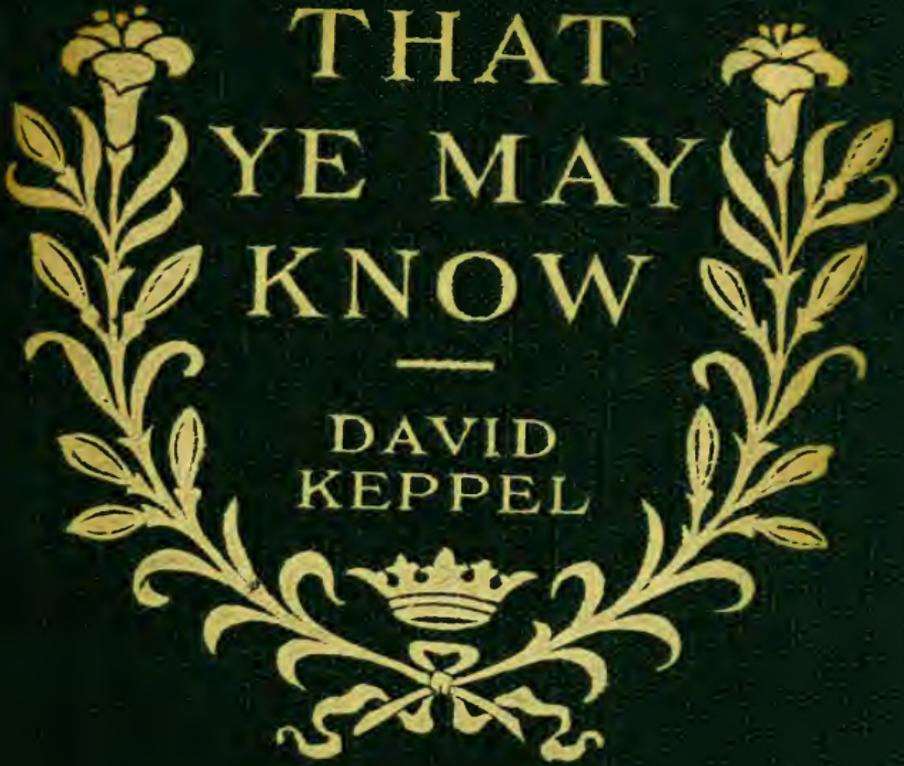




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KNOW

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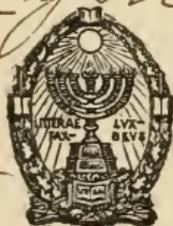
That Ye May Know

THE QUESTION, HOW MAY I KNOW
THAT I HAVE ETERNAL LIFE?
ANSWERED FROM THE FIRST
EPISTLE OF SAINT JOHN

By

DAVID KEPPEL

one of our Presian's school
my student boys, when you were our pastor perhaps you remember him, he was the pastor of our Methodist church the last 3 years & now at Clifton Springs



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

How may I know that I have eternal life? is perhaps the greatest question that can occupy the mind of the Christian.

Eternal life includes in one term all the blessings of the gospel. God is the source of it; and he transmits it to every one that is born of God. Hence it begins at the new birth. In fact, the germination of eternal life within the soul is the new birth. In this present world eternal life is the life which we now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us; and of which we can say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." In the world to come eternal life is the sort of life that God and his angels and saints are living. It is

eternal communion with God and with those who love him. It is eternal blessedness and eternal glory. Eternal life, moreover, is the opposite of spiritual death now, and of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power hereafter. In a single phrase, we may say that eternal life is that which distinguishes the child of God from others, both in this life and in that which is to come.

Now, it is awfully possible to make a mistake as to our possession of eternal life—to believe we have it when we have it not. Our Lord himself says: “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Fearful are the consequences of such

a mistake. In this present life he who makes it is like the Laodicean who said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," whereas he was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked"; and in the world to come, he who makes this mistake loses eternal felicity and falls unprepared into the hands of the living God.

In such a case as this we cannot afford to take chances; we cannot depend upon past experiences, however blessed; we dare not trust the sweetest frame; we must have certainty. But how can we have certainty? How may I know that I have eternal life? Surely this is of all questions the most important!

Now, if it should become known for the first time that a treatise from the pen of the beloved disciple of Jesus, the saintly John, were in existence, answering fully and clearly this most important question, the presses of the

world could not supply the demand for copies.

Such a document does exist. It has not, however, been hidden for centuries in some Egyptian mummy-pit or on the shelves of some ancient library, but—where it is quite as likely to be overlooked, where indeed its real message has been overlooked by thousands—in the back pages of the New Testament. We refer to that precious little tract known as the First Epistle of John, allowed by nearly all reverent scholarship to be from the pen of the beloved disciple, which clearly and distinctly answers this greatest of all questions.

Two considerations suggest modesty in pressing the assertion that the First Epistle of John answers this great question, the first being that comparatively few students of the epistle find anything of the sort in it; the other, that a large and influential portion of the Christian Church does not

believe such an answer to be possible.

Up to the beginning of the eighteenth century the prevailing view of the epistle seems to have been that expressed by Dr. Adam Clarke, namely, that as to distinct heads of discourse, "it does not appear that any were intended by the apostle, who wrote just as the subjects occurred to his mind, or, rather, as the Spirit gave him utterance." About the time named Sebastian Schmidt timidly suggested that the epistle might have an underlying plan, and later scholars have developed that idea with greater or less success, very few, however, reaching the conclusion which seems to have been intended by the apostle himself, when, near the close of his treatise, he says: "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God."

One reason for the failure to discover

what seems to be the clear meaning of the epistle is found in the overstraining of the theory that in this treatise the apostle was attacking Gnosticism. Now, it is most true that Gnosticism, that weird system of speculation which pervaded the borderland between Christianity and heathenism, pretending to occult and superior knowledge, existed in later New Testament times; and it is quite likely that some of the doctrinal statements and denunciations of the epistle were aimed at its errors by the author, who, according to Irenæus, so feared and hated the Gnostic heresy that he refused to remain under the same roof, even in the public baths, with the arch-Gnostic Cerinthus. But we do not find that he attempts the refutation of the Gnostic heresy. What he does attempt is to displace the false and pretentious gnosis, or knowledge, of Gnosticism, by substituting the genuine knowledge of Christianity. Hence it comes to pass

that in this little book the word "know" or its equivalent occurs more than thirty times.

We have said that a large and influential portion of the Christian Church does not believe it possible for the ordinary Christian to know that he has eternal life. Thus the Council of Trent, expressing the belief of the Roman Catholic Church, declares that "no man can know, with the certitude of faith with which error may not be mixed, that he has received the grace of God." The belief, or rather the doubt, thus formulated is found crushing the hearts and paralyzing the energies of individual Christians of all churches. Where this exists there can be no fullness of joy; and hope, mixed with doubt, ceases to be the anchor of the soul. We have spoken of the question, "How may I know that I have eternal life?" as the most important that the Christian can put to his soul. But if it be impossible to know that

we have received the grace of God at all, it is clearly impossible to know that we possess that greatest of all gifts of grace, eternal life; and therefore to that most important question there can be no satisfactory answer.

Thank God, the beloved disciple did not so judge! "These things," says he, "have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (5. 13). These words coming from the pen of the author of the fourth gospel have peculiar significance, for we find near the close of that gospel a statement very like the one noted, and evidently bearing a similar relation to the gospel which the words just quoted bear to the epistle: "These are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name." We need scarcely call attention to the progression of thought in these two sentences. The gospel was written that believers might have life; the epistle,

that they may know that they have it. Thus the epistle is really no epistle at all, but an appendix to the gospel, written as it were with the same quill; the gospel giving ample grounds for saving faith, the epistle furnishing tests whereby we may know that our faith does indeed save us, that we have eternal life.

Now, it is most significant that students of John's gospel are coming to see that the author did indeed do what he tells us that he intended to do—write things down whereby his readers might be led to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Thus Marcus Dods in the Expositor's Bible says: "The Evangelist explicitly says that his purpose in writing was to promote the belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This purpose he judges he will best accomplish by reproducing in his gospel those manifestations of his glory which elicited faith in the first disciples and in others.

He relates, therefore, with the utmost simplicity of language, the scenes in which Jesus seemed to him most significantly to have revealed his power and his goodness, and most forcibly to have demonstrated that the Father was in him." Canon Westcott says of the fourth gospel, in the Speaker's Commentary, "The record is a selection from abundant materials at the command of the writer, made by him with a specific purpose, first to create a particular conviction in his readers, and then in virtue of that conviction to bring life to them." Now, then, if it be evident, as it is, that in his gospel the apostle carried out the purpose stated near its close, why should not the same be true of the epistle? We believe that it is true—that there is not a line of the epistle but was written with the express purpose that the readers, who already believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, might have their joy full

by knowing that they have eternal life.

If, however, we are expecting to find a series of bald tests whereby we may know that we have eternal life, we are liable to be disappointed; or rather let us say, we shall find something far richer and more satisfactory than any such series of tests could be. Sometimes the revelation given whereby we may know that we have eternal life takes the form of the enunciation of a great principle, sometimes of an exhortation to holy living, or exultation in some great privilege, and again it takes the form of a formal test; but under all these forms we shall find, if we search for it, some fact whereby we may know whether we have eternal life.

Again, the apostle does not always name eternal life as the object of the test. As one might turn a gem this way and that to catch the gleam from many facets, so the apostle uses many terms, each one revealing some new

phase of eternal life. Thus he speaks of walking in the light, having fellowship with God, knowing God, dwelling in God, sonship to God, the love of God perfected in us; but we know by a sort of intuition that we cannot enjoy any of these without possessing eternal life—that, indeed, they are simply phases of eternal life.

Nor do we affirm that the epistle contains nothing else than a series of tests of the possession of eternal life. The dear old apostle is himself so joyous in the possession of eternal life, so full of anxiety as to the present happiness and eternal salvation of his dear children, so watchful of the dangers that surround them, that he is constantly bubbling over into exhortation, warning, rebuke, or exultation; but, while we delight in the luxuriant foliage and abundant clusters of the vine, let us not miss the underlying body of the vine, which supports and produces all. That is to say, let us not, in our enjoy-

ment of the precious texts which lie upon its surface, neglect the strong chain of reasoning which underlies the whole epistle, whereby we may know that we have eternal life.

There is scarcely any possibility of doubt that the First Epistle of John is from the pen of the disciple that Jesus loved, the man who leaned upon his breast, and who of all earthly friends was nearest to his Lord; hence, if we are inquiring as to our possession of that eternal life which can only be received by believing on the name of the Son of God, we can find no man more competent to instruct us than this bosom friend of the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, we find in Saint John certain personal characteristics which confirm our confidence in him. He is the Positivist of the New Testament. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" seems to be his motto in all that he writes. We have already noticed in the epistle his em-

phatic claim to being an eyewitness to the facts upon which he is basing his argument. The same peculiarity is found in the gospel. In relating what he considered to be a most extraordinary, if not altogether miraculous, feature of the execution of our Lord, namely, the flowing of blood and water from his pierced side, he adds, "He that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true." A friendly hand adds a note to the gospel which goes to show that among his contemporaries this assertion was heartily indorsed: "This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true." Even in his private letter to Gaius, perhaps the very man who added that friendly note to the gospel, the apostle says, "Thou knowest that our witness is true." If John was the author of Revelation, as we believe he was, we find there illustrated the same peculiarity. Near the close of

that work he says, "I John am he that heard and saw these things"; and this is but the summing up of his declarations concerning the objects of his vision, repeated more than ninety times, that he had seen and heard them.

We may therefore follow our guide with the confidence which one naturally has in a writer who has access to the bottom facts, and is satisfied with nothing less, but builds his teaching upon those certainties which he himself has seen and known.

A peculiarity of John's style may be mentioned, which is found in all of his formal works, and which, while really a beauty, may, if we are not aware of it, serve to obscure the real clearness of his thought. John always works to a plan, each succeeding point of which is clear to his own mind before he makes it clear to his reader. The coming idea casts its shadow before. Thus he is seldom abrupt; but, as the musician

sometimes introduces a note foreign to the harmony which he is playing, yet proper to the chord which he is about to produce, so the apostle often introduces a thought new to the reader, and which may even seem foreign to what he is saying, but which soon reappears in full harmony with the new thought which he is about to utter. Thus his periods are seldom sharply distinguished, but rather melt one into another, like the dissolving views of the stereopticon, in which the new picture begins to appear long before the old picture has faded from the canvas.

In this introductory chapter it only remains now for us to exhibit in broad outline the facts stated by the apostle whereby we may know that we have eternal life.

The first of these is that we walk in the light. The apostle's argument is in brief this: God is the source of eternal life; to obtain and retain

eternal life, therefore, we must have fellowship with God; but God is light, pure light without one speck of darkness, not the mingled light and dark of Gnosticism; to have fellowship with God, then, is to walk in the light; and to walk in the light is proof that we possess eternal life.

The second fact is that we keep the commandments of Christ. Of these the apostle specifies two: one so familiar that he does not need to repeat it, the old commandment, "Love one another"; the other a new commandment, "Love not the world." The argument is this: To have eternal life implies that we know Christ; but we are only sure that we know him when we keep his commandments; hence when we do keep his commandments we have reason to know that we have eternal life.

The third is the fact of holy living. This the apostle presents in two phases, positive and negative; he that is born

of God does righteousness, and he does not commit sin. Now, to be born of God is to have within us the beginning of eternal life; consequently, if our life justifies the belief that we are born of God, it proves the possession of eternal life.

The fourth proof that we have eternal life is the testimony of the triune God, the witness of the Spirit, the full assurance of faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and the testimony of God the Father that he hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

CHAPTER II

LIGHT AND LIFE

WE now take up the question, How may I know that I have eternal life? and we find that the apostle's first answer is, that we know that we have eternal life, or, what amounts to the same thing, have fellowship with God, when we walk in the light as God is in the light.

This part of the argument, and indeed the entire argument, is aptly introduced by the apostle's assurance of his own fitness to deal with this great question. He says:

“We are declaring to you with regard to the teaching concerning the Life, that which was from the very first, which we ourselves have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have gazed upon, and these hands

of ours have handled. Also the Life was made visible, and we have seen it, and are telling what we have seen, and are declaring unto you, the Life, the eternal life which was with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have actually seen and heard we are declaring to you also, so that you may have fellowship with us; and surely this fellowship of ours is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; and we are writing what we are that our joy may be full" (1 John 1. 1-4).

From this introduction, which we venture to give in a free translation because of its difficulty as it stands in our Bibles, we see that the apostle assures his readers of his peculiar relation to the matters in hand. He is neither introducing some novel theory nor retailing matters of hearsay, but he is declaring that which has been received by the church from the beginning of Christianity, with which, moreover, he himself, with his fellow

apostles, had immediate and personal relation. It might, indeed, be objected, that the life eternal, being intangible and invisible, could not be a matter of personal knowledge; but, while he admits that it had its origin in the invisible God, whom "no man hath seen nor can see," nevertheless it is manifested in Jesus Christ, God's Son, and therefore in discussing the things concerning the word, or doctrine, of the life, he is truly declaring that which he had seen and heard.

He bases his first test of eternal life upon a grand principle which he himself had from the lips of the Master: "This is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1. 5).

Now then, if this be so, it follows that he who has fellowship with God must walk in the light, for God is light. But it is only by having fellowship with God that we obtain eternal

life or continue to enjoy it; for God is the source, the fountain of this life; hence it follows that he who has eternal life must of necessity walk in the light.

It may be objected that this is basing the proof that we have eternal life upon feeling, that we believe we have eternal life simply because we feel good. Now, this objection would be well taken if light were nothing but a feeling; but both in the natural and in the spiritual world light is vastly more, it is a fact.

Even as a feeling, the sense that we are walking in the light is no mean evidence that we have eternal life. Indeed, he upon whose soul the light of God is pouring needs no better evidence. Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine that this momentary darkness is blindness, total, irremediable.

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse,
Without all hope of day!

Now turn your face toward the sun-lit heavens, and open your eyes. What a change! We may have no words to define it; but no one can doubt it. It may come as gradually and noiselessly

as the springtide
Its wreath of verdure weaves,
And all the trees on all the hills
Open their thousand leaves,

or as suddenly as an Oriental sunrise bursting at once among the startled shadows; but some such change comes to him who is called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. "There is no object so foul," says Emerson, "that intense light will not make it beautiful." This is true of the light of God; it paints its rainbow on our falling tears; sorrow touched by it "grows bright with more than rapture's ray," and even sin itself, when we get well to the God-ward of it, is glorified by that light, as

Clouds themselves like suns appear
When the sun pierces them with light.

It is idle to say that such an experience as this has no evidential value.

But, after all, it is light as a fact, rather than light as a feeling, walking in the light, rather than basking in the light, which proves that we have eternal life. If he whose eyes Christ had opened had returned from Siloam perceiving nothing of the persons and objects in the way, but running against and stumbling over them, no one would have believed him when he said, "Whereas I was blind, now I see." But he evidently "came seeing," hence no one could doubt his words. Even so, many things are manifest to him who is walking in the light of God. He perceives God, and has fellowship with him. He perceives his own unfitness for such fellowship, and seeks cleansing in the precious blood of Jesus. He is under no misapprehension in this matter, but frankly confesses that he is a sinner, needing cleansing. Still less does he—as certain Gnostics were

doing, and not a few self-righteous moralists are still doing to-day—deny that he has sinned.

He knows better than that, for is he not walking in the light? He is like one coming out of the darkness, say of a coal mine, into the light of a brilliantly illuminated parlor, who perceives at once that his person and his clothing are soiled, unfitting him for association with the other guests, and who seeks the bath and the wardrobe, and returns cleansed and fitly clad for such high fellowship. In the clear light of God he does not deceive himself by saying that he has no sin, or that he has not sinned; but, frankly confessing both, he finds God faithful and righteous to forgive his sin and cleanse him from all unrighteousness. He seeks the bath—the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness—and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth him from all sin.

But let us turn to the apostle's own

words; for we dare not read into his message anything which he did not himself put there: "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1. 6-10).

Before leaving this discussion of sin the apostle gives a statement concerning it of great practical value. While the normal condition of one who walks in the light is that of sinlessness, nevertheless even to such a one sin is not impossible. Hence he exhorts his readers not to sin. But if one who

had been walking in the light should be so unhappy as to fall into sin, the apostle would not have him give up his confidence as though that one sin proved that he never had eternal life. God, who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust, has made provision for such lapses. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. So righteous, so worthy is he, that the Father is kindly disposed toward those for whom he pleads, not on account of their worthiness, but for the sake of their intercessor. Thus the child of God who sins can be restored to the favor of God on precisely the same conditions as those upon which he, or any other member of our race, found forgiveness at first.

“My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but

also for the sins of the whole world” (2. 1, 2).

The next token of the possession of eternal life really falls under the present head, being simply a description of how one acts who is walking in the light. Still, on account of its great clearness and importance we give it the emphasis of a separate chapter. There may be some doubt as to the *feeling* that we are in the light; we may indeed compass ourselves about with sparks, and walk in the light of our own fire, and in the sparks that we have kindled, and have no reward other than that announced by the prophet, “Ye shall lie down in sorrow”; but there can be no doubt as to whether we are *walking* as children of the light. The blind may have some sensations of light; and he who sees may close his eyes and fancy himself in the dark; but there can be no doubt when we walk abroad. The blind cannot act as though he saw; nor he who sees as though he were blind.

CHAPTER III

WALKING IN THE LIGHT—OBEDIENCE AND LIFE

THE next test is an exceedingly practical one. It is this: "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (2. 3).

It will be remembered that in his gospel, which unquestionably was in the hands of those to whom John was writing the epistle, the apostle quotes our Saviour as saying: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." To know that we know God, then, is to know that we have eternal life.

The apostle first of all insists upon the validity and the reasonableness of this test: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is

a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" (2. 4, 5).

The apostle's vehemence suggests that some in his time said, "I know him," who did not keep his commandments. This was indeed the case. Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, who was himself a disciple of John, and who therefore may be called John's spiritual grandson, tells us that the Gnostics of his time reasoned that "as gold, though mixed with the mire, does not lose its beauty, so they themselves, though wallowing in the mire of carnal works, did not lose their spiritual essence; and therefore, though they did not abstain from anything that is foul in the eyes of God or man, they could not contract any defilement." Similar teachings have been reached from the standpoint of high antinomianism and mysticism; but what is perhaps more dangerous is the vague feeling, backed up by no system of argument what-

ever, that one may disregard the law of God and the morals of society and still win the prize of eternal life. To all such the words of Saint John are wholesome reading: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his word, is a liar."

The apostle adds a terse sentence expressing the sweet reasonableness of this test: "Hereby we know that we are in him: he that saith he abideth in him," that is, in Christ, "ought himself also to walk even as he walked" (2. 5, 6). Of course he ought! It is of all things most unreasonable to profess to abide in a Saviour whom we do not even follow. The Master himself had little use for lip-service. "If ye love me," says Jesus, "keep my commandments." If, then, we find a great gulf between our profession and our practice, if our love of the Saviour is merely a sentimental feeling which does not induce us to follow him, we may well doubt our possession of eternal life.

This test is based upon two commandments—one so familiar to his readers, and so characteristic of the writer, that he has no need to repeat it; the other a new commandment. “Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard. Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth” (2. 7, 8).

Jerome preserves to us a delightful reminiscence of John which illustrates the relation both of himself and his readers to this “old commandment”: “When he tarried at Ephesus to extreme old age, and could only with difficulty be carried to the church in the arms of his disciples, and was unable to give utterance to many words, he used to say no more at their several meetings than this, ‘Little children,

love one another.' At length the disciples and fathers who were there, wearied with hearing always the same words, said, 'Master, why dost thou always say this?' 'It is the Lord's command,' was his worthy reply, 'and if this alone be done, it is enough.' " It is easy, then, to understand why the aged apostle refrains from repeating words which had become an old story to his readers, but there is not the slightest doubt that the "old commandment" is that which he ascribes to the Master in the gospel: "These things I command you, that ye love one another."

No words of ours can so well express the testing quality of this commandment as do those of the apostle himself: "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness,

and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" (2. 9-11).

What could be clearer? We have already learned that walking in darkness is proof positive that we have not eternal life abiding in us. If, then, we act toward our brethren as those walking in the dark do toward their fellows; if we fail to recognize them as brethren, if we run into them and jostle them, and then are angry with them because of the jostling; if, in a word, we habitually misunderstand and dislike our fellow Christians, it is proof that we do not walk in the light, and therefore that we have not eternal life.

The new commandment has been already introduced with a note almost apologetic: "Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth" (2. 8). What

he seems to mean in this very difficult passage is this, that, both in the days of Jesus and in the days in which John was writing, darkness was passing away and new light was breaking forth; hence new commandments were to be expected. The "old commandment" of John's time was the "new commandment" of Jesus; and as Jesus was justified in announcing a new commandment in his own day, even so John feels justified in announcing a new commandment, which is valid so far as Christ is concerned, for, while he never enacted it as a commandment, the substance of it is contained in his teachings, and is valid so far as those to whom John is writing are concerned, being given on apostolic authority.

This new commandment he now proceeds to declare with the most solemn tenderness. In giving the apostle's words we do so in paraphrase, the phrases set off by dashes being, of course, our own explanations:

“I am writing to you—this epistle—my dear spiritual offspring, because your sins are forgiven you for his—Christ’s—sake; to you older people I am writing because you know him—namely, Christ—from the beginning; to you younger people I am writing, because you have conquered the Evil One. I wrote to you—in my gospel—dear ones—even before you were my spiritual offspring—because you have known the Father—though you did not then know the Son—to you older people I wrote because you have known Him—namely, him who is just mentioned, the Father—from the beginning; to you younger people I wrote, because you are strong, and are versed in God’s word, and have conquered the evil one: do not love the world nor the things in the world” (2. 12–15).

He addresses his readers as *teknia*, as his own spiritual children, telling them why he is writing to them. To all he is writing because their sins are

forgiven them for Jesus's name's sake; to the older people, because they know Him that is from the beginning, the Son of God in the bosom of the Father; to the younger people because they have been bold soldiers of the cross, and have overcome the wicked one. Yes, and before he could number them among his *teknia*, his spiritual children, he had written to them as *paidia*, as his dear boys and girls; when in the dim light of Judaism and Theism they knew the Father, though as yet they did not know the Son, he had written to them his beautiful gospel, to the end that they might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and believing might have life through his name. Even then the older ones, the fathers, had their vision of God, and the younger ones, strong in the ancient scriptures, their victories over the evil one. By all these tender memories of those that were older, and all these victories over evil of those that were younger; by

their relation to himself as their instructor and spiritual father; by the interest he had formerly shown in penning for them his gospel that they might believe in Christ and have eternal life; by the interest he is now showing in penning his epistle, that they may know that they have eternal life, he adjures them: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (2. 15). This is the new commandment.

Surely this is a test of the possession of eternal life; for, to use the words of the apostle, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (2. 15). And certainly if the love of the Father is not in him, neither is eternal life in him! And the apostle makes it very clear that the love of the Father cannot rule the worldly heart. "For," says he, "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (2. 16, 17).

O, what a warning is this to the worldly Christian! The very things which he loves so well, to which he clings as making life worth living, are the evident tokens of eternal death.

It may be objected that all this is taking a very narrow view: that the love of the brotherhood is a class affection, not to be compared in dignity with the universal love of mankind, that love which moved God to give to the world his only begotten Son; and that there are far more heinous sins than worldliness. Now, all this might be important if the apostle were giving a system of ethics, but he is not, he is giving a practical test of the possession of eternal life, therefore he seeks not broadness and completeness, but precision. As the traveler who can scarcely judge of his progress by the

apparent motion of the distant mountain top, and cannot judge of it at all by the motion of distant stars, can judge accurately by the apparent motion of the wayside trees and posts; even so, while one might be puzzled to judge of his religious condition by the perfection of his love to God, or by his world-wide love to man, he need have little difficulty in judging by his relation to the brother at his side, or the world at his door. It is the little straw, rather than the tossing billow or the waving forest, which shows the way the wind is blowing.

We now come to a digression, a little off the line of the apostle's argument, but nevertheless containing a test of eternal life, as timely now as it was when Saint John wrote to his spiritual children concerning them that were leading them astray.

His allusion to the passing away of the world suggests the coming of the last hour, perhaps the last hour of the

Old Testament dispensation and the winding up of the Jewish nation. Now, it was the settled belief that the last hour should be ushered in by the solemn entrance of Antichrist upon the stage of history. Paul had declared that that day should not come until "the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God"; and Jesus, long ago, had told four chosen disciples, of whom John himself was one, that there should arise false Christs and false prophets, who should show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, the very elect. In a private conversation with the elders of this very church of Ephesus to which John is now writing, Paul had said years before, "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the

flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

John perceives the scudding clouds betokening the coming tempest which should so nearly wreck the ship of salvation. “Even now,” says he, “have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us” (2. 18, 19).

It was indeed a time to try men’s souls. Still, there was no reason why the disciples should be moved from their steadfastness. Indeed, the apostle does not expect that men who have tasted of the heavenly gift, and of the powers of the world to come, will be moved from the old faith by teachings so grossly false as were then current.

“Ye have an anointing from the Holy One,” he reminds his readers, “and ye know all things” (2. 20). Little need had they of this new gnosis, who already knew the mind of the Spirit; and it seemed as if they who knew the truth so well could not be drawn away by the antichrists whose teachings were so utterly untrue. The apostle uses strong words: “Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, even he that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also” (2. 22, 23). He advises his readers to cling to the old faith: “As for you, let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning” (2. 24); and then gives to them the test which, as we have said, is as timely to-day as ever: “If that which ye have heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son, and in the Father.

Faith of our fathers! living still
In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword:
O how our hearts beat high with joy,
Whene'er we hear that glorious word!
Faith of our fathers! holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death!

In these days of ours, when the foundations of the faith are being tried as perhaps never before, when new theologies and new faiths are offered on every hand, this touchstone of eternal life is as important as it was when first written. As John said to his Ephesian children, so say we: "As for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that anyone teach you; but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, abide ye in him. And now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (2. 27, 28).

CHAPTER IV

SINLESSNESS AND SONSHIP

THE third test given by the apostle is that of holy living. Sinlessness is a proof of sonship; and inasmuch as it is one and the same thing to be a child of God and to have eternal life, it follows that sinlessness is a proof of the possession of eternal life.

It is worthy of remark that, while in presenting the former tests the apostle either identifies himself with his readers or addresses them directly, using the pronoun "we" or "you," in giving this test he uses the third person. From this we gather that while the former tests were internal, this is external. The former tests enable each one for himself, by introspecting his own heart and examining his own life, to answer the question, How may I

know that I have eternal life? but this test is to be applied to others, answering the question, How shall we distinguish between the true child of God and the professed child of God who is really the child of the devil?

There was, and still is, great need for such a test. Every test given by the apostle includes, as an essential feature, the love of the brethren; and logically so, for there is no line of evidence of the possession of eternal life which is not vitiated and nullified if brotherly love be lacking. It was of the utmost importance then, and is of the utmost importance now, to have some simple and reliable rule by which to distinguish the genuine child of God from the hypocritical or deceived professor.

Notably was such a rule needed in Ephesus by those to whom the apostle was writing. Not all in Ephesus who claimed to be brothers were really so. As foretold by Paul, grievous wolves

had doubtless already entered the church, not sparing the flock; and from their own number men were arising speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them. Men who said that they were apostles, but who were not apostles but convicted liars, were appealing to the church.

Now, it is not for a moment to be believed that John insisted upon brotherly love for such characters, as a sign of eternal life. Indeed, we know that he did not, for, writing to the elect lady in his second epistle, he says: "If anyone cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching," namely, the faith that was once delivered unto the saints, "receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works." Indeed, if tradition reports truly, John himself wasted very little brotherly love upon Cerinthus, who was doubtless one of these false brethren. Paul, writing to Timothy

concerning men in the Ephesian church, who were corrupted in mind and destitute of the truth, supposing that godliness is a way of gain, says, "From such withdraw thyself"; and the glorified Redeemer himself congratulates the same church that they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, "which," says he, "I also hate."

Some simple and unerring rule by which the children of God and the children of the devil might be made manifest, and be clearly distinguished the one from the other, is absolutely essential; and such a rule we find, stated positively and negatively: "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God"; and, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (2. 29 and 3. 9).

This is practically the same as the rule given by Jesus years before: "By their fruits ye shall know them"; and it is the very test which we ourselves instinctively use, and which the world

itself insists upon, in judging of the genuineness of Christian profession, namely, that the real child of God will do that which is right and avoid that which is evil.

“If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as He is pure. Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. And ye know that he was manifested to take away sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not:

whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him. My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous: he that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (2. 29—3. 10).

In applying the positive phase of this test, "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of God," the apostle reasons thus: "If ye know that God is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." Certainly! like begets like; the righteous God will have righteous children.

Pausing a moment to exult in the fact that the Father hath bestowed such love upon us that we not only are called, but actually are, the children of God, the apostle goes on to add two other reasons why the child of God must be righteous. The one is that he hopes one day to see the Father, and to be like him; and having fixed this hope on God, it is but natural that he should purify himself, even as God is pure. This is most reasonable. If we expected to be ushered into the presence of an earthly monarch we would put on court costume; how much more, then, shall those who expect to appear before the King of kings seek to be arrayed in the robe of righteousness! The other reason is that the Saviour was manifested to make him righteous: "He was manifested to take away our sins, and in him was no sin."

Three reasons, then, unite to make it certain that the child of God will be positively righteous: his birth, his hope,

and his Saviour. It is but natural that the child of the righteous Father should himself be righteous; he who hopes to see God face to face will certainly strive to be pure even as God is pure; and the sinless Saviour stands ready to do what we ourselves cannot do—to take away our sins.

We now approach the negative phase of this test, which is stated with amazing clearness by the apostle: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.”

Now, when we recall the definition of sin under which the apostle is working, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law,” or, in the terser rendering of the Revised Version, “sin is lawlessness”—a definition vastly differing from that which is given

later, "All unrighteousness is sin"—we perceive how fair and conservative this test is. If sin be lawlessness, then he who is committing sin is not merely deviating from absolute righteousness, but he is acting lawlessly, doing what the law of God declares to be wrong, and what he himself and everybody else knows to be wrong. He who is born, or begotten, of God cannot do this. Why? Because the seed of God, that holy influence which entered into him at the new birth, and which constitutes him a child of God, abides in him. How could he continue to be the child of the holy God while he is defying and ignoring his law? Common sense itself assures us that he cannot; and therefore we are justified in applying this test to anyone who comes to us claiming to be a brother. If he is acting lawlessly, doing what he knows and what we know to be sinful, whatever profession he makes, we cannot regard him as a

child of God, or receive him as a brother.

“Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, *neither he that loveth not his brother.*” We have said that, however the apostle approaches his subject, he always insists upon brotherly love. Indeed, he seems to regard the lack of it as the greatest possible unrighteousness; and it is probable that it actually was the crying sin of the Ephesian church, of which he was pastor.

When Paul first wrote to that church he congratulated them on their “love for all the saints”; but times had changed, and writing later to their bishop, Timothy, he describes a condition of the church far from amiable, in which men were “lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good,

traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof." The glorified Jesus, writing to them by the hand of John, says: "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love"; not love of Himself, for, so far as outward acts could show, he credits them with that, but love to one another, the love for all the saints for which they were famous when Paul first wrote to them.

It is not strange, then, that John should again insist on brotherly love as the *sine qua non* of the Christian life. This he does so clearly and forcibly that we cannot do better than repeat his words: "This is the message which ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another: not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (3. 11).

Cain was the father of the persecuting world, Abel of the suffering saints. As it was in the beginning, so it is now, and ever shall be. We hear much of the alienation of the masses from the church, and the church is often berated as if it were altogether to blame for this; but the fact is that the masses always were, and always will be, alienated from the genuine church of Christ. It is only as the church descends to the level of the world, or as portions of the world rise to the level of the church, that this alienation ceases. The Master says to his disciples: "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." O church of the living God! O worldly and world-beloved Christian! If the world love you, there is a flaw in your title; you cannot read your title clear to mansions in the skies.

Our own experience confirms the words of the Master. Before we came into the family of God we had the same feeling toward the genuine children of God that the rest of the world has toward them. Of course, we loved some individual Christians on personal grounds; but we would have loved them vastly better if they had not been so strict, so peculiar. Of the rest, many, whom we now believe to be earnest and humble followers of Jesus, then seemed to be hypocritical pretenders, who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. If a Christian was so successful in living a godly life that we could find no flaw in it, we were embittered toward him as we felt with Iago,

“He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly”;

but if he failed, how bitterly we sneered at his “hypocrisy,” and held him up to contempt as a specimen of “your church members”!

It takes a miracle of grace to make us love the brethren. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." This is the explanation of our love for the children of God; and at the same time, it is perhaps the clearest and most reliable test of our own sonship to God, and possession of eternal life.

How vigorously the apostle enforces this capital test of life! Those who think of John as the somewhat namby-pamby apostle of sentimental love make a colossal mistake; for to the close of his life he was Boanerges—the son of thunder. Not any inspired writer, not the Lord himself, struck harder blows, or more straight from the shoulder. Listen to his words: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby know we love, because Christ laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" Then the thunderstorm of apostolic indignation passes, and the sunlight smiles out through the scudding clouds, as he tenderly says: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and truth. Hereby"—that is, by brotherly love practically expressed—"Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him; because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight" (3. 15-22). Surely this is logic on fire with love!

In closing this chapter let it be re-

remembered that the tests given in it are external, and not internal. Many a true child of God, pure of heart and tender of conscience, by forgetting this, has found in some of the forceful words of John a savor of death. Conscious of a thousand lapses from absolute righteousness, he reads, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," and cries in anguish, "Then am I no child of God; for if I say that I have no sin, I deceive myself, and the truth is not in me!" He might go farther and add the guilt of sacrilege to that of self-deception, for John himself has said, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar."

How can these things be? How is the frank confession of sin, past and present, the duty of the child of God, who nevertheless cannot sin? Now, there is really no discrepancy here, but only the misapplication of a test. The words, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin," furnish a test

to be applied to those claiming to be brethren, so searching and sure that by it the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil; for he who does right and commits no sin gives strong evidence that he is what he professes to be—a child of God; while he who does not do right, but disregards the law and commits sin, whatever his profession, is not a child of God, but a child of the devil. But he who applies this rule to his own conscience is like one examining his skin under a microscope, who perceives a thousand blemishes and deformities, where others, or even he himself looking through a proper medium, see nothing but grace and beauty.

On the other hand, we have no right to apply the internal tests to our professed brother. How can we know whether he is walking in the light or not? How can we judge whether he is keeping the commandments of Christ, save by his outward life? If he meas-

ures up to the external standard, doing right, avoiding sin, loving the brotherhood, we have no right to demand further proof; for, as to the rest, to his own Master he standeth or falleth.

CHAPTER V

THE TESTIMONY OF THE TRIUNE GOD

WHERE the Mississippi River rises in the highlands of Minnesota, at first its course winds among hills of drift and boulder where many other streams leap and gambol, so that it is not then easy to determine which stream really belongs to the Father of Waters. Further along in its course it rolls through rich prairies to meet its great tributary, the Missouri, whose turbid stream flows for a long distance in the same channel with the Mississippi, their waters joining but not blending. Then the united stream is joined by the Ohio, and the triune river sweeps on to the sea.

Such is the course of the apostle's argument in the closing portion of his great little book. Three lines of evi-

dence are traced: the testimony of the Father sweeping on throughout the entire argument, sometimes manifest, sometimes hidden, but never absent; then there is the witness of the Spirit, generally easily distinguished, but mingling now and then with the other lines of evidence; and finally there is the "full assurance of faith" in the atonement wrought by the Son of God. These three lines of evidence are, as we might say, braided together, in "a threefold cord" which "is not easily broken." Indeed, the testimonies of the Spirit and the Son are inseparable from that of the Father, for at their root the three lines of evidence are one, the triune God testifying to our possession of eternal life, and sealing that testimony with the seal of love.

The apostle introduces this part of his argument by an appeal from the judgment of our own heart to the judgment of God. In spite of the clearness of the tests already given,

the heart may deceive us, for, to use the words of the prophet Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

"Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him: because if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him" (3. 19-24).

If, as we apply the searching tests already given to our own case, we are condemned in the lower court of our

own heart, we have still the right of appeal to the supreme court of heaven. Even though we have entered the plea of guilty, He who "knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust," may set aside that plea for the sake of Him who is our advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous. But if, on the other hand, our hearts condemn us not, we have reason to expect a token of our acceptance in the answer to our prayers; and if we are indeed keeping his commandments, and doing the things that are pleasing in God's sight, believing on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and loving one another, the apostle assures us that we may boldly approach the throne of grace, expecting that whatsoever we ask we shall receive.

We now come to the first part of the testimony of the triune God:

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

"Hereby we know that he abideth in

us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (3. 24).

This it was that sent Paul shouting through the eighth of Romans: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

But times had changed when John was writing. Satan had learned to counterfeit this signature of God. Many false prophets had gone out into the world—all claiming to be Spirit-filled, just as many false "isms" are now abroad in the world, making the same claim. All is not of God that professes to be spiritual. People are not only deceived by false teachers, speaking "great swelling words of vanity," but there is danger of self-deception. To use the thought of another, some men's egotism reaches so high that they mistake its dictates for the voice of God. While the witness of the Spirit is, when genuine, the most delightful

and satisfying evidence of eternal life, there is perhaps none so liable to be counterfeited, and when counterfeited there is not one more disastrous. Hence there is need of extreme caution in accepting what purports to be the witness of the Spirit, either in our own experience, or as the professed basis of the religious teachings of others. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (4. 1).

The apostle gives us four tests by which we may distinguish the Spirit of God, tests which are as sound to-day as they were when John wrote them, which we cannot improve and do not need to modernize. They are these: the Spirit that is truly of God is orthodox as to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, it is opposed to the world and victorious over it, it is loyal to the apostolic teaching, and it is—love.

This is the age of novelty. The old

notion that a thing is apt to be stanch if it has stood the test of time has given place to the belief that only what is new is really worth while. Advanced thinking, the novel and striking, in science, in criticism, in theology, usurps the reverence once paid to the authority of testimony. Indeed, if evolution rule in the world of thought, as it is supposed to rule in the world of matter, the latest thought ought to be the ripest and the best; for, are we not the heirs of all the ages? Hence, men of intellect criticise every belief, however venerable, and question the right of every fact to be accepted, even though its claim rests upon the testimony of eyewitnesses hitherto unimpeached.

The belief of the Christian Church in the divine-human person of Jesus Christ has not escaped such criticism. Indeed, it cannot be easy to reconcile the unique history of a unique Being with the positive philosophy of our day; hence thinking men stumble at

the union of the divine and human in one person, and that the person of a man. Then the New Theology, with its humanitarian view of Christ, flashes upon the mind with all the vividness of a new discovery—of our own discovery. It seems to be the inspiration of the very Spirit of Truth; but, beware lest it be the voice of our own egotism! Prove the spirit whether it be of God. This new theology, yielding to none in professed admiration for the Christ-spirit, whether manifest in the person of Jesus of Nazareth or in the lives of other good men; admitting that this admirable Christ-spirit has its origin in God, and is incarnate in lives of Christlike men; nevertheless denies that it “was God,” or that the same personal Spirit, in the person of Jesus Christ, is “come in the flesh.” “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God:

and this is the spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already” (4. 2, 3).

A polemic against the new theology does not, however, come within our present scope; but we simply use it as an illustration of a spirit that has gone out into the world, but which does not endure the test, in that it is not loyal to the belief in the incarnation of Jesus Christ; for “every spirit that confesseth not Jesus”—that “annulleth Jesus,” as some ancient authorities read—“is not of God.” Alas for the church which annulleth Jesus! It has annulled its own spiritual power. Christianity with the divine-human Christ Jesus left out has little to offer to the world which the world does not already possess. Alas for the Christian who annulleth Jesus! for he has annulled his only hope of eternal life. If he refuse to believe in Christ, he falls under the condemnation of the Master’s own words: “He

that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life," and even if his unbelief should be justified—if there should prove to be no such Jesus Christ as John proclaims—then eternal life is no better than a dream.

The next test to be applied to those who come to us claiming to have a message inspired by the Spirit of God is this: Are they opposed to the world and victorious over it? Contrasting those of his own communion with the false teachers, John says: "Ye are of God, my little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore they speak as the world, and the world heareth them" (4. 4, 5).

The religious teachers and churches which have no controversy with the world or the world with them, whether it be the fashionable minister truckling to a fashionable church, or the "people's

church" bidding for the applause of the masses, would do well to lay to heart the ringing words of James, the Lord's brother: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?"

There seems to be a naivete, if not a narrowness, about the next test: "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not; by this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (4. 6); which reminds us of the old test of orthodoxy: "Orthodoxy is my doxy; heterodoxy is your doxy." But when we remember that the matter in dispute between John and the rival teachers was not a matter of opinion at all, but a question of fact, namely, whether Jesus Christ had or had not come in the flesh, and that John knew by the evidence of his own senses that he had so come, we see that John is not setting up his own opinion against

those of other men, and condemning all that differ from him; but he is contrasting the fact concerning Jesus Christ, as he knew it by "certain infallible proofs," even by the evidence of his senses, with the vagaries of the gnostic teachers, and drawing the very sober and justifiable conclusion that where there was such world-wide difference between fact and fancy the teachers of fancy could not be inspired by the Spirit of God.

The apostle now comes to the last test by which the Spirit of God may be known—the test of love. His argument is in brief this: God is love, hence where the Spirit of God is, love is. Thus the presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is manifested by the love which glows in our hearts and shows itself in our lives; and thus the witness of the Spirit is sealed with the seal of love. "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth

not knoweth not God; for God is love. Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (4. 7-11).

Wonderful is this abiding love, which is really the indwelling God! When perfected it casts out all fear. Not the day of judgment itself has any terror for him who possesses it. "Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, even so are we in this world. There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love" (4. 17, 18).

And it is all of God. We love because he first loved. This, indeed, is

the very gist of the apostle's argument; for if this divine love have its source in God, and we find it in our hearts and lives, it follows that we must have fellowship with God; and, as we have already learned, fellowship with God is eternal life. Moreover, it is practical, not the mystical love which would outpour itself upon God alone, but the warm, human love that, loving God, loves man also. Indeed, to profess love to God while we have no love for our brother is sheer pretense. John uses a shorter and sterner word when he says: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (4. 20). And not only is this reasonable, but John gives us a commandment covering this very point which he had himself received from the lips of the Master: "That he who loveth God love his brother also" (4. 21).

A possible difficulty in the minds of

some of his readers occurs to the apostle, the answer to which leads on to the next great line of evidence.

THE ASSURANCE OF FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

The difficulty to which we refer is this. Some one may ask, How can I love a Being whom I have not seen? John answers. It is true that God is invisible. "No man hath seen God at any time" (4. 12); but, after all, there are three modes by which God, though invisible, can manifest himself to us. First, as we have already seen, he manifests himself to us by his Holy Spirit: "Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (4. 13). Second, while the Father is invisible, the incarnate Son of God was neither invisible nor intangible. He was no phantom either, and the man whose words we are studying had seen and heard him, had gazed into the depth

of his eyes and leaned upon his bosom. "And," says the apostle, "we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God" (4. 14, 15). O, how near we are to Jesus Christ, how near we are brought to the Father through faith in Christ, as we read these words from the pen of "the disciple whom Jesus loved"! The third mode in which the invisible God reveals himself will appear later.

Let us now dwell upon the evidences of eternal life which cluster about the cross of Christ. "Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (4. 9, 10).

Thus eternal life becomes possible to

us by the coming of the Son of God into the world. The love of God, which before the coming of Christ was almost unthought of, and which even now "passeth knowledge," has become the commonplace of religious thought since "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The barriers between the love of God and the need of man are all taken away; for He is our propitiation. The life and death of Jesus Christ, and our heartfelt acceptance of these as expressing the love of God to us and his infinite yearning to make us, sinners, holy and happy; our acceptance of him—as an example which we will follow, a sacrifice making a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for us, and a Saviour whom we will love and obey—removes all hindrances from the outpouring of the love of God upon us.

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is

the Christ," whosoever heartily accepts him as John has been presenting him, "is begotten of God" (5. 1). "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (5. 12). Thus faith in Christ furnishes a powerful proof of eternal life.

In a few words the connection is traced between this line of evidence and that given before: "Whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. Hereby we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and do his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. And who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (5. 1-5.)

Belief in Christ makes us children of God, and, of course, children of God will love the Father; but he who loves the Father will love his children. That is to say, belief in the Lord Jesus Christ has the very same result which flows from the indwelling Spirit—love to God and love to man. Moreover, this love to God and man leads us to keep God's commandments, and to overcome the world. But there is only one possible way by which we can overcome the world, namely, by our faith. But faith in what? There can be but one answer: In Christ. "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

The Son of God goes forth to war,
 A kingly crown to gain:
 His blood-red banner streams afar;
 Who follows in his train?
 Who best can drink his cup of woe,
 Triumphant over pain,
 Who patient bears his cross below,
 He follows in his train.

Jesus himself says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"; and those who believe that he is the Son of God follow in his train, and also overcome the world, as he did.

But how shall this be accomplished? Ah, Jesus came with water and blood, not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. "This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood" (5. 6). He not only came, as John the Baptist did, with water, baptizing unto repentance, symbolizing that outward cleansing which fits us for fellowship with the saints; but he came with the blood, that precious blood of Jesus, which cleanseth us from all sin, thus fitting us for fellowship with God. Thus,

The water and the blood,
From his wounded side which flowed,
Are of sin the double cure.

Moreover, he gives us his blood to drink. That heroic life which went out with the blood shed on Calvary is infused into the souls of those who believe in Jesus. Christ liveth in them. It is said that the heart of the Bruce carried before the heroes of Scotland in battle incited them to prodigies of valor. Even so the precious blood of Jesus carried with us in our conflict with the world insures victory.

This outward and inward cleansing and victory over the world received by us through the life and death of Jesus is proof most positive that we have eternal life; and to this, as we have already seen, the Spirit also bears witness, so that there are indeed "three who bear witness, the Spirit," bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, "the water," manifesting itself in a changed life, "and the blood," cleansing us from all sin. "And these three agree in one," that is, in one testimony to the fact

that we are indeed in possession of eternal life.

Can this assurance be strengthened? It can; for, after all, convincing as this testimony is, it comes from our scrutiny of our own lives. We believe that we have eternal life because we find ourselves marvelously changed. It is "the witness of men." But "the witness of God is greater"; and, in addition to all other evidence of the possession of eternal life, we have

THE TESTIMONY OF THE FATHER

But will God, the Almighty Father, indeed add his testimony? He will, and does. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." It was said some pages back that there are three modes by which the invisible God manifests himself to us. Two of these, the witness of the Spirit and the revelation of God

through his incarnate Son, we have already considered. Now come we to the third, the testimony of the Father.

To us this testimony is found in the words of Holy Writ; but to Saint John the testimony of the Father was a matter of personal knowledge. Twice, and probably three times, he had listened to the voice of the Father as it bore witness concerning the Son. It is likely that John was standing by when Jesus, after he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water, and when there came "a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He certainly was on the mountain-top with Jesus and his two fellow disciples when, to use the words of one of them, "there came a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; and he stood by in the street of Jerusalem when Jesus prayed, "Father, glorify

thy name"; and, while some "said that it had thundered," and others said, "An angel hath spoken to him," John heard the words of the Father: "I have both glorified my name, and will glorify it again." Over and over he had heard Jesus appeal to the Father as bearing witness to his mission. Thus in the temple Jesus said: "The Father that sent me, he hath borne witness of me"; "For the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."

To us, as we have already said, this testimony comes, through inspired apostles and prophets, in the pages of the Bible, the written word of God. So satisfying is this testimony, even to us, so thoroughly does the Father bear witness concerning his Son, that "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in Him" (5. 10). And, on the other hand, so unmistakably does the Father set his seal to the work of

the Son, ratifying all that Jesus says, and standing back of all that he is, that the apostle truthfully declares: "He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (5. 10-12).

Before leaving this subject, let us advert to some instances of the Father's testimony to the Son. "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." Through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah the Father says of the Son, "Behold, my

servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up"; and again, "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

We have already spoken of the miracles of Christ as being the Father's testimony to his Son. This is especially true of that miracle of miracles, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As Paul says, Jesus Christ "was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." In raising Jesus from the dead, and setting him "at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come," God hath set his seal to the mission of his Son, giving us who are trusting Christ for salvation the assurance that God is back of all that Jesus has done for our salvation, and that his atonement, in

which we trust, cannot fail so long as the truth of God endures.

In closing we call attention to one more item in this testimony of the Father, namely, his "exceeding great and precious promises." Every one of them, whether they come to us through prophet or psalmist, apostle or evangelist, or from the lips of the Master, is "the promise of the Father." From this exhaustless treasury let us select a few: "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the

Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel,
thy Saviour." Well has the poet
said:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

MY brother, you have been asking yourself the greatest question that a Christian can put to his soul: How may I know that I have eternal life? It is a question of such tremendous importance that an inquiry as to the validity of all the title-deeds on earth would pale into insignificance beside it. On finding a satisfactory answer depends the eternal interest of your immortal soul.

The man who knew Jesus Christ as a familiar friend offers to be our guide in this inquiry. He declares that he has written his little book that we might know—not think or hope, but know—that we have eternal life. We find that he has done exactly what he intended to do, given us tests whereby

we may know whether we have eternal life or not. We have followed these tests and found them reasonable. He has given us, if indeed we have eternal life, proofs from within, proofs from without, and proofs from above; but if we have it not, every proof condemns us.

How do we stand the test from within? Are we walking in the light as God is in the light? Have we fellowship with God? Does the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse us from all sin? And if we walk in the light, do we walk as children of the light, keeping Christ's commandments, loving our brother, not loving the world?

How do we stand the test from without? Can we truly say, as we judge ourselves just as we would judge another, that we are doing righteousness, that we are not committing sin, that we do really and practically love the brotherhood of God's people?

What testimony have we from

above? Have we the witness of the Spirit, bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God? and do we bear on our hearts and in our lives the seal of that Spirit, the seal of love? Have we the full assurance of faith in the Son of God? Are we washed in the water from the impurities of our outer life, and cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ from all unrighteousness? Do we accept the testimony of the Father to his Son? Do we heartily confess that God the Father has affixed his seal to the salvation which Jesus has wrought for us?

If so, be of good cheer; experience, observation, the testimony of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, agree that we have eternal life.

But, if you feel that you cannot endure the test, still, "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only,

but also for the sins of the whole world." And, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Our task is done. What remains of John's epistle contains simply the conclusions which he draws from the certified hope of eternal life. Some of these conclusions were peculiar to the times in which he wrote; some of them belong to us if so be that there be no flaw upon the title-deeds of our inheritance. The conclusions are in brief these: confidence that "if we ask anything according to his will," God "heareth us"; that it is our privilege and duty to lead sinless lives, for "whosoever is born of God sinneth not"; and that the Son of God has come, "and hath given us an understanding" whereby we know these two things, "the true God" and "eternal

life." Why should we turn away from these to serve idols?

And now, praying that those who have followed us in this study of Saint John's great little book may find an assurance of the possession of eternal life, we make his parting words our own:

"THESE THINGS HAVE I WRITTEN UNTO YOU, THAT YE MAY KNOW THAT YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, EVEN UNTO YOU THAT BELIEVE ON THE NAME OF THE SON OF GOD."

