suggest, interpreted primarily in the sense of the idolatrous Cæsar-worship which Rome imposed upon the races under her sway, the two pictures present no necessary discrepancy. The general contention, however, that John has utilised brief existing apocalypses may be conceded, difficult as critics find it to agree as to the precise sections of this Book which may thus be accounted for, though the eating of the little book recounted in x. 10 suggests that borrowing from a previous source is to be looked for in what immediately follows. On this theory we may account for the presence here and there, *e.g.* in xii. 15, 16, of fragments of imagery which, though possessing some relevance to the situation for which they were originally written, seem to yield no satisfactory meaning in the crisis for which John writes. Still, these are exceptions. Composite as were its sources, this Book represents the fusion of them into a unity which bears a Christian imprint, and is intended to express a Christian message. This does not involve, however, that we must discover a meaning in every detail of the imagery. There are undoubtedly, as

in our Lord's parables, minor features which are only intended to give colouring to the picture, or add vividness to the movement, and which belong to the art of the seer rather than to the substance of his message.

Earlier as some portions of the Apocalypse have been seen to be, its composition and issue in its present form must, in the judgment of most critics, be assigned to **the last decade of the first century**, not only because the persecution under Domitian, the then reigning emperor, seems to fit the circumstances which called forth the Book, but because Nero, instead of being thought of as still alive and in hiding in Parthia—a form which the myth concerning his return took for some time after his death,—is pictured as being brought back from hell, a view which cannot be traced till towards the end of the first century. More plainly than any other of the Johannine writings the Apocalypse claims to be written by John, and hence to many the only point to be determined is whether we are to identify the author with John the Apostle, or with that nebulous figure, John the Presbyter. But is not a further conclusion possible? The Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles exhibit a marked unity in thought, style, and language, and may easily have come from one hand. But it is difficult to believe that the same hand wrote the Apocalypse. Phrases and terms, it is true, occur which recall the Johannine terminology, but others equally

characteristic are absent, and such sporadic affinities as exist are sufficiently explained, if traced, not to John himself, but to a disciple who had sat at his feet. For the supreme difficulty which seems to demand that solution is that, whereas the Greek of the Gospel and the Epistles, whilst simple, is grammatical and idiomatic, that of the Apocalypse is full of harsh constructions, false concords of gender and case, and imitations of Hebrew structure, so that the style has been not unfittingly described as "the broken Greek of a foreigner" who knew but imperfectly the language in which he was writing. That consideration, if no other, makes it probable that **the writer of this Book** was different from the author of the other Johannine literature. And if we assign the latter to John the Apostle,—and it can at least be said that the theory has not been clearly disproved,—the Book of the Revelation, even though it purports to come from John, may be due to some other hand. For one feature of apocalyptic literature is that it is generally pseudonymous, *i.e.* the real writer hides himself behind the name of some famous man belonging to the past, and sometimes to the near past. Of this pseudonymity the Books of Daniel and Enoch are familiar examples. Because this was a Christian apocalypse, the name of some Christian leader had to be borrowed, and that of John was chosen (he may have died only a little while before), not only because of the influence which his

name would carry among the churches addressed, but because the actual writer may have felt, as the result of actual fellowship with John during his lifetime, that he was uttering the convictions of his beloved master. On this question, the discussion of which is here necessarily brief, dogmatic assertions are to be deprecated, but it may be claimed that the solution suggested is not unworthy of credence.

Whoever was the "John" of the Apocalypse, it is evident that he has a lofty conception of **the Person of Christ**, for the majestic being, of whom he speaks in ch. i., alive from the dead, bearing at His girdle the keys of death and Hades, and walking with transfigured mien amid the Asian churches, represents One whose only rank is Divine. The seven churches, to whom this Book was addressed, receive each a specific message, mostly of praise commingled with blame. For there is thus disclosed one grave feature of the historic situation, namely, that these Asian Christians were ill prepared to meet the impending crisis. The love of some had grown cold ; worldliness had infected others ; at Thyatira what seems to have been Gnostic libertinism, with its specious initiation into "the deep things of Satan," menaced the purity of the church ; other Christians, *e.g.* those at Pergamum, "where Satan's throne is" (ii. 13), felt with special intensity the pressure of the dominant Cæsar-worship and the vicious seductions of paganism. So

the general call, linked with the promise of fitting reward, was that these churches should recover, or retain, holiness of life, fervour of love, and purity of faith. Only a Church thus armed could stand against the onset of a persecuting world.

These prefatory messages concluded, **the drama of deliverance and judgment** begins to unfold. A door is opened in heaven, and mystic voices are heard, and the seer "in the Spirit" beholds wonderful things (iv. 1, 2). Since John's aim in this Book is to kindle hope within the Church by reminding her of the unseen and heavenly reinforcements which, contending on her behalf, would in the time of crisis ensure preservation and triumph, he naturally begins with an august picture of the greatness and all-pervasive sovereignty of God. Seated on a glorious throne, and with the seven spirits and the four cherubim before Him who typify the perfect forth-going of the Divine energy, the Almighty receives, as symbolically presented by the living creatures and elders, the adoring homage of the universe. It is the picture of a God whose writs run everywhere, and whose power, universally acknowledged, is competent to effect the decisions of His will. Thus is the mind of the reader prepared for the drama of destiny which follows. The Lamb, identified by means of other titles with the Jesus of history, receives also, as was fitting for One who was to be God's agent in the accomplishment of

judgment, the acclamation and homage of the heavenly court, His present dignity and lordship being traced, as the very title "Lamb" was intended to suggest, to His redemptive sacrifice for man. Christ too is competent for His new task, and able to break the seals of the book of doom. And as each of the seven seals is broken,—the number seven probably denoting judgment perfected,—some phase of the Divine action is manifested, and we see how God is able to bring His chastisements to pass, and usher in the Day of Judgment. Conquest, slaughter, famine, and pestilence—these, depicted by horses of various hue, are declared instruments of the Divine vengeance. When these have passed, the opening of the fifth seal discloses the motive God has for vengeance in the appeal constantly made to Him by the blood of His martyred servants. If He delayed avenging them, it was only because He was waiting until their number was complete, and the cup of their persecutors full to the brim. With the sixth seal the hour is ripe, for, when that seal is broken, the Day of Yahweh, with the dread accompaniments long associated with it in prophecy, is ushered in, and the final assize, of which the preceding visitations had been but premonitory, begins.

At this point (ch. vii.), and as a counterfoil to the terror of the foes of the Church, when faced with the avenging wrath of God, we have a **picture of the security** with which Christians, conceived poetically as the true

Israel, pass unscathed through all the foregoing horrors. John has a vision of a redeemed host, representative of many tongues and tribes, constituted by those who "come out of the great tribulation," *i.e.* the persecution which to the seer was even then in progress. Standing before the throne, they praise God for the achievement of His Messianic salvation, and, with a happiness which no distress or sorrow is permitted to disturb, they find the consummation of their bliss in the vision and service of God. Thus are the antagonisms of earth carried up to their final issue. It might have seemed enough if the Apocalypse had ended here, but it belongs to the art of the writer that he seeks to make his moral effective by giving more than one demonstration of it. Hence the breaking of the seventh seal occasions no new action, but heralds a silence in heaven—a silence of awe-struck expectation—preparatory to a new presentation of the drama of judgment. Seven trumpets replace the seven seals, and, as they are each blown in succession, there are let loose upon the earth various forms of destruction, nature and animals, as well as mankind, receiving the strokes of doom. The destructive agencies are in part suggested by the Old Testament stories of the plagues of Egypt and of the visitation of the locust-swarm in Joel, though the woe heralded by the sixth trumpet is probably a concerted attack upon Rome by the barbaric nations of the East. That the Parthians, dominant

among these races, were to be the instrument of God's vengeance upon the Roman power is a theme to which John returns. Meanwhile, after the sixth trumpet, as after the sixth seal, he is diverted by the desire to introduce an episode (xi. 1-13), borrowed, as we have seen, from some earlier writer, but congruous in spirit and, to some extent, in form with the preceding woes. Its insertion paves the way for the sounding of the seventh trumpet, with which "is finished the mystery of God" (x. 7), and the programme of judgment moves to its climax. "Great voices" in heaven announce the subjugation of the cosmos to its rightful Lord, and acclaim the Messiah as He enters upon His eternal reign.

Here, again, we might expect the Book to draw to its close upon this anthem of victory, yet to our surprise we are at once borne back again to the conflict, and find that it is still in progress. The reason must be that, although John has already conducted his readers through two cycles of judgment to the Divine victory over wrong, he has not yet brought his message into as **vivid touch with the historic situation** as he desires. Apart from a vague reference to invasion from the East, the instruments of God's vengeance upon Rome have been elementally pictured as war, pestilence, famine, and various scourges of nature. Now he comes closer to the scene, and at the same time widens the lists, so

that we see who, in his judgment, are **the real combatants**, and what are **the final issues**. Christians are reminded that the foes of the Church are the foes of God, and that their battle against the persecuting might of Rome is but an acute and final phase of the age-long conflict between God and the powers of evil. The order in chap. xii. is a little confusing, because the story of the dragon's persecution of the woman and her child is partly told before we learn how the creature came to be on earth. But if we correct the sequence, what we see is that the present conflict of Right with Wrong is only the perpetuation for a space on earth of the struggle which began with that war in heaven, in which Michael with his angels subdued Satan and his allies. Cast forth from heaven, Satan now has his sphere of malignity in this lower world, and, as the symbolism of xii. 3 shows, is regarded by John as finding his agent in the Cæsars of Rome. The object of attack is the Messiah, symbolically depicted as the offspring of the Jewish Church, though, by a transition of thought easy to a Jewish Christian, the "woman" comes also to express the Christian Church viewed as the new Israel, the historic continuation of the old, and Christians are "the rest of her seed" (xii. 17). Detail more obviously applicable to the immediate situation is furnished in chap. xiii., where two beasts appear. One having ten horns and seven heads, the latter bearing blasphemous

titles, represents the dynasty of the Cæsars, with whom, through their impious claim to Divine worship, the Church was at issue, as also with another "beast," lamb-like in appearance but dragon-like in action, and typifying the priestly orders in the empire who lent themselves in various ways to the spread of the imperial cult. The first beast, however, stands for an individual as well as a dynasty, for it was felt that the anti-Christian venom of the Cæsarian line had come to a head in Nero. His death, when it took place amid universal execration in A.D. 68, was believed by many to be a mere ruse, and his return from some place of hiding was hourly expected. Nero, consequently, is that head of the dragon which seemingly had been smitten unto death, but whose death-stroke was healed (xiii. 3), and he it is, regarded as once more possessed of the imperial power, who is foreshadowed in the mystic number 666 (ver. 18). Such were the foes of the Church in the impending crisis.

And what about her friends and helpers? For answer John takes us to the unseen and heavenly side of things, and we see the hosts of God marshalling themselves in defence of His weak and persecuted people, God Himself standing within the shadow "keeping watch above His own." In ch. xiv. we are shown the Lamb surrounded by His redeemed host, whilst various angels go forth, some of them to urge loyalty to the true faith and

to announce the blessedness "from henceforth" of those who die holding it fast, but most of them to warn men concerning the perils of idolatry, and to proclaim the impending judgment. Then, after a heavenly anthem in which the entire historic process of salvation, which is to have its consummation in the overthrow of Rome, is by partial anticipation celebrated in "the song of Moses" and "the song of the Lamb," the reader is prepared for another description of the cycle of doom. Again the number seven appears, and, as angels pour forth the bowls filled with the wrath of God, the earth becomes afflicted with various plagues and woes, widespread in their horror, and all of them premonitory of **the near approach of the end**. In ch. xvii. the grand *dénouement* begins. To Rome, mystically designated Babylon, and pictured as a foul harlot "sitting by many waters"—a symbol of her extensive sway,—the hour of vengeance has come. The earthly agent of its infliction is the beast which "was and is not, and is about to come out of the abyss," *i.e.* Nero brought back from the dead and released for a space from hell so as to effect Rome's overthrow. Supported by ten potentates, whom he has hired with the bribe of independent kingship, he marches on the city which towards the end of his reign had scorned and rejected him, and in fire and ravage he takes a bloody revenge. Heaven rejoices in his victory, and declares Rome's destruction the merited reward of

her luxury and sin. Still, that is only one stage of the consummation. There would have been no real deliverance for the Church simply in the substitution of a Neronian tyranny for that which already existed. Evil may be permitted to scourge itself by internecine strife, but, if right is to be vindicated, the evil that survives must also be challenged and subdued. Accordingly we have the picture of the heavenly host, singing already the Hallelujah chorus of anticipated triumph (xix. 6), marching forth in dread array, their leader He whose blood-besprinkled robe recalls His atoning sacrifice, just as the sharp sword proceeding from His mouth speaks of judgment. It is a sublime and heart-stirring vision. First the "beast," with his ally, "the false prophet," is taken and cast into the lake of fire; his legions also are exterminated. Then Satan, whose instrument Nero has been, is also assailed, for it is a universe with all the power of evil in it shattered of which this seer dares to dream. Adapting his forecast to a scheme made sacred by previous apocalyptic, John divides Satan's overthrow into two stages. First of all, he is placed in chains in the abyss for a thousand years, during which the Messiah, surrounded by the martyrs who, because of their faithfulness, have been raised from the dead, enjoys the glories of His millennial reign. Then comes an interval during which Satan, released from bondage, once again deceives the nations, and gathers

them together for final battle with the Messiah. In that encounter the power of Satan is utterly broken, and he himself consigned to unending torment, a doom shared, in the second and general resurrection which at once takes place, by all whose names are not found written in "the book of life."

Thus is **the universe purged of wrong** and the power of evil broken. But ideal progress consists not simply in the absence of evil, but in the perfect realisation of good. So this vision-prophecy concludes with the picture of transformed heavens and earth, with the sea vanished, which, like Horace's *oceanus dissociabilis*, was to the Jew the dread source of peril and estrangement. The inauguration of the perfect reign of God is marked by the descent out of heaven of the holy city which was to be its sphere. It had long been part of Jewish belief that, when the kingdom of God was ushered in, a new Jerusalem—Paul's "Jerusalem from above"—conceived as already existing with God, would descend and take the place of the old city. Under that form, therefore, John gives to us his conception of the ideal future. He pictures a city wonderful in its proportions and matchless in its beauty, with streets of gold and gates of pearl and walls of jasper. Holy in that there enters it nothing which defiles, healthy since its inhabitants know neither sickness nor death, happy

seeing that tears are wiped from off all faces and men sorrow no more, the New Jerusalem, needing no sun to lighten it nor temple to localise its worship, is the realisation of all men's ideals, the home of a perfect and redeemed humanity.

With this sublime **picture of the goal of progress** the Apocalypse draws to its close. The epilogue consists of a few admonitions and warnings which, seeing that the writer puts them into the mouth of Christ, bespeak John's profound conviction as to the truth of the message which he had felt moved to declare. And can we not feel that in substance his message was right, and stands eternally true? What he says in effect is that, because we live in a universe in which God exists and works, right will finally prove stronger than might, and deliverance come to all who are oppressed. "Greater is He that is in you," he seems to say to the Church, "than he that is in the world." The ultimate victory of progress has its guarantee in the power of God and in the present activity of His Spirit. It may be true that John, as he applied this inspired conviction to the immediate situation, gave a forecast of the movement of history with which actual events failed to agree, but therein he simply **betrays the limitations** which attach to every true prophet. It is one of the characteristics of prophecy that, in fore-

casting the future, it often errs as to time and mode ; the perspective of history is foreshortened, and the prophet is much more sure as to issues than he is concerning processes. But that is only what we might expect from an inspiration which worked in a vital, as distinct from a mechanical, way. We may feel, too, that the whole notion of apocalyptic was defective in that it isolated man, and left issues and ideals to be realised by the exclusive and dramatic intervention of God. We, with our deeper knowledge of the movement of history and of the relations which bind God and man in holy partnership, have come to see that God works not so much by revolution as by evolution, and that the New Jerusalem is not simply the gift of God from above but the product of man's striving from beneath. Every book, however, has to be judged by the age in which it is written, and by the immediate situation to which it is addressed. The message of the Apocalypse is not necessarily untrue, because it is not the whole truth. In times of darkness and strain, when the limits of both our strength and wisdom are overpassed, this Book has a special message for us, reminding us then that, though we have become so weak and helpless that we can do nothing, there is still left to us a God who can do everything. And in hours less exhausting, when, nevertheless, foes are hot and eager, and the battle for the right is prolonged and hangs with

dubious issue, it is well to be reminded of the unseen hosts that are on our side, and, looking through John's eyes into the open heaven, to behold the final triumph of the will of God. A Book which, with unrivalled splendour of imagery, conveys to the travailing Church of Christ such convictions and hopes, was worthy to bring the canon of revelation to a close.

II

OTHER NEW TESTAMENT
TEACHERS

CHAPTER IV

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

IF we could trust the opening words of this Epistle, **the problems of its date and authorship** would lie within a narrow compass, since it professes to come from "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Three persons bearing the name of James appear on the stage of New Testament history, but of these James the brother of John is speedily removed by martyrdom, whilst James the son of Alphæus is a lay figure, of whom nothing is known beyond his name. The remaining James became in A.D. 44 head of the Christian society at Jerusalem, and from that time forward, as we learn from various sources, was not only influential in the councils of the Church, but commanded also the respect of the general Jewish community. As one of the brethren of Jesus, who believed in Him after His resurrection, this James alone was sufficiently eminent to be known by the name without some added description, so that not only here does he style himself simply "James," but Jude, his brother, when writing his little Epistle,

thought it a sufficient introduction to his readers to denote himself as "Jude, a brother of James." As regards the Epistle now under discussion, it is the general opinion of those who reject, as well as of those who accept, this James as its writer, that the opening salutation is intended to assign its authorship to James of Jerusalem. Those critics, therefore, who regard it as a product of the second century, and simply attributed to James because it accorded with the point of view assigned to him by tradition, are beset with the difficulty that, under those circumstances, a more explicit description than "James" would have been used to denote the alleged author.

If we turn to the Epistle itself we find much that sustains its traditional authorship. Criticism has justly described it as the least dogmatic of all the New Testament writings. It is concerned supremely with problems of conduct. The teaching of Jesus receives great prominence, whilst His death and resurrection are almost ignored. The quotations, too, in which that teaching is recalled, seem to be cited from memory rather than culled from documents, the inference being that the Gospel story was as yet in the oral stage of transmission. **The absence of theological interest** is most credibly assigned to that early period in the life of the Church when, though the Gospel facts were proclaimed, the construing of them in terms of a

theology had yet to take place. Moreover, when James wrote, the days of miracle were not past (v. 15), the return of Jesus was shortly expected (v. 9), and the controversy as to the obligation of Christians towards the Mosaic Law had not yet become acute. If, too, we regard Palestine as the home of the writer,—and figures and illustrations in the Epistle which would occur naturally to a Palestinian, lend support to this view,—the social conditions depicted are those of the first century and prior to the fall of Jerusalem. The most significant feature of the Epistle, however, is the intense sympathy of its writer with Judaism. He moves familiarly among the pages of the Old Testament, finding there, and not, as he sometimes might have done, in the life and work of Jesus, illustrations to enforce his appeals. The very faith which, when divorced from works, he denounces, is illustrated by a reference to the *Shema*, that confession of faith recited daily by every pious Jew, and beginning: "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord." Moreover, not only does James offer no hint as to the existence of Gentile-Christian communities, but **the persons to whom he writes** worship in the "synagogue" (ii. 2), and their sufferings, which included in some cases arraignment before "the judgment-seats" (ii. 6), were such as came, not from their Roman overlords, but from their Jewish brethren. Lastly, yet not least in its

significance, the Epistle in its formal salutation makes no pretence to be a distinctively Christian document. It is addressed "to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion," a phrase which is most naturally interpreted to mean, not an ideal and Christian Israel, but the Jewish community as a whole. It is quite true, the Epistle itself being witness, that James, a Christian himself, has mainly in view Jewish Christians, or such Jews as possessed sympathy with the Christian movement. But the fact that in his salutation he does not segregate these from Judaism and treat them as a distinct entity, points to the time when the Church was not only confined to Judaism, but was regarded as a reform movement within its borders, Christians still using the synagogues and reverencing the traditions of the older faith. The sharp schism, which resulted in the Christian Church being organised as a separate institution, had not yet taken place. For such conditions in the early Church we must look to the time prior to A.D. 50, and that view, therefore, has most to say for itself which dates this Epistle in the immediate neighbourhood of that year. In spite of those eminent critics who would relegate its composition to the second century, we may confidently regard it as the oldest surviving document of apostolic Christianity.

It is not difficult to see **how James came to write this Epistle.** Living at Jerusalem, to which Jews of the

Dispersion were constantly resorting, he had unique opportunities of knowing the state of the Jewish world. The "myriads among the Jews" who had believed, and were at the same time "zealous for the law" (Acts xxi. 20), doubtless included many from the Dispersion as well as Jews resident in Palestine; and of the former many would date their first sympathy with Christianity from some visit to Jerusalem and contact with Jewish Christians of the type of James. Given much to intercession for his nation, and commonly called "the Just" because of his piety, James combined in himself the ethical enthusiasm of the old prophets and the mellow wisdom of the later Jewish literature. In language as well as in ideas affinity has been detected between this Epistle and the Books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. But what James derived from these sources was wholly suffused with the teaching and spirit of Jesus. This is supremely a Christian document, moving on the high plane of the Sermon on the Mount, much of whose teaching it in spirit or letter reproduces.

The Epistle is unsystematic in construction, and **was intended to hearten** its readers in their trials and to correct certain defects in their conduct. Those to whom James spoke were **subject to trial**. This arose partly from their fellow-countrymen, who, in some instances, lent themselves either to religious

persecution or to social injustice. But the main source was the unfriendly atmosphere in which these Jews of the Dispersion lived. The pressure from without was sometimes so severe as to strain their faith almost to breaking-point. Nevertheless James forbids them to yield. He reminds them of the religious value of trial, in that they could glean from it the fruit of patience. The resolute endurance of wrong and hardship—for it is an active rather than a passive grace which James denotes by the term "patience"—was a quality by which this Epistle sets great store. So precious was it, making the man in whom it had ripened to the full "perfect and entire, lacking in nothing," that the manifold trials in whose endurance it was gained were to be borne, not with the fortitude of a Stoic, but with the joy of a Christian.

Such was the message of James to his afflicted brethren. One thing which is very manifest in his Epistle is his **sympathy for the poor** and his distrust of the rich. Jewish society in the Dispersion had its extremes of poverty and wealth. Apart, however, from the injustice which frequently stained the latter, what stirred the soul of James was that social differences intruded even into religious worship. The picture of the rich man with the gold ring and the fine apparel, who is treated with obsequious deference as he enters the synagogue, whilst the poor man is con-

temptuously bidden either to stand or to sit on the floor near to some one's footstool, was doubtless drawn from life. James protests against such invidious distinctions. Accepting the later conceptions of the Old Testament, in which "the poor" and "the quiet in the land" were also the pious, whilst "rich" is frequently synonymous with "wicked," he recalls his readers to the true standard of worth. Men were to be judged not by what they had, but by what they were, and therein the balance dipped against the rich. Not only did rich men, as masters, oppress their labourers, but in religion they were the vindictive persecutors of the righteous, haling them before the synagogue-tribunals, and, in the case of Christians, reviling the holy name which had been called over them in their baptism (ii. 6, 7). To yield special honour to wealth was to forget the beatitude in which Jesus had assigned the Kingdom pre-eminently to the poor (Luke vi. 20). But James' final appeal is to the law of love. To love our neighbour as ourselves was more than an Old Testament injunction; it was "the royal law" in the sense that, as regards human relations, Jesus had made it the supreme law of the Kingdom of God. The love thereby enjoined made unbrotherly distinctions impossible. The argument of James attained special cogency from his conception of **the moral law as a unity**. We may trace this idea, not so much to Christ's compres-

sion of the whole law into the single commandment of love, as to precepts of the rabbis, who, not without occasional extravagances of interpretation, made breach of one commandment the violation of all. Happily James does not linger in this dubious region, for his final word is a command that his readers should speak and act as those who are to be judged by "a law of liberty." Twice in this Epistle does he use that striking phrase to describe the Christian rule of life. To speak in the same breath of law and liberty seems a contradiction in terms, yet in this instance the contradiction is resolved in a higher unity. For when law and nature have become attuned, even law becomes the sphere of freedom, since duty is no longer imposed but chosen, and service is the spontaneous offering of the spirit. When the soul, though under law, no longer knows it as a fetter, religion has become inner and spiritual. In that ideal James and Jesus are one.

Another point wherein this Epistle bears the mark of Jesus is in **the importance which is attached to conduct.** In sayings which seem to recall the close of the Sermon on the Mount, James bids his readers be "doers of the word, and not hearers only." Using the figure of a mirror, he compares the mere hearer to a man who gives simply a passing glance at his reflection, with the result that he speedily forgets what he is like. The true hearer, however, keeps a steadfast gaze upon the holy

law (*cf.* the Psalmist's words: "In His law doth he meditate day and night"), and, in consequence, duty contemplated becomes duty done. In words which seem deliberately to recall legalism with its outward lustrations and ceremonial observances, James affirms that, in the sight of Him who is God and Father, the purest ritual is to show kindness to the afflicted, and to keep the soul free from the stain of sin; in brief, the true "Divine service" is a life of holiness and love.

Such teaching shows how far James, with all his affinities for Judaism, had passed beyond the merely legalistic temper. His enthusiasm for the practical and ethical appears also in his discussion of **the relation between faith and works**. Many critics see in this discussion a counter-statement to Paul's teaching that justification is conceded to faith, and not mediated by "works of the law." But a close examination reveals that the two theories move on different planes. In the Epistle to the Romans the faith which justifies has Christ as its object, whilst in its content it is the movement of the whole personality—thought, feeling, and will—towards the object of trust. In James, however, faith looks towards God, and has other than the Pauline signification. In two passages, where it is applied to prayer (i. 6, v. 15), it denotes, as in the Gospels, a joyful confidence in the goodness of God. In the section, however, concerned with faith and works it implies

simply an intellectual assent to certain truths such as demons exhibit, when they approve the dogma that God is one; it is a cold conviction exerting no pressure upon the springs of action, and is parallel, therefore, to a heartless injunction to the needy to be warmed and filled, whilst their wants are left unsupplied. The relation between creed and conduct was one of the problems debated in the rabbinic schools, Abraham and Rahab being probably stock illustrations adduced in the discussion. The term "justify" came also from the same source. Again, whereas the works of which Paul spoke are definitely called "works of the law," *i.e.* good deeds done merely under the constraint of external commandment, and so constituting simply a formal or legal righteousness, James speaks of "works," *i.e.* conduct in general. Paul was concerned about the inner side of the religious life. There he saw that the operative principle was "faith," and he was content to lay upon it the whole burden of the sinner's justification, not because he was indifferent to conduct, but because the principle, being what it was, could not but express itself in life. Faith was an explosive power, a moral dynamic that worked by love. "Works of the law" there might be, where this faith was absent, but, conceding its presence, appropriate conduct was bound to ensue. But not so with faith as James views it, for, moving as it did, in the chill region of the intellect, it

could conceivably exist apart from works, and when it was thus isolated, it was "dead"; like the body with no indwelling spirit, it lacked the completeness which belongs to life. So what James assails is the divorce of creed from conduct, the schism between profession and practice.

There are several sins against which James utters a special warning. One is a **sin of temper**. Some of the churches were rent with faction or honeycombed with jealousy. Men who possessed "wisdom," and so aspired to teach, looked with envy upon others with the same gift. James feels moved to pronounce such "wisdom" demonic in its source, and earthly in the sense that it lacked spiritual illumination. The true wisdom, he says, came from above,—the man who lacked it could obtain it from God for the asking,—and it bore the proof of its source upon it, in that it was pure and gentle and docile, not given to strife or hypocrisy, but full of mercy and good fruits (v. 17). In that teaching we have an echo of Christ's own claim when, after professing to be the medium of a unique revelation, He bade men come to Him and learn of Him, "for," said He, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. xi. 29). "Wisdom" has its true setting in a pure and gentle spirit.

Another sin which James rebukes is **the uncontrolled use of the tongue**. In various ways the tongue yielded

to license. The Oriental tendency to strengthen speech by garnishing it with all manner of profane phrases caused James to reiterate our Lord's summons to absolute simplicity of statement, whether in affirmation or denial (v. 12). Violence of language often had its root in heat of temper, passion being most easily kindled in religious controversy. Hence we have the exhortation to be swift to hear but slow to speak, slow above all to the anger which was inimical to righteousness, in that it neither commended sound doctrine nor promoted good living (i. 19, 20). Eager aspirants to the office of religious teacher are sobered by a reminder of the solemn responsibility attaching to the use of the tongue, which, as James views it, is the key to man's whole nature (iii. 1, 2). Resorting to picturesque figure, he compares the tongue to the bridle in the horse's mouth, or to the tiny helm controlling the course of a great vessel. Its malignity is seen in the mischief which it is capable of doing. Like the little spark which wraps in flame a great plantation, the tongue, itself set on fire by hell, inflames the whole movement of life. In the microcosm of man's personality it corresponds to the sinful world in humanity. It is an untamed beast defying control, or a venomous serpent working destruction. In its subjugation, therefore, lies the task of the Christian. To say nothing of the inconsistency of the same tongue being used both to bless God when He is worshipped,

and to curse men who, being made in God's likeness, deserve blessing too, so that it is as if a fountain from the same orifice sent forth both salt water and sweet, or a fig-tree or vine yielded alien fruit, there can be no religion where the tongue is left unbridled. James submits religion to this solitary test. Does a man not stumble in his speech? Then the same is a perfect man, for his control of his most rebellious faculty argues a similar dominion over the rest. Does a man, whilst thinking himself to be religious, fail to bridle his tongue? Then, says James with swift precision: "This man's religion is vain." Such is the teaching of this Epistle, and if, as we read James' words, we are tempted to feel that, important as is the due regulation of the tongue, he has attached an exaggerated value to it in the scale of the virtues, we can, on the other hand, infer how great must have been the license which called for such a strong pronouncement.

The social teaching of this Epistle calls for but brief exposition. The wrongs which some of its readers were suffering, in that their wages were fraudulently withheld by their masters, move James to an indignant denunciation which is quite in the old prophetic strain. It is interesting to observe that in this connection we have James' reference to the Second Coming of our Lord. Not only does he, in harmony with the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, associate with that Coming the

drama of judgment, but he looks upon the return of Christ as near at hand. The unjust and grasping rich are bidden, therefore, to "howl for the miseries" which are coming upon them. All their unholy devices to secure wealth will avail them nothing. Already their costly garments are moth-eaten, and the canker of rust has settled on their gold, because, little as they dream of it, it is in the "last days" that they have laid up their treasure (v. 3), and the end of their enjoyment of it is at hand. But if the bitterness of loss and illusion thus awaited the rich, vindication was also impending for those whom the rich had defrauded. He who even now stood at the door was the Judge, and He would execute judgment for all who were oppressed. The poor, therefore, are urged to suffer with patience, stifling even the murmurs against their masters to which they are tempted. "Remember," he says to his readers, "the patience of Job. Recall how in that instance the end displayed the pity and mercy of God. Cultivate the same virtue in your hardships, and in due time you shall reap the same reward."

Whilst he attacks the wrong which often stained the acquisition of wealth, James, like Jesus before him, evinces no hostility to rich men simply on the ground of their riches. What he condemns in them is the unregulated thirst for pleasure which too often was their motive in the quest for riches, and the unspiritual temper which

wealth is apt to engender. In other words, he surveys the social problem from **the standpoint, not of economics, but of religion.** The fierce competition in the pursuit of gain, issuing, as it did, in such contention and hurt as James can only describe in terms of a battlefield, is attributed by him to an unsatisfied lust for pleasure. So blunted had the moral sense of some aspirants for wealth become that they even made its acquisition a subject of prayer, only to find that the sinful ends for which they coveted it resulted in the frustration of their prayer by God (iv. 3). Moreover, the rich man was constantly haunted by the spectre of materialism threatening the divorce of the soul from God. James pictures the presumptuous spirit in which such a man often announced his plans for business or travel, forgetting in the pride of his heart that the continued life on which he was so confidently reckoning was wholly dependent on the will of God. But to the rich a more subtle peril than even a presumptuous pride was the despiritualising of life. Since God would not tolerate a divided allegiance, devotion to material ends, or, as James calls it, "friendship with the world," meant enmity with God. In a striking phrase James speaks of the Spirit planted by God in man as yearning over him with a jealousy that can brook no rival (iv. 5). The demand made upon the rich man, therefore, is that he shall cultivate a quiet and submissive spirit, resist the

temptations incident to his calling and station, and abide in close fellowship with God, cleansing his hands from evil deeds and his heart from divided loyalties. In such a humbling of soul James bids rich men rejoice, because only thus would they, with a wealth that sometimes withered like the flower of the grass before the sirocco's hot breath, have secure possession of a treasure that would not fade away. Thus over the fierce clamour of the world's market-place the clear voice of James, like the muezzin sounding the call to prayer from the minaret of an Eastern mosque, bids the faithful guard even in their money-making the deep interests of the spirit.

So what we have in James is a re-publication, with adaptation to existing conditions, of the teaching of Jesus. It is significant that even salvation is defined in terms of truth, for it consists in being begotten "by the word of truth" (i. 18), or in receiving "with meekness the implanted word" (i. 21), *i.e.* in accepting with humble submission the teaching of Jesus as the rule of life. James betrays throughout this letter the influence of his greater Brother. If we lack teaching about Jesus, we are given the teaching of Jesus. The message that lies at the heart of this letter is that **religion is life** in fellowship with a holy and loving God. James, devout even to asceticism, and bearing about him the air of another world, comes with this clear call to the highest into the

strife of tongues and the din of the world's traffic, and he summons the suffering and the oppressed, the worldling and the scandal-monger, the formalist and "the wise," back to the gracious realities of faith and love. We may be thankful that among early Christian literature there has been preserved for us an Epistle which has so clearly stamped upon it the hall-mark of Jesus.

CHAPTER V

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

The authorship and destination of this Epistle remain among the unsolved and, it is to be feared, insoluble problems of New Testament criticism. As regards its author, the saying attributed to Origen, "Who it was that really wrote the Epistle, God only knows," still describes the situation. The one point on which criticism is agreed is that the tradition, which regarded Paul as the author, and which even in the early Church had currency only in Alexandria, is not credible. In default of Paul the authorship of the Epistle has been assigned to various persons—to Apollos because of the affinities with the Alexandrian philosophy which the letter exhibits; to Barnabas because of his influence in the Palestinian churches, and because, too, this "word of exhortation" might suitably come from one who was a "son of exhortation"; to Philip, assuming that the Epistle was sent from Cæsarea to the Judaising section of the Church at Jerusalem. But the most interesting

view of all, and one to which Harnack gives his adhesion, is that it may have been written by Priscilla or Aquila, and preferably by the former. It has been pointed out that, in the roll-call of the worthies distinguished by faith, women, or deeds wrought by them, receive an honoured place (though the non-mention of Deborah is difficult to explain). The intrusion of a woman into the realm of authorship may have so startled the narrow ecclesiasticism of the primitive Church that the tradition of it was suppressed. Whatever value may attach to these various theories, it is clear that no one of them is sufficiently established to be final.

The same conclusion applies to the related problem of the destination of the Epistle. One thing of which its study convinces us is that it was **not written at large**. No other New Testament writing, not excepting even the letters to the Corinthians, takes us more vividly into the heart of a definite historical situation. Whatever pertinence this Epistle may have had to Jewish Christians in general, it was addressed in the first instance to a specific community of that type, for we may dismiss the somewhat curious view that its first readers were Gentile Christians who were in danger of lapsing into irreligion or paganism. A few phrases, such as "to fall away from the living God," seem, when regarded in isolation, to lend plausibility to that view; but over against them must be set the whole drift of the Epistle,

which is a many-sided exposure, not of the emptiness of paganism, but of the inferiority of Judaism to Christianity. As regards the home of the Jewish Christians addressed, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Cæsarea, and Rome have all, with varying degrees of probability, been suggested.

But though the locality of the church remains undetermined, **the situation** within it is clearly portrayed in the Epistle itself. A crisis had arisen in which loyalty to the Christian faith was imperilled. So grave and imminent was the danger that the writer of this letter cannot wait until he was able to visit the church, as he hoped shortly to do, but sends to it forthwith this message of warning and appeal. His whole aim is to save his readers from apostasy. For the existence of this danger two causes were responsible. One was the circumstances in which these Christians were placed. Converted long ago through the preaching of men who had been eye-witnesses of Jesus, and sustaining shortly after that event severe persecution and the spoiling of their goods,—a reference, doubtless, if this community was in Palestine, to the harrying of the Church by Paul before his conversion,—they had lived long enough to see their leaders one by one pass away, whilst the expectation of Christ's visible return still remained unfulfilled. Moreover, their attachment to Christianity earned for them the scorn of their neighbours. Twice does the

writer of this Epistle refer to "the reproach of Christ," by which, as xiii. 13 shows, can only be meant the stigma affixed to these Christians because of their breach with Judaism, and their alienation from the common sentiment of their nation. What significance this acquires if the scene be Palestine, and the time those troubled years which preceded the fall of the Jewish State! More and more among orthodox Jews circumstances were bringing to the ascendant the party of fanaticism and violence. An armed struggle with Rome, a renewal of the old battle for independence, was becoming daily more certain. Those who, like the Christians, remained aloof from this movement, were exposed to the reproach of being unpatriotic, for what had they to offer as a counter-policy? Simply patient waiting for a Messiah, whose return, already long delayed, seemed more and more doubtful. What wonder if, under this external pressure, their older faith, linked as it was with patriotic zeal, drew them back to it, so that they became lax in their attendance at Christian worship (x. 25) and were in danger of drifting from faith in Christ!

A faith possessed so long, and yet in peril of being lost, can never have been gripped securely, and that is indeed **the complaint** which the writer of this letter urges against his readers. He blames them for their spiritual immaturity. Their defect lay in the realm of ideas. They had too feeble, because too superficial,

a conception of the Christian faith. They had not reached to its heart and seen its deep spiritual implications. And so in this Epistle they are summoned to leave rudimentary positions and questions, such as the discussion of the mode and virtue of ritual washings and the impositions of hands, or theorisings as to the resurrection and judgment associated with the Messiah's reappearance, and they are urged to press on to "perfection," to that deep and comprehensive view of Christ and His work which alone could keep them from drifting.

For this writer sees clearly that **Christ is the key to Christianity**, and that, in order to understand it, we must understand Him. The superiority of Christianity to Judaism, which it is his aim to establish, lies in the unique pre-eminence of Christ and in the consequent perfection and finality of His work. To that as the essential theme of this Epistle we are introduced in its opening sentence. There we have **the first of the contrasts** which the letter sets forth. Revelation under the old dispensation was given fragmentarily and in a variety of ways, and thus lacked the unity which belonged to God's self-disclosure in Christ. Moreover, in the former case, the agents of the Divine communication had been prophets or, in the case of the Law, angels, in that view being recalled a tradition of later Judaism that Moses had received the Law on Mount

Sinai through the ministry of angels. But God had given the Gospel through a Son—a Son, too, who, in addition to being His agent in the creation and maintenance of the universe, was “the effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance,” and had, in virtue of His redeeming activity, been enthroned at the right hand of the Divine majesty, the angels, who at the best were servants, and not sons, being commanded to do Him homage, and to minister to such as became partakers of the Messianic salvation. As was the relative dignity of Christ and the angels, so must also be the relative worth of the revelations which they introduced. And if the injunctions of Judaism were enforced by Divine sanctions, what possible escape from punishment could there be, if men rejected the great salvation vouchsafed by God, confirmed by miracle, and mediated by the Messianic Son.

The next contrast is between Jesus and Moses as the outstanding figure of the Old Testament and the man to whom, according to tradition, the Law was first communicated. Why was Jesus greater than Moses and so, inferentially, the Gospel superior to the Law? Because, though both were alike faithful in God’s house, Moses held the inferior rank of a servant, whilst to Jesus alone belonged the dignity of a Son. Christ too is He who has built the house, the writer having in mind in that assertion mainly the Christian order of things,

though his sense of its continuity with the Old Testament system enables him to speak of Moses as related to the same house, but in an inferior way. But to devout Jews the central element of their religion was its sacrificial rites. These provided the writer of this letter with **his most elaborate contrast**. To think of the Old Testament sacrifices was to be reminded, in the first instance, of the Aaronic priesthood by whom those sacrifices were offered, and, notably, of the high priest who, especially on the great Day of Atonement, summed up in himself, not simply the whole priestly order, but the entire Jewish nation. Over against him there is set "the high priest of our confession, even Jesus," for whom no adequate Old Testament analogy is found but Melchizedek, the shadowy priest-king, coming out of the unknown and passing as swiftly into it, to whom Abraham gave tithes and paid homage on his return from his defeat of the four kings. The child of mystery, with nothing known as to his birth or decease, appearing just for one moment upon the stage of history, and yet in that moment acknowledged by Abraham as his superior, Melchizedek, to one schooled in the Alexandrian modes of exegesis, seemed the prefigurement of a priesthood, eternally constituted, lifted beyond conditions of time, and as much greater than that embodied in Aaron and his successors, as Melchizedek was greater than Abraham from whom Aaron sprang.

Thus does the writer of this Epistle exhibit the pre-eminence of Christ's person. His line of argument may seem inconclusive to us, partly because of the curious and semi-allegorical mode of exegesis to which he resorts. There does not appear to us, *e.g.*, to be any necessary relation of type and anti-type between Melchizedek and Christ. Still, even where we question his premisses, we are able to reach by an independent route the same conclusions, and, in passing judgment upon him, we have to remember that he was writing to men who, like the writer himself, regarded the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament as a valid road to the truth. Even inspiration has to be content to take men as they are, and revelation, because it comes in the first instance to men of particular traditions and culture, has to reflect those mental idiosyncrasies in its modes of expression. Dismissing that subject with this passing reference, we need to go back for one moment, and gather up all that this Epistle affirms concerning the person of Christ. The three contrasts already referred to, set forth His unique and Divine glory. But there is another side to the picture. In one of the exhortations which, true to his practical aim, the author appends to each of his antitheses, he develops his view of the Incarnation. It is sufficient to say that nowhere in the New Testament are the fulness and the reality of **our Lord's identification with**

humanity more clearly described. He who was greater than angels, became for a little while lower than they, that He might submit to the suffering of death. He partook of flesh and blood, making Himself one in all save sin with the brethren whom He came to save. By the endurance of moral trial in the shape of suffering and temptation He acquired sympathy and learned obedience, always remaining sinless, yet developing after a human fashion, and in such a way as meant the growing realisation in His nature of the good. As the "leader" of our faith Christ is to us the perfect pattern of fidelity to the will of God. Not only so, but in the holy perfection of Christ's earthly life lies the explanation of His exaltation to glory and of His high-priestly activity within the veil. Because of the fidelity shown in His submission to death He has been crowned with glory and honour, so that it may be said that what was His by nature has become His also by merit; He has won as man what was His as God. In the same way His high-priesthood is not an office which He has arrogated to Himself, but is one to which He has been appointed by virtue of His inherent and indissoluble life. Dignity of function is determined by quality of person. It is because Jesus is "a Son, perfected for evermore," that He has by a Divine oath been appointed to a priesthood abiding and unchangeable.

So from the brief humiliation of earth the perfected Son passes to the right hand of God, where, declared heir of all things, worshipped by angels, and invested with full authority over the coming Messianic age, He ministers to the salvation of all who obey Him. But **what preceded the Incarnation?** Did that event represent the beginning of the Messiah's career, and had the period of humiliation no state of glory as its background as well as its issue? This Epistle may not be so explicit on that problem as we could desire, but when we are told that the Son, who is now heir of all things, was He also by whom God made and sustains the world, and when again, in a quotation from the Psalms, He is declared to have laid the foundations of the earth, such activity demands more than a merely ideal pre-existence of Jesus. It requires a pre-temporal life in which the Son, even then perfectly reflecting the Father's glory and expressing His essence, shared in the life of God and reposed in His love. That, too, is the point of the comparison of Christ to Melchizedek, who, "having neither beginning of days nor end of life," is "made like unto the Son of God." Subordination of some sort there must have been in that pre-incarnate state, or else how could it be said of the Son that "God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness"? But this is a point which the writer of the Epistle simply affirms; he does not linger to explain. What seems

clear is that there appears here the same exalted view of Jesus as existing before all time and sharing eternally in the nature and activities of God, which we find in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel and in the later teaching of Paul.

And as is the Worker, so is also His work. That derives its supreme value from the person who achieves it. We come to the very heart of this Epistle when we see how the writer applies this principle to **the death of Christ** and the subsequent presentation of His offering in heaven before God. For, true to the ritual of the great Day of Atonement, when only the presentation of the blood of the victim in the holy of holies completed the sacrifice, Jesus also consummates the offering of Himself only when He appears in heaven for us. His death and subsequent intercession represent one atoning transaction. Now to the devout Jew the centre of the legal system was its sacrifices. On that—its ceremonial side—our author contemplates the Law, and from that point of view convicts it of being unprofitable and ineffectual. Through the essential externality of its sacrifices it could “make nothing perfect.” It moved in the realm of shadow and symbol. What was needed, therefore, was a sacrifice real, effectual, and final, as opposed to a cultus which was simply external, ineffective, and shadowy. It is by showing that Christianity answered that need that the writer of this letter steadies

the wavering faith of his readers. Put in one brief sentence his argument is this: Christianity is the final religion because the sacrifice of Christ is ideal. To establish that momentous truth required a **series of contrasts** in which the new is set over against the old. To begin with, the priests of Judaism were frail and sinful men, needing themselves, as much as those for whom they acted, the atoning virtue of the sacrifices which they offered. Then their offerings were simply dumb animals, "the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of the heifer," and these, because they were something external to the offerer, could never avail to purge away his sin. By their constant repetition, which itself was a sign of their ineffectuality, they succeeded in keeping alive the sense of sin, but, so far as the actual cleansing of the conscience was concerned, they were but emblematic, pointing forward to some sacrifice yet to be disclosed, which should accomplish in fact what they only did in symbol. The Law in its sacrifices was but "a shadow," a dim outline "of the good things to come," and so could not make men perfect. Once more, the Aaronic priest offered in a sanctuary which, because it was of this world, was imperfect, being an inadequate attempt to realise the true sanctuary which was in heaven. Heaven to the Jew was the home of the ideal, in the sense, however, that there the ideal existed not simply in thought but in fact. The concep-

tion, as we have seen (p. 28), was applied to many things, and, among them, to the Temple, so that it was after the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary shown to him on the mount that Moses was said to have formed the tabernacle, thus providing for the heavenly reality an imperfect, because earthly, counterpart. Thus did defect stain the system of legal sacrifice. Even the Old Testament itself admitted this, when it spoke through Jeremiah of the new covenant which God would establish with Israel, thus branding as obsolescent that which had been originally constituted by sacrifices at Sinai. Christianity brought in a **new and a better order**. Its high priest, though chosen from among men, was harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and so had no need to make atonement for Himself. And this ideal priest had an ideal sacrifice, for the offering which He brought was not some brute beast, but His own spotless and holy life offered up in perfect obedience to Him whose will it was His delight to do. Because the offering was ideal, it accomplished a real deliverance from sin, effecting an inward and not merely a ritual cleansing. Moreover, since it was through "an eternal spirit" that Jesus thus offered Himself to God (ix. 14), *i.e.* in obedience to a spiritual principle which, though it found concrete exhibition in time, was itself timeless in the sense that sacrificial love was eternal in the heart of the Redeemer, His work became valid for all time,

not simply having prospective worth, but availing also for those who had transgressed under the first covenant. Perfect thus in scope and quality, it required no repetition. Finally, Christ's offering was presented in the ideal sanctuary, for it was in heaven that He, bearing His own blood, appeared before God. And having entered that home of reality, there He abides. Unlike the Aaronic priest, whose entrance into the holy place once a year spoke more of exclusion from God than of access to Him, Jesus by His continued tarrying in the heavenly sanctuary declares that God has become accessible to sinful men, and that "a new and living way" into His presence is now open.

It is in this access to God and life in His presence that, according to the thought of this Epistle, man's salvation consists. We are not furnished with anything deserving to be called a **theory of atonement**. Beyond an appeal to the analogy of the Law, where, "apart from shedding of blood, there is no remission," our author's main plea for the necessity of Christ's death turns upon a verbal refinement. Having argued that Jesus has established a new covenant between man and God, he proceeds, true to Alexandrian modes of exegesis, to take the Greek word for "covenant" in its secondary sense of "will" or "testament," arguing thence that, since a will can only become operative on the death of

the testator, the new "testament" associated with Christ could only become effective through His death. This mode of reasoning will carry less weight with us than it did with Jewish Christians of the first century. In any case, that particular appeal is only incidental to the main argument of the Epistle. What is fundamental is the assumption, because to a Jew it would be axiomatic, that sacrifice is necessary for the removal of sin. Building upon that belief, common to him and his readers, the author claims that **Christianity is the absolute religion**, inasmuch as through the sacrifice of Christ it effects in reality and once for all that release from sin which the legal sacrifices only hinted at in prophecy and symbol. Moreover, he keeps to ritual analogies even in defining the nature of salvation, for, unlike Paul, who, true to his strong ethical interest, describes salvation as "justification," he uses consistently the terms "perfect," "cleanse," "sanctify," to define the transformation of the heart accomplished by Christ. What is evident, too, is that the vital element in Christ's offering was the perfect surrender of His will in holy obedience to God. In ways for which we have analogy rather than proof, that act of the Redeemer avails for His brethren, delivering them from the fear of death, and releasing them from that "conscience of sins" which barred their entrance into the Divine fellowship. Now where Christ,

our "forerunner," has gone, we may follow. Into the "Sabbath-rest," unrealised in the occupation of Canaan, Christ, the new Joshua, has Himself entered, and all who believe share even now in its possession.

That brings us to **another interesting feature of this Epistle**. From certain phrases it might seem that the realisation of salvation is assigned to the future, for Christians are described as being brought to a "glory" beyond the shores of time, the possession of which is "a better hope" "or the hope set before us." It is also "unto salvation," *i.e.* unto the perfecting of Christian experience, that Jesus is expected once again to emerge from the unseen. This view is traceable to that Alexandrian philosophy of the author which held that in the supersensible we must find the real, the material and sensible being but shadowy emblems of it. The Christian pilgrims, therefore, "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly"; they seek, as the fatherland of the soul, "the city which hath the foundations," and "which is to come." But that is only one side of our author's conception. Having declared (x. 39), confident in the strength of his previous argument, that he and his readers are not of them that shrink back into perdition, but are of them that have faith "unto the saving of the soul," *i.e.* unto the perfect realisation of salvation, he proceeds to show that "faith is the title-deeds" (for so

we must translate) "of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It is that activity of the soul which guarantees the reality of the unseen and spiritual, and already in some sense seals them as ours. It was by such a faith that the Old Testament worthies lived, and so ever reached out to more than they had yet grasped; nay, of such a faith Jesus Himself was the file-leader, for was it not "for the joy set before Him" that He "endured the cross, despising shame"? Unlike the Pauline conception, in which faith is strongly ethical, representing the devout movement Christwards of a man's whole personality, faith in this Epistle is reposed in God, and is that intellectual forth-reaching—akin to hope, save that the grasp of faith is more assured,—by which the unrealised is seized and in measure already made our own. For that reason salvation becomes an experience as well as an expectation. Christians have already tasted "the powers of the age to come"; the anchor of the soul, "taking sure grip of that which is within the vail," keeps the believer even now secure and safe.

Such is, in rough outline, the lofty argument of this Epistle. Bold the message undoubtedly was, so that the writer stands in some doubt as to how it will be received by his readers. Destructive it was bound to be, for men who were turning longing eyes back to Judaism could not in their own interests be allowed

to entertain any illusion as to its inadequacy and its consequent supersession. But the great glory of the Epistle is its constructive side, the sustained argument by which Christ is assigned the supreme place among the religious leaders of mankind, and His sacrificial work becomes God's final word concerning sin and salvation. The exposition of this truth was the surest defence against apostasy. "We needs must love the highest, when we see it," and, loving it, must hold to it. **Elements in the historical situation**, *e.g.* the delayed return of Christ, and the present sufferings of his readers, our author meets by affirming his own conviction that the return was imminent (x. 25), and by teaching that suffering was but the discipline imposed by God upon His sons for their good, on which grounds he bids those to whom he speaks abandon their lethargy and despair. But his main appeal is that they, instead of reverting to Judaism, should brace themselves to a definite breach with it. Why go back to that which was outworn and superseded? Such drawing back was "unto perdition," for Judaism had no power of redemption, and, if men who had already felt the renewing power of Christianity turned from it under the vain delusion that Judaism was better, what hope could there be for them, since they had been too blind to know the best when they had it? Such trampling under foot of the blood of the covenant

meant doing despite unto the Spirit of grace, and falling into the avenging hands of the living God.

Instead of a reversion that was futile and perilous, the duty of the hour was to go forward by realising the **finality and independence** of the Christian faith. In a bold figure, suggested by the fact that Jesus had suffered crucifixion outside the gate of Jerusalem, this writer bids his readers go forth unto Christ without the camp, *i.e.* to break finally with Judaism, sharing cheerfully with their Lord the reproach which such a breach might entail. The two faiths were separate and incompatible. "We have an altar," he says, "whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." Sinai, fenced from the approach of man or beast, and shrouded in darkness and tempest, save as it was lighted by the dread glory of the Divine theophany—that was the symbol of the awe and exclusion which belonged to Judaism. But over against Sinai there stood Mount Zion, the symbol of the Christian order. To that, not fenced by any awful barrier, the readers of this Epistle had found access, and in reaching it had come to God and all the holy fellowships which centred there, and to the new covenant sealed by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. There it was their duty to abide. With sacrifices, save those of praise to God and loving service to their fellows, they had finished.

Their spiritual well-being was bound up with the new faith, of which, through their defective comprehension of it, they had all too feeble a grasp. So to these wavering Christians came this "word of exhortation," bidding them realise the true inwardness of their faith, and stand fast in the liberty with which it had set them free.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

THE opening salutation of this letter ascribes its **authorship** to the apostle Peter. To the acceptance of that view, well supported as it is by tradition, there is no insuperable objection. The Greek in which the Epistle is written may be somewhat purer than one would expect from a Galilean fisherman, but a credible explanation of this is that Silvanus (or Silas), who conveyed the letter to the churches addressed in it, had also something to do with its literary form. A more serious objection is the debt which it owes, in phraseology and ideas, to the Pauline Epistles, notably to those to the Romans and Ephesians. But this may be perfectly compatible with Petrine authorship. If this letter was written at Rome,—a city intimately connected with the two Pauline Epistles referred to, since it was the destination of the one and the source of the other,—and if the date of its composition was after the death of Paul, but before the full violence of

Nero's persecution had burst upon the Roman Christians, Peter's **affinity with Pauline ideas** becomes credible. For if Galilee and Syria, and perhaps even Asia Minor, had been Peter's special sphere, he had been concerned with Christian communities which, while consisting largely of Jews, contained also a growing admixture of Gentile converts, the problem of whose relation to their Jewish brethren was thus being happily solved. Such a situation, coupled with the success of the Pauline mission, could not fail to have a liberalising effect upon Peter, whose mind, largely practical in its bent, was always sensitive to the logic of events. He was no prejudiced doctrinaire, but a man whose instincts, left to themselves, were invariably on the side of liberalism. It must not be forgotten also that the universalism present in the spirit and teaching of Jesus must have left its mark upon so impressionable a disciple as Peter; indeed this letter exhales the influence of Christ's earthly ministry. So, as by a natural affinity, Peter with the lapse of time grew towards Paul, absorbing with minor modifications his point of view, and becoming a man to whose voice the mixed churches of the Dispersion were sure at a time of crisis to listen with respect.

For though this Epistle is formally addressed to "the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion," the letter itself is evidence that the churches so addressed cannot

have consisted simply of Jewish Christians. Else how could the apostle have said of **his readers** that they "in time past were no people" (ii. 10), that they had formerly "wrought the desire of the Gentiles," walking in sins which were characteristic of the heathen (iv. 3), and that they had been redeemed from the "vain manner of life" handed down by their fathers (i. 18)? Christians who had once been heathen must be in mind in such sayings, and if, therefore, churches containing this element are referred to by Peter in terms which only seem appropriate to God's ancient people, it is because the apostle has appropriated the Pauline idea that the Christian Church had become the true Israel, because it had given welcome to God's Messiah, whilst the unbelieving Jews by rejecting Him had excluded themselves from the chosen people and the covenant of grace. The wild olive grafted upon the ancient stock had become one with it in privilege and nature.

The place of authority over mixed churches of this type may, on personal grounds and because of his broad sympathies, have been tacitly assigned to Peter after the death of Paul. For though it is generally agreed that "Babylon," from which this letter purports to be written (v. 13), is a veiled name for Rome, hinting at the bitter hostility which that city had already shown to God's new Israel, not only does Peter make no reference to

Paul, but some at least of the churches which he addresses here, e.g. those in Galatia and Asia, came so admittedly within Paul's sphere of authority that, whilst he was alive, no other apostle would have ventured to claim their ear. We may assume, therefore, that Paul was dead when this letter was written. It addressed itself to a **disturbed situation**. Persecution had fallen upon the churches of Asia Minor. A "fiery trial," testing their endurance and loyalty, had come upon them. Not that they stood alone in this, for Peter reminds his readers (v. 9) that the same sufferings were being accomplished in the Christian brotherhood generally, though certain circumstances may have made a steadying message to those Asiatic Christians specially befitting. Their persecution came in part from Jews who, emboldened, doubtless, by their success in compassing the death of Paul, grew more venomous in their attitude to the Christian faith. Calumny, verbal abuse, scorn of the Christian name which they bore—these were elements in the social persecution which these Christians endured (iii. 16, iv. 4, 14). Doubtless some of them in addition were haled before the local magistrates, who, quick to follow the unsympathetic attitude towards Christians already manifest in Rome, looked with prejudiced eyes upon men who, whether guilty or not of that with which they were charged, belonged to a sect which, by its very aloofness from the

rest of the community, seemed disruptive and anti-social in its spirit.

Such was the situation—one that, notwithstanding opposing critics like Pfleiderer and Harnack, is compatible with the Petrine authorship of this Epistle and with its being dated about the year A.D. 65. In substance the letter consists of **counsels to the persecuted**. It at once reminds of privilege and exhorts to duty. So far as present experience is concerned, it was great in its realisations but greater still in its hopes. There was the Messianic salvation, the goal of the Christian's faith, trembling on the horizon, "ready to be revealed in the last time." Unto "a living hope" of participation therein, due, as none knew better than Peter himself, to the resurrection of Jesus, Christians had been begotten, and so, loving a Christ whom they did not yet see, and undaunted even by their manifold trials, they were able even now to "rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory," gladly anticipating a Divine consummation which had been the theme of prophets and was the wonder of angels.

But privilege has its counterpart in duty. One great note of this Epistle is **its emphasis on conduct**. Holiness in all manner of life in imitation of the holy perfection of God, a wholesome fear, during their time of sojourning, of the Heavenly Father who had redeemed them at such cost, the cultivation of sincere love of the brethren

—these were graces to which Peter exhorts his readers. He will not even let them take their great hope lightly, for he bids them make conscious effort, “girding up the loins” of their mind, to keep it steadfastly before them. What he longs for is a Church which, with “all wickedness and all guile and hypocrisies and envy and all evil speakings” removed from it, is built up, through the moral development of its individual members, into a spiritual house, each Christian a living stone therein, or is constituted a holy priesthood, offering acceptable, because spiritual, sacrifices, the Church thus becoming the true people of God, the peculiar property and glory of Him by whom it has been redeemed and framed. Nor is the apostle content merely with general exhortations to goodness. He pursues his readers into the various relationships of their life, and there bids them exhibit the Christian ideal. Before the heathen Christians were to lead a pure and consistent life, so they might silence slander and even gain converts (ii. 12). To the civil power in its various forms they were to show themselves loyal, recognising that civil authority had Divine sanctions, and was essential for the stability of law and order. Here, again, “by well-doing” they might vindicate themselves from the aspersions of men who in ignorance believed evil of them. Household servants, most of whom would be slaves, were bidden to yield a deferential obedience to their masters—not

only to such as were good and considerate, but also to the cruel and unjust. The Divine approval would rest upon such servants as, from a sense of religious duty, submitted patiently to unmerited wrong. It was only when suffering was undeserved that there was any credit in patient submission to it, and such suffering was part of the Christian's fated lot, for therein he was but like his Master, who, not only in the fact of suffering, but in its unmeritedness and the meek and unreviling spirit in which He bore it, left an example for His followers to imitate. Yet again, domestic relationships were to be hallowed by the Christian spirit. Wives are exhorted to act with such submission and godliness towards their husbands that any of the latter who are heathen may be won to faith in Christ. The ornament of "a meek and quiet spirit" was to be more sought after by a wife than attractiveness of dress and outward finery. The husband, too, was to be considerate in recognising the claims of his weaker companion, and in so ordering their mutual relations that, when both persons were Christians, no obstacle might be placed in the path of that religious development to which husband and wife were equally called. Such is Peter's detailed exposition of Christian duty.

The stress laid therein upon goodness in act and disposition appears also in Peter's admonitions to his readers **in reference to their sufferings**. His main concern

is that no Christian shall do anything to deserve them. "Let none of you," he says, "suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler in other men's matters" (iv. 15). "It is better," he says again, "if the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing" (iii. 17). Prejudice accounted in part for the sufferings which these Asian Christians endured, and that prejudice could best be dispelled by the complete renunciation of all heathen vices, and by the faithful performance, under a sense of religious obligation, of all social duty. The apostle goes so far as to affirm that a man living in that spirit will, under normal conditions, remain unmolested. "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good?" (iii. 13). Nevertheless there was the natural antipathy of the world to goodness to be reckoned with, and hence there was the possibility of persecution for righteousness' sake. But such persecution was blessed, though obviously everything depended upon its unmeritedness and upon the spirit in which it was borne. If it was because of the name of Christian which they bore that men were called to suffer, they might glory in the name and rejoice in the suffering, for thereby they came into true fellowship with Christ. It is here that we touch the most interesting feature in **Peter's doctrine of suffering**. The claim has been made that Peter, had he really been the author of this Epistle, would, with

his non-theological temper, have said little about the death of Jesus in recalling the earthly ministry. But such a view, besides forgetting the significance which, even to a disciple like Peter, the death of Christ had come to assume, ignores the practical situation with which in this letter he was seeking to deal. He was writing to men who were suffering, and what was more natural, therefore, than that, in heartening them, he should recall how their Master also had suffered? The path which they were treading had been pressed before by His bleeding feet. And what did this fellowship with Christ in suffering mean? It meant, first of all, cessation from sin, because "he that suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (iv. 1). The idea there expressed is somewhat obscure, the sense in which "flesh" is used being a matter of dispute. What seems clear, however, is that it does not stand, as in Paul's teaching, for the whole principle of evil in man, but recalls more particularly man's bodily nature, and the passions and incitements to evil which are incident to existence therein. Peter tells us that "Christ suffered in the flesh" (iv. 1), *i.e.* in His earthly life He endured self-denial and privation and suffering, because these were inseparable from the recoil from sin and the steadfast pursuit of righteousness. To natures such as ours pain is bound up with moral achievement. No pains, no gains! But he who will suffer rather than sin has reached such heights of

conquest over sin that he has virtually snapped the connection between it and him ; sin has become a subjected thing, and he has "ceased from" it. May we not interpret in this way Peter's reference to Christ suffering in the flesh? When, therefore, he bids us arm ourselves with "the same mind," *i.e.* face our sufferings with the stern resolve that we will endure anything rather than commit wrong, he tells us that thus we too by God's grace shall find the tyranny of sin within us broken, and the soul led forth into the liberty of the sons of God.

One other assurance the apostle gives his readers as an anodyne for their pain, and that is **the brevity of its duration**. "The end of all things," he says, "is at hand." If the devil, their adversary, seemed unwontedly active, prowling like a lion ravening for its prey (v. 8), their resistance of him, though steadfast, would not need to be prolonged. Now was "his hour and the power of darkness." But after Christ's followers had suffered "a little while," the eternal glory unto which they had been called in Him would be revealed (v. 10), and at Christ's manifestation all His faithful ones would receive the unfading crown. Thus were the very clouds fringed with the radiance of the Christian hope.

So far as **the person and work of Christ** generally are

concerned, the teaching of this Epistle is incidental and fragmentary. The new life in man is produced by "the word of God," *i.e.* by the message of God's grace proclaimed to men in the Gospel. The crown of this message was evidently the resurrection of Jesus, for Peter speaks of it as begetting "a living hope," and making it possible for men to repose "faith and hope in God" (i. 3, 21). Faith, which in this Epistle is closely akin to hope, has God, and not Christ, as its object. The redeeming work of Christ, whilst a transaction in time, was the unveiling of an eternal purpose of God, so that the Lamb slain "was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times" (i. 20). Such testimony, too, as the prophets gave beforehand to the sufferings and glory of Christ was due to the working in them of the Spirit of Christ (i. 11), *i.e.* either, as Dr. Hort translates, "the Spirit of Messiah," or "the Spirit of which Christ is and was the bestower." The language of these passages is not absolutely decisive, but many exegetes see in it an assertion by Peter of a real, and not merely an ideal, pre-existence of Jesus. But of all the incidental teachings of this Epistle, the most interesting, if also the most perplexing, is that which refers to our Lord **preaching to the "spirits in prison"** and to "the dead" (iii. 18-20, iv. 6). These sayings have provoked a

discussion too lengthy even for summary here. One view regards "the spirits in prison" as the fallen angels of Gen. vi. 2, who for their wrong-doing were cast down to hell (II. Pet. ii. 4), and to whom, after His death, Christ went and proclaimed judgment. But surely the contrast in iii. 20, between "the disobedient" and the eight souls that were saved demands that the former shall belong to the same—*i.e.* the human—order, and shall refer, therefore, to the men who disregarded the warnings of Noah. Accepting that view, it is still maintained that "the spirits in prison" and "the dead" are those who are now dead, but who when alive, heard Christ "in the Spirit" preaching vicariously to them through the lips of Noah. It is enough to say that this exegesis is so unnatural, and so strains the force of the language, that only the wish to avoid an unwelcome dogma can have suggested it. On the whole the interpretation that seems necessary is that Christ "in the spirit," *i.e.* in that disembodied state which was His in the interval between His death and resurrection, went and preached in the unseen world to the sinful and disembodied dead, the wicked who perished at the deluge not being His sole hearers, but being mentioned by Peter as typical, partly because their wickedness was so extreme, and partly also because the reference to baptism (iii. 21) which he already had

in his mind, called up by anticipatory analogy the Flood and the sinners of that age. As to the purpose of this preaching to "the dead," it is said to be "that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." The meaning of this statement only becomes clear in the light of its context. Peter, anticipating the speedy return of Christ, sees the near approach of the judgment associated therewith. Christ stands "ready to judge the living and the dead." But a common judgment surely, if it is to be equitable, implies common opportunities and privileges; yet how could men, now dead, belonging to bygone and pre-Christian times, justly sustain the same judgment as the living to whom the Gospel had been proclaimed? The apostle's answer is that privilege has been equalised. The disembodied and sinful dead have had the Gospel preached to them by Christ Himself, and the object of His preaching has been that "they might be judged according to men in the flesh," *i.e.* might justly be submitted to the same standard of judgment as was imposed upon men still alive, but might "live according to God in the spirit," *i.e.* even in their disembodied condition might reach out to realise the new life which was God's gift in Christ. Whence this tradition of Christ's "descent into Hades" was derived, and how far it answers to fact, will be matters of dispute. But

the principles that shine out in Peter's application of it, viz. that the redemption brought by Christ avails for all worlds and times, and that the judgment which He will direct, will observe an equitable correspondence between demand and privilege, are such as find ready approval in the Christian mind and conscience.

CHAPTER VII

THE EPISTLES OF JUDE AND SECOND PETER

THERE is not only convenience in discussing these two Epistles together, but, apart from their brevity, justification for so doing. Both had difficulty in gaining admission into the Canon of the New Testament, and both, as we shall see, are **akin in their teaching**. Indeed the resemblance is so marked in both phrasing and ideas that the conclusion of criticism is that one of these Epistles has been used in the composition of the other. On which side, then, was the borrowing? Is Second Peter an expansion of Jude? or Jude an abbreviation of Second Peter? The former view is to be preferred on various grounds, *e.g.* that the construction of Jude from Second Peter is a literary feat too difficult to be credible; that certain obscurities in Second Peter, the reason for whose existence is intelligible to criticism, are only cleared up when the parallel passage in Jude is consulted. But if Jude's Epistle has priority, other

conclusions follow. It is impossible to date that Epistle within the traditional lifetime of Peter, for, quite apart from the general situation, which Jude deals with, being more suited to a later date, he speaks of the apostles as a collective body and as belonging to the past, whilst "the last time" of which they had spoken, with the false teachers who were to characterise it, had come (vers. 17, 18). Jude's short letter cannot, therefore, have been composed earlier than A.D. 75; some critics relegate it even to the second century. But that means that another Epistle dependent upon it must have been later still, and hence that Second Peter, though it was clearly sent forth in Peter's name, came from some other pen. On other grounds this view is justified. We may conclude, therefore, that Second Peter is the work of some anonymous author, writing near the middle of the second century, who, wishing to gain for his message the authority of the great apostle, sent it forth in Peter's name, and to churches in Asia Minor that had been addressed in First Peter—to churches, at any rate, which were familiar with that letter. And just because those churches were probably not acquainted with Jude's Epistle, else the author of Second Peter would scarcely have ventured to use it so extensively, we may assume that Jude's letter circulated in a different region—possibly among the churches of Syria or of the adjacent portion of Asia Minor.

We may infer without question that **the Epistle of Jude** was written by some one bearing that name, for an obscure author, wishing to hide himself behind another's name, would obviously have chosen someone more distinguished than Jude. Unless, therefore, the words "brother of James" in the opening salutation have been added by some copyist, we may identify this writer with the Judas who was brother to both James of Jerusalem and Jesus. Though he does not claim to be an apostle, we can imagine that his relationship to Jesus would give him some authority over the Syrian churches, if he ventured to address them. That he dwells in a somewhat curious and Jewish world is shown by the use he makes (vers. 9, 14), giving them, indeed, a canonical status, of two portions of Jewish apocryphal literature—the *Book of Enoch* and the *Assumption of Moses*. Out of this circle of quaint and old-fashioned conceptions—fortified, indeed, by them—Jude addresses himself to the existing situation. He seems to have had in preparation some larger treatise on "the common salvation" (ver. 3), the experience of Divine grace which he shared with his readers, but from this occupation he was diverted by the emergence of a crisis. It was occasioned by the appearance in the churches to which he wrote of **false teachings and practices**, due to the presence of men who combined a practical antinomianism with the germs of certain Gnostic

ideas. They denied, as did the Gnostics, the sole rulership of Christ (ver. 4), whilst another offence laid at their door (ver. 8), is that "they set at nought dominion" (or "lordship") "and rail at dignities" (or "glories"). The context shows that angels of some sort are referred to in these seemingly technical terms. If good angels, as some suppose, are meant, the point, according to the context, will be, that contemptuous language towards them is extremely unfitting, seeing that when, according to a popular tradition then current, the archangel Michael contended with Satan as to whether he should bury the body of Moses or Satan be allowed to bear it away, the language of Michael even towards his wicked adversary was marked by studious moderation; and if bad angels were treated thus, how much more entitled to respect are the good? The weakness of that interpretation, however, is that it does not bring the offenders' scorn of "dignities" into any obvious relation with the license ascribed to them. Hence there seems more force in the suggestion that what is hinted at is a conception of angelic hierarchies, good and bad, which, under certain conditions, had "dominion" over men, and could work their weal or woe. The idea of these antinomians was that, at the moment of baptism, they had, as though by some magic rite, passed under the sovereign protection of Christ, so that henceforth, whatever their conduct, the potentates who brought woe upon the sinful were

powerless to harm them, and from within the sheltered defence of their Christian profession could be scorned and defied. If that be the position, the reference to Michael is intended to suggest by contrast the rash folly of these daring libertines.

For libertines they were, making **the grace of God a cloke for license**. That is the head and front of their offending. They were "ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (ver. 4), "animal, having not the Spirit" (ver. 19). Perverting Paul's teaching concerning the Christian religion as meaning release from legalism, they said that the Christian was lifted above law, so that moral distinctions became meaningless. The result of such teaching was inevitable. These "emancipated" ones turned Christian liberty into license, and made their profession of discipleship a cloke for vicious indulgence. Many of them evidently posed as teachers, and in that guise craftily insinuated themselves (ver. 4) into churches, upon which they boldly pastured themselves (ver. 12), sowing strife and making "separations," *i.e.* creating cliques and parties, and, with simply a selfish regard for their own advantage, working serious harm. It is no wonder that Jude, in a wealth of figures drawn from ordinary life and nature, almost exhausts the language of invective in his denunciation of them. He speaks of them as "spots" (this translation is to be preferred to that of "sunken reefs"), or sources of

defilement, in the love-feasts, that intimate expression of Christian fellowship in the early Church, for, as we gather from the parallel passage in II. Pet. ii. 14, these libertines turned even the love-feasts to vicious ends; as clouds that were rainless and autumn trees which were fruitless, mere shams devoid of both profit and goodness; as wild waves, restless because of the surging up of unholy passion; as erratic meteors, flashing for a brief moment in the heavens and then quenched in eternal darkness. When he would find parallels to them, Jude turns to the unbelieving Israelites who fell in the wilderness, or to the angels who, through sin, forfeited their proud heritage, or to the vicious cities of the Plain; or, using vivid speech, he describes them as sharing the sins of Cain and Balaam and the sons of Korah. That men, on whom such strictures could with any semblance of truth be passed, should have been tolerated within the Christian Church, seems almost incredible, until we remember that every successful movement has its camp-followers, that the keen ardour with which high ideals are first pursued is difficult to maintain, and that error is always plausible and seductive, when it links itself with sensual gratification.

To Jude **two things were clear**,—the ultimate doom of these false teachers, and the present duty of the Christians whom he addressed. Not content with recalling the Divine judgments which fell upon analogous

transgressors, he specially applies to these antinomians a prediction of the Divine assize which appears in the apocryphal *Book of Enoch* (vers. 14, 15). Just as their coming had been predicted (ver. 18), their punishment was also certain. The immediate duty of the Church was to counteract their baleful influence by contending earnestly "for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (ver. 3). It may be noted in passing that the term "faith," as there used, comes as near as it does anywhere in the New Testament, to denoting a scheme of doctrine, a concrete system of ideas—a fact which, even if it stood alone, is sufficient to demand a late date for this Epistle. So far as the false teachers themselves and those influenced by them were concerned, the duty of loyal Christians was manifold, being regulated by the extent to which a man had committed himself to false teaching and practice. And all the while, as their supreme safeguard, Christians were to look well to their own hearts, building themselves up on the sure foundation of their "most holy faith," cultivating prayer, and keeping themselves within the charmed circle of the Divine love, and, finally, looking with eager expectation towards that mercy which, at the return of Christ, would issue in the boon of eternal life.

Of Jude's letter **the Epistle known as Second Peter** is, as we have seen, largely a republication, especially in the second chapter. Detailed reference to that portion of

the Epistle is, therefore, unnecessary. An interesting clue as to the date of composition is afforded by the existence, when this Epistle was written, of outspoken scepticism as to the return of Jesus. "Where," men were asking in a tone of scorn, "is the promise of His coming? The 'fathers' of the Church are all dead, and yet the world keeps on its course with no sign of change." Faith in the Parusia was crumbling owing to the long delay in its occurrence. It is significant that our author meets that scepticism, not only by reaffirming the certainty of Christ's return, but by justifying its delay. If the expected coming had not yet occurred, it was not because God was slack concerning His promise. Time with Him was not measured by human standards. The delay was merciful in that it was designed to allow men space for repentance before mercy gave place to judgment (an idea which is repeated later, when the long-suffering of God is said to contemplate man's salvation). But, whether soon or late, Christ would come again, with the unexpectedness of a thief, and His return would witness the violent dissolution of the present order of things, and of the world in which that order had its home, and out of the crumbling ruins would be evolved new heavens and a new earth, the abode of righteousness. In constant readiness for that grave consummation and in earnest longing for it Christians were to pass the days of waiting, for Christ's

return, though long delayed, was inevitable and sure. "We did not follow cunningly-devised fables," says our author, "when we made known unto you the power and coming" (*i.e.* the return) "of our Lord Jesus Christ" (i. 16). So the business of his readers was, by growth in Christian virtue, earnestly to respond to God's choice of them, so that, when the eternal Kingdom was inaugurated, they might be furnished with entrance into it (i. 10, 11).

A novel feature in the teaching of this Epistle is **the importance which is attached to knowledge**. There indeed, it has been said, we have its key-word. Yet the author's thought will elude us unless we see that "knowledge" is used in a twofold sense. In one meaning it stands but slightly removed from faith, though it possesses an added degree of certainty. Faith so soon melts into knowledge, as used in this sense, that Christian experience is traced indifferently to a "precious faith" (i. 1) and to the knowledge of Christ (i. 3). Faith leads to "virtue," a rudimentary but comprehensive manifestation of the Christian graces, and that "virtue" leads on to "knowledge,"—that is the path of Christian progress (i. 5). But "knowledge" in this latter sense, just because it is elementary, instead of being a goal, only represents a new starting-point, for, in virtue of its possession, the Christian is enabled to move on to the graces in their more advanced stage, self-restraint being supplemented

by patience and godliness, until, when love comes in to complete the circle,—love not simply towards the Christian brotherhood, but towards humanity,—the very moral advance so registered bears fruit in that deeper “knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (i. 8), in which the readers of this letter are in a final appeal exhorted to grow (iii. 18). This knowledge is spoken of sometimes as a knowledge of God, and at other times as a knowledge of Christ, but the two phrases are thus interchanged simply because the knowledge in question is that which we have of God through Jesus Christ. Yet it is more than mere intellectualism. Nay, it is to such an intellectualism, barren because divorced from conduct, that the true “knowledge” is opposed, our author’s desire probably being to rescue the term from the unethical, and even immoral, associations to which an antinomian Gnosticism had degraded it. Knowledge here, as in the Johannine writings, is not merely intellectual, but ethical and practical. It denotes such a fellowship, not merely with the thought, but with the spirit and will of God, as inevitably finds appropriate expression in character and life.

Thus does the writer of this letter set the true *Gnosis*, or knowledge, over against the false, and test each by its fruits. It is interesting to note that Paul’s Epistles are referred to as being perverted by ignorant or wicked interpreters so as to justify misconduct. The very

doctrine against which Paul protested so vehemently (Rom. vi.), that the passage from law to grace meant freedom to transgress, became "the error of the wicked" (iii. 17), who thus turned liberty into libertinism. Another reference to Scripture—this time to Old Testament prophecy—presents a problem for exegesis. "Peter" has been arguing that the glory manifested in Christ's person at the Transfiguration was a pledge of His return in glory. "And thus," says he, taking that event as the goal to which all revelation converged, "we have the prophetic word made more sure—a word to which you do well to take heed, as to a lamp shining in a dark room, until the day of that consummation dawns." But prophecy could not nourish hope unless it was rightly interpreted. And so we are told to recognise, first of all, "that no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation," *i.e.* as most exegetes are disposed to explain this difficult saying, "a prophecy is not a puzzle which can be solved according to individual caprice" (a practice of which the false teachers denounced in chap. ii. were guilty); "it embodies a definite purpose, in the discovery of which the individual interpreter must be governed by general principles of exegesis, which are approved by the judgment of the Christian community." Individual caprice is thus barred out, because "no prophecy ever came by the will of man"; not in human volition or effort lay the secret

of its utterance; "but men spake from God, being borne along by the Holy Ghost" (i. 19-21). What therefore, the Holy Ghost has inspired, requires Him also for its interpretation. **The view of inspiration** thus set forth, implying, as it does, the supersession of the prophet's intellect and will by a superior force, represents it, after the fashion of Philo or Plato, as essentially mechanical in its operation. And the presence of such a degenerate conception here is a reason, added to others, why scholarship relegates this Epistle to the second century, and regards it as probably in date the latest contribution to the New Testament.

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