

# God's Inspiration of the Scriptures Part 11

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### § 49. 1 Peter.

As the address in the Epistle of James differs from that of Peter, whose two Epistles are directed to the same Christian Jews, elect sojourners of the dispersion in part of Asia Minor, so the character of both is most distinct, as may be now soon in the first of the two. They were as he says "elect according to God the Father's foreknowledge in [virtue of] sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and blood-sprinkling of Jesus Christ." Thus does the apostle contrast their standing with Israel, who had only a fleshly and external separation to Jehovah, and were bound to obey the law under the sanction of the sprinkled blood of victims which kept death before them, as the sure penalty in case of their disobedience.

The opening is like that of the Epistle to the Ephesians, yet with a marked difference from the first and throughout. Here it is not "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, according as he chose us in him before the world's foundation that we should be holy and blameless before him in love," etc. It is, "Who according to his much mercy begot us again unto a living hope through resurrection of Jesus Christ out of the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, reserved in the heavens for you that are guarded by God's power through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1: 3-5). It is not "the mystery," but the "heavenly calling," for saints who pass through the wilderness and await their heavenly inheritance at Christ's appearing; it thus far resembles the Epistle to the Hebrews. Exultation meanwhile should be, as grief for a little through varied trials which terminate at His revelation. But we love Him, though we never saw, Him; and though we do not see Him, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, in distinctive contrast with Israel's faith and hope. We receive soul-salvation and wait for that of our bodies. The prophets predicted; the Holy Ghost now witnesses in the gospel; the Lord will be revealed to crown all in glory. Thus between the two, room is made for the gospel and Christianity. We therefore, cheered by what is accomplished, gird up our loins in the Spirit, and hope perfectly for the grace to be soon brought us in Jesus Christ's revelation (6-13).

He says then as obedient children, conforming not yourselves to the former lusts in your ignorance, but according to the holy One that called you, may ye be holy in all conduct; because it is

written, Be ye holy, because I am holy. And if ye invoke as Father Him that impartially judges according to the work of each, pass the time of your pilgrimage in fear, (not because ye doubt your deliverance, but) knowing that not with corruptibles, silver or gold, ye were redeemed from your vain course of life handed down from fathers, but with Christ's precious blood as an unblemished and spotless lamb, foreknown before the world's foundation, but manifested at the end of times for you that through Him believe in God that raised Him out of the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (14-21)

The chapter closes with pointing out that having purified their souls by obedience of the truth to unfeigned brotherly love, they were out of a pure heart to love one another fervently, being born again not of corruptible seed but incorruptible through God's living and abiding word. It was not now a question of Israel's sons, but of God's. And as the new relationship was through His word received in faith, it was on the ground of His sovereign grace in presence of the total failure of His ancient people. Because all flesh is as grass, and all its glory as grass and its dower; but the Lord's word abides for ever. And this is the word which was preached unto them. Relationships to each other among believers follow these to God and Christ; they are most excellent, intimate, and enduring (22-25). Saints might suffer but ought to be of good cheer.

1 Peter 2. Hence they were, putting away all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies, and slanders, to long for the pure milk of the word as new-born babes, that they might grow thereby to salvation, if indeed they had tasted that the Lord is good: without this all was vain. As we see, salvation here as elsewhere is viewed as only complete when glory comes; but as by God's word we were born again, so are we nourished. He is the Living Stone, rejected by men but with God elect, precious; and they coming to Him as living stones were being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Isa. 28: 16 is cited; for the work of grace in Zion by-and-by is no less true for the believers now, to whom the preciousness belongs, while the nation stumbles in disobedience; whereas the faithful gain to the highest degree and are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for a possession, to set forth the excellencies of Him that called them out of darkness into His wonderful light. What Israel are to have when they believe is forestalled, and much more now (6-10). Christians as such are the sole priests whom the Lord now recognises.

As pilgrims and sojourners they are besought to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, with their behaviour seemingly among the Gentiles, that wherein they slander them as evil-doers, they might, as witnesses, out of their good works glorify God in a day of visitation (11, 12). Christians are meant to be separate to the Lord, and ever waiting for Him and glory above, instead of being sown to Jehovah in the land, for great is the day of Jezreel.

Again, he lays down submission to the powers that be, closing with a pregnant summary: honour all, love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the king (13-17).

Domestics are next exhorted to subjection with all fear of their masters; and the Christian principle is enjoined, "If doing good and suffering ye shall endure, this is grace with God." Hence Christ in suffering every way and perfectly is set as model to us, who had gone far astray but now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (18-25).

1 Peter 3. Then wives and husbands are exhorted in the same strain of grace as objects of God's government at work morally (1-7). Finally, all were to be of like mind in sympathy, brotherly love, tenderness, and humility, not returning evil in deed or word, but contrariwise blessing in the sense that such is our calling and hope. The Psalms are freely used to confirm it, warning against self and

assuring us of the Lord's care. Even if we should suffer for righteousness, how blessed! We need not fear or be troubled, but should sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, always ready to answer everyone that asketh a reason about the hope that is in us with meekness and fear, having a good conscience, that, wherein they slander us as evil-doers, those may be put to shame that calumniate our good behaviour in Christ (8-16).

Next he urges the manifest truth that it is better, if the will of God will it, to suffer well-doing than evil doing; for Christ also once suffered for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God, put to death indeed in flesh but quickened in Spirit, in [virtue of] which [Spirit] also He went and preached to the imprisoned spirits, heretofore disobedient when the long-suffering of God waited in Noah's days while the ark was a preparing, wherein few (that is, eight) souls were saved through water; which figure also now saves us, baptism, not putting away of filth of flesh, but a request of a good conscience Godward through Jesus Christ's resurrection, Who is at God's right-hand, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to Him (17-22). The notion of Christ's descent to Hades after death and there preaching to saints, sinners, or angels, is a mere dream, not only without scripture but contrary to it, and irreconcilable with revealed truth. The passage refers solely to His Spirit preaching to the antediluvians through Noah. As they then disobeyed the word, they are in prison, awaiting the still more solemn judgment for eternity; so must those; be who refuse the gospel now preached.

1 Peter 4. Christ suffering for us in flesh is here pressed on us, who also need it the more because of our having lusts, which He had not. The past surely should suffice those who are now renewed, and have lived with the unrestraint to which Gentile surroundings exposed. If now reviled, because they refused such vileness, those who did so should give account to Him that is ready to judge quick and dead. For therefore were glad tidings preached to dead also [of course while alive], that they might be judged according to men in flesh, but live according to God in Spirit. If they submitted to that judgment of themselves as guilty men, they emerged by faith with a new life whereby they lived according to God in Spirit. It is the other side of what the antediluvians experienced who disobeyed Noah's preaching of righteousness (1-6). They were dead now, who by faith bowed to the judgment of their condition and also laid hold of the promises to a life Godward.

This bringing before the apostle the end of all things as drawn nigh, he calls the saints to be sober and watch unto prayers; to cherish before all things fervent love among themselves, because love, instead of bruited abroad, covers a multitude of sins; to be hospitable one toward another without murmurings. Even as each received a gift, they were to minister it to one another, as good stewards of God's manifold grace: if one speak, as God's oracles; if one minister, as of strength which God supplies; that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, Whose is the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen (7-11).

In verses 12-19 is the word not to take as strange the fire among them that cometh for their trial, as though a strange thing happened to them; but in communion with Christ's sufferings to "rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice exultingly. If ye are reproached in Christ's name, blessed [are ye], because the [Spirit] of glory and the Spirit of God rests on you." This is the highest suffering in God's sight, not merely for righteousness, but for Christ. Let none of you, he proceeds, suffer as murderer or thief or evil-doer or as overseer of other's affairs; but if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but glorify God in this name. Because [it is] the time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what [is] the end of those disobedient to the gospel of God? And if the righteous is with difficulty saved, where shall the ungodly and sinful appear? Wherefore also let those that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing to a faithful Creator.

1 Peter 5. The last chapter opens with exhorting the elders among them, himself a fellow-elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who was also partaker of the glory about to be revealed, in exact keeping with the Epistle. Feed, says he, the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight not by necessity but willingly, nor yet for base gain but readily, not as lording over your allotments but being models of the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, ye shall receive the unfading crown of glory (1-4). How every word shines with the light and love of God, yet how forgotten in Christendom!

The younger he bids be subject to elders, and to bind on humility toward one another; for God sets Himself against proud ones, but gives grace to the lowly. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in season, having cast all your anxiety upon him, for he careth for you" (5-7). Again he says, Watch, be wakeful: your adversary the devil as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour. It is not the wiles of a serpent here, still less the ruler of the authorities of the air, but the wilderness enemy. "Whom resist, stedfast in faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brotherhood in the world. But the God of all grace that called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after suffering a little, himself shall make perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle: to him [be] the glory for the ages of the ages. Amen." Did not the apostle remember and apply Luke 22: 32? No doubt he was carrying out his charge over the circumcision that believed in the sphere where Paul laboured so much. And it is full of interest to note that the faithful Silvanus, the companion of the one, now conveyed this Epistle of the other, wherein he exhorts and testifies that this is the true grace of God "wherein ye stand, (or, in which stand)." Again "Mark my son" is now Peter's companion, quite restored to the confidence of the other apostle who had blamed him of old. "She that is joint-elect" appears to be the true force; but whether Peter's wife or another in Babylon whence he writes, we cannot say. He asks for a warm and holy greeting, and peace too mutually, to "you all that are in Christ."

## § 50. 2 PETER.

Not less characteristic of the great apostle of the circumcision is his Second Epistle. They are both occupied with God's moral government; but the former is in view of saints now suffering for righteousness, and for Christ, waiting for His appearing; the latter in view of false and corrupt teachers (2 Peter 2), and of scornful philosophic adversaries (2 Peter 3), alike unrighteous, who shall not fail to meet His judgment in that day. Both are eminently practical and hortative, redemption and new risen life being the basis in the one case, as Christ's purchase aggravates the wickedness in the other.

2 Peter 1. "Symeon Peter, bondman and apostle of Jesus Christ to those that obtained like precious faith with us by (or, in) righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ." These cited words of address are distinctive, notable, and instructive. He does not speak of their being reckoned righteous "through faith," as many misunderstand, but attributes their receiving faith such as the apostle had to God's faithfulness to His promise. For there is always a remnant of grace among Abraham's seed, and of none other. So it had been in the guilty history of Israel; and so it was then, after the Jews rejected their own Messiah. And the dispersed share like precious faith with those who by grace followed Him intimately. If the Blesser here, "our God," became our "Saviour Jesus Christ," it is the more impressive; as undoubtedly He was not Messiah only but the Jehovah God of Israel. To "Grace and peace be multiplied to you," he now adds "in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (1, 2). The increasing stress called for it then and since.

Grace had already done so wondrously for them that he looks for growth accordingly and

spiritual power (3-11). "As his divine power hath given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by (or, by his own) glory and virtue, through which he hath given us the greatest and precious promises, that through these ye may become partakers of a divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust. Even for this very reason too bringing in besides all diligence, in your faith furnish virtue, in virtue knowledge, in knowledge temperateness, in temperateness endurance, in endurance godliness, in godliness brotherly kindness, in brotherly kindness love. For if these things be and abound in you, they make [you] neither idle nor unfruitful as respects the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; for he with whom these things are not is blind, shortsighted, having forgotten the purging of his old sins. Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure, for doing these things ye shall never stumble; for thus shall the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be richly furnished to you." In the full provision of grace he would confirm their souls, but this in order to earnest diligence and the supply of all deficiency; that instead of questions through habitual negligence and short-coming, they should enjoy an unclouded sense of their election and calling, and their anticipated entrance into Christ's everlasting kingdom be supplied along the way.

Yet, glorious as the kingdom will be, Christianity has higher things in Christ to which our apostle but alludes. In view of speedily departing he casts on no apostle to succeed, still less on an imagined apostolic succession as men say, nor any safeguard but the word of God, as did Paul also. No cunningly devised fable do we follow to make known the power and coming of our Lord, but were sanctioned witnesses (not ἀπόπται only but ἐλόπται) of His majesty, and heard the Father's voice utter His delight in His beloved Son. This made the prophetic word more sure, to which those addressed did well to take heed, "as to a lamp shining in a squalid place, until day dawn and [the] morning star arise in your hearts." They were not to slight prophecy with which they were more or less familiar as Jews. But Christ now known by the gospel yields better and brighter things to which he encourages them. Hence he would have arise in their heart the heavenly light of the day of grace, and of Christ Himself the Star of the morning, the Christian hope before the day of Jehovah. Here they might be weak, as most have been even though not Jews previously. Prophecy is truly about the earth: our proper portion is with Christ in heaven. But they must not take prophecy of scripture as being of its own (or, isolated) interpretation. This might suit man's limitation; but God gave it as a whole converging on Christ and His glory. "For never by man's will was prophecy brought, but men spoke from God, borne on (or, moved) by the Holy Spirit" (12-21).

2 Peter 2. Here the apostle sets out the ruin of the Christian confession by false teachers, as before it had been for Israel by false prophets. He avows no illusive hopes. Far from getting all the nations to the banner of Christ, there should be the "falling away," the apostasy, and worse still (as we read in 2 Thess. 2). "They shall bring in destructive sects, denying even the Sovereign Master that bought them, bringing on themselves swift destruction" (1). The Lord Jesus bought, not the hidden treasure only, but the entire field, the world. He tasted death for every thing. All are His not only by divine right of creation but by His death that purchased all with the utmost solemnity. This however does not mean redemption, which delivers the captive from the enemy, but simply that they are purchased. Believers are both bought and redeemed; all the rest are bought only, and among them those corrupters of whom the apostle speaks unsparingly as bringing the way of truth into disrepute. Their sure and exemplary judgment he confirms by varied instances. "And many shall follow their licentiousnesses, because of whom the way of truth shall be blasphemed. And in covetousness with feigned words they will make gain of you; for whom the judgment from of old is not idle, and their destruction slumbereth not" (2, 3). The first witness of coming judgment he draws from sinning angels that were left till the Lord judges Satan at a later day; but God has already consigned them to pits of

deepest gloom for that judgment. The next is the old world of ungodly on whom He brought a flood when He preserved Noah a preacher of righteousness. The third is the overthrow that consumed ungodly Sodom and Gomorrah when He delivered righteous Lot. Thus the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of trial and keep unjust men for punishment in judgment-day, but chiefly those that go after flesh in lust of uncleanness and despising lordship (4-10).

A most energetic moral denunciation follows (11-17) of their audacity and self-will, corruption, luxury, and wanton licentiousness ensnaring unstable souls, and yet more. Forsaking the right way, theirs is the path of Balaam with no less folly; and for them the gloom of darkness is reserved. The plain proof is given from ver. 18 to the end of the chapter. Their high-flown words of vanity only allured and ensnared others into their own slavery of corruption, however they might promise liberty. Their last state of return to evil was all the worse for a knowledge that gave a temporary escape from the world's pollution. It was as a dog turning back to its own vomit, and a washed sow to rolling in mud.

2 Peter 3. This deals rather with scoffing unbelief of closing days against the promise of the Lord's coming. Peter would have them remember the words spoken before by the prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through "your apostles." It was all foretold. Materialism would prevail, what is now called Positivism; not hypocritical corruption as in chap. 2, but philosophical or infidel materialism as the only truth and certainty (1-4). The apostle refutes it first by the inspired account of the deluge: things have not continued as they are from creation's start. The antediluvian world perished by the flood: whilst the now heaven and earth by His word are stored up, kept for fire unto a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (5-7). He intimates what is no small thing for understanding the coming day of the Lord, that one day is with Him as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day; though accomplishing immense change at once, it also extends through a long period. And it is His grace in now saving, not slackness, that defers it. But it will come unexpectedly as a thief; in which (day) the heavens shall pass away with rushing noise, and elements with fervent heat shall be dissolved, and earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up (8-10). It is still the day, but its evening as it were, when this catastrophe shall come.

Hence his appeal to the saints. "All these things being thus to be dissolved, of what sort ought ye to be in holy ways and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, by reason of which (day) heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and elements in fervent heat shall melt? But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, as ye wait for these things, use diligence, spotless and blameless to be found by Him in peace; and count the long-suffering of our Lord salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, as also in all [his] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which (epistles) some things are hard to understand, which the untaught and unestablished wrest, as also the rest of the scriptures, to their own destruction" (11-16).

How weighty the application to holy and pious and devoted service! and how interesting in more ways than one the reference to "our beloved brother Paul;" who, while he mightily explained the prophets, went so far beyond as to divine counsels, hard to Jews especially, which the ignorant and unstable distorted to their ruin. It is clear that inspired Peter calls Paul's epistles "scriptures," all of which were so misused. And more than that; he speaks of Paul's having written to the Christian Jews, as Peter also in both his Epistles. What can this be, but the Epistle to the Hebrews? Compare Heb. 12: 26, 27: the one apostle referring to the morning, the other to the evening, of the same day of the Lord.

"Ye therefore, beloved, knowing beforehand, be on your guard lest, led away along with the error

of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: to him [be] the glory both now and unto eternity's day. Amen." All over it is Peter's fervour, but aged and mature, waiting for that death by which he should glorify God.

## § 51. 1 JOHN

The unique character of the Epistle before us cannot but impress every intelligent Christian, one might say any attentive disciple. Like that to the Hebrews, it has no formal address: like that of Jude, it is meant for, as that was addressed to, all saints everywhere, both too in view of the deepest evil among professing Christians; by Jude, of apostates who had crept in; by John, of many antichrists who had gone out.

But our Epistle is distinguished by the fullest development of the life eternal in Him who lived among men, in the closest intimacy with His own here below, the same life which was with the Father before He was manifested on earth.

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we gazed on, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the life eternal, the which was with the Father, and was manifested to us): that which we have seen and heard we report to you that ye also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship too is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ; and these things we write that your joy may be filled full" (vers. 1-4). This introduction is based on the grand one to the Gospel in John 1: 1-18; but with the marked difference that there it was the Word *in* the beginning, God with God before creature came into being; here it is "that which was *from* the beginning," the Word of life become flesh, that tabernacled among us in the most familiar love; that the chosen witnesses, and such as believe their report and like them have life eternal in Him, might have the same blessed fellowship, fellowship with the Father and with His Son in the fullest joy now and evermore. No higher joy than this fellowship will be in heaven; and it is our unbelief if it be not ours now on earth.

Then comes the divine nature, testing our reality in vers. 5-10; it is "the message" that follows the manifestation.

"And this is the message which we have heard from him, and declare to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus [Christ] his Son cleanseth 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 just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we sinned not, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Thus having had the love of the Father and the Son, we must face God as light, as every converted soul proves. One following Christ walks no more in darkness but has the light of life. The question here is *where* we walk, not *how*. We are brought to God Who is light and therein walk henceforth, poor as the walk may be; but if that is so, we have fellowship one with another, all so walking (and no longer in the dark of an unknown God), with the assurance that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from every sin. Its efficiency is as great to purge as God's light to detect all sin, and this we now share with every saint. We confess, and God forgives and purifies. But if we pretend to walk in the light while still in the dark, our life is but a lie; if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves: else the truth would lay it bare. If we say that we did not sin, we go farther wrong still and make God a liar,

for His word attests the contrary.

1 John 2: 1, 2 supply the resource if one should sin. "My little children, these things I write to you that ye sin not. And if one 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 for the whole world." His person and His work abide in unchanging value; but He meets our inconsistencies by His advocacy on our behalf on high. And we have "Father" here as in the introduction, not "God" us in the testing of our nature and ways by His light between the two paragraphs.

The question is then raised how to know that there is true knowledge of God. The first proof is obedience in 3-6, keeping His commandments, and yet more His word. All profession without obedience is false; while he that speaks of abiding in Him ought himself also so to walk as He walked. The second proof is love in 7-11. It was an old commandment without power when our Lord was here with His disciples; it became a new one when He died and rose. Always true in Him, it was then and thus "true in him and in you, because the darkness is quite passing, and the true light already shineth." Here too, claim to be in the light, while hating one's brother, proves that one is in nothing but the darkness of fallen nature. Christ must be our life, whether to obey or to love.

Next we have the family of God, all having their sins forgiven for Christ's name (ver. 12), distinguished as fathers, young men, and babes (παιδιά) in ver. 13, and repeated with enlargement, save for the fathers, in vers. 14-27, closed by ver. 28 which unites them again as "little children" (τεκνία) by the call to abide in Him, that when He shall be manifested, we (John etc., not "ye") may have boldness, and not be put to shame from before Him at His coming. The great principles and the details of this parenthesis are full of weight, beauty, and interest: the fathers characterised by knowing Christ as here, to which the apostle adds nothing; the young men by vigour in overcoming Satan and loving the Father, not the world; and the babes warned against the many antichrists, but knowing all as having unction from the Holy One, and as it abode in them, so were they to abide in Him.

Practical righteousness is touched in the last verse of 1 John 2 as flowing from being born of God, when the apostle turns to another parenthesis in 1 John 3: 1-3, where the Father's love, our present relationship as children, and the hope of Christ's manifestation are richly brought out in a few words. For indeed we need all grace to practise righteousness, which depends on the divine nature; but the hope too has purifying power. He then contrasts the sinner with Christ in Whom was no sin and Himself manifested to take away our sins: as every one that practises sin practises also lawlessness; for sin is a deeper and wider thing than transgressing the law. So whoever abides in Him sins not; whoever sins has not seen nor known Him. Thereon the family of God are warned against deceivers; and righteousness is insisted on, and the devil and the Son of God confronted as are the children of God with those of the devil, ver. 10 being the transition to love, and Cain the ensample of hatred and unrighteousness.

Thus they were not to wonder if they were hated by the world which remains in unremoved death. We on the contrary know that we have passed out of death because we love the brethren; whereas hatred is in principle murder, and no murderer has life eternal abiding in him. But love must be real, not in the tongue only, from its utmost self-sacrifice down to little deeds of every day. We must also beware of a bad conscience, so as to have boldness toward God, and receive what we ask, in an obedient spirit, believing on the name of His Son and loving one another. "And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him; and hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he gave us."

This leads into the unfolding of the Spirit in 1 John 4 as to truth and love. "Beloved, believe not

every spirit, but prove the spirits if they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus [Christ come in flesh] is not of God; and this is the [spirit] of the antichrist whereof ye have heard that it cometh, and now it is already in the world" (1-4). Ye are of God, says he to the little children, and have overcome them; *they* are of the world, their all; we (the inspired like himself) are of God, as perfectly giving His word: a momentous thing then and ever since. "Hereby know we the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." When the truth is thus clear and settled, we can freely speak of love.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth hath been begotten (or, is born) of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not knew not God, because God is love." It is not standing here by faith, as Paul urges, which is also true, but participation in the divine by Christ as our life. "Herein was manifested the love of God in our case, because 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 as propitiation for our sins." Ought we not then to love one another? No one has ever beheld God; our love should now attest Him, as Christ when here declared Him (compare John 1: 18). "Herein we know that we abide in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." For His Spirit is the power of all communion. Yet is the apostle careful to allege the surest fact, lest we should get lost in feeling. "And we have beheld and do testify that the Father sent the Son as Saviour of the world."

Hence the simplicity and the directness and the breadth of Christian truth. It is not only those who had beheld Him while here; nor was the deepest blessing the fruit of singular spirituality or attainment. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God." How this strengthens the weak, and reproves the careless! Does it allow of doubt? "And we have known and believed the love which God hath in our case. God is love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God and God in him." Nor is this all: "Herein hath love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment, and he that feareth hath not been made perfect in love. We love [?him], because he first loved us." Unreality is thus exposed. If one say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loves God love also his brother. The possession of a divine nature is the great contrast with the world in 1 John 3; but here in 1 John 4 we have the further and high privilege of God's dwelling in us, leading to our dwelling in Him, and His consequent dwelling in us as power spiritually.

With this 1 John 5 connects itself. Who is my brother? "Everyone that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born (or, begotten) of God; and every one that loveth him that begot loveth him also that is begotten of him." But John will not allow love apart from obedience: "Herein we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." They unite in a new nature, life eternal, the substratum of the entire Epistle. "For all that is begotten of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? "

Then he adds the work, or rather the person characterised by it. "This is he that came through (διὰ) water and blood, Jesus Christ; not by (ἐν) the water only, but by the water and the blood. And it is the Spirit that witnesseth because the Spirit is the truth. Because there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and the three are to the one (end)." Life is not in the first man, but

in the Second, Who both atones and purifies. So blood and water came out of His pierced heart when dead; and the Spirit bore witness through John who saw and knew its truth, that we might believe: three witnesses, yet one testimony. Full salvation is in Christ and in Him alone for the believer.

On this therefore the apostle reasons and appeals in 10-12. It is God's testimony about His Son; and he that believes on Him has the testimony in himself, if all else failed; for the life is in Him for security and association with Him, as we have it really for present exercise and fellowship every day. "He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Very weighty is the sum here: "These things wrote (or, write, ep. aor.) I to you that ye may know (εἶδ) that ye have life eternal, ye that believe on the name of the Son of God." It is conscious knowledge.

Then he urges confidence in prayer, and specifies it on behalf of a brother not sinning to death; if so, one should refrain. To suppose that the sin here in question is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and the death meant is eternal judgment or the second death, not only is unfounded but destroys the force of this scripture. It is the moral government which our Father carries on whilst we are here, as we may trace in 1 Cor. 11: 30-32, as also from the early time of the O.T. (Job 33, 35). It may go beyond cleansing in order to one's bearing more fruit as in John 15: 2; so both apostles teach.

The threefold assertion of "we know" in 18-20 grandly and with suitability concludes the Epistle. "We know that every one that [is] begotten of God sinneth not, but the begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we should know him that [is] true; and we are in him that [is] true, in his Son Jesus Christ." Here it is Christian knowledge, not objective only but conscious; and this next not merely in moral character as born of God, but of Him in the fullest contrast with the world as a whole lying in the wicked one. Then we have the conscious knowledge that the Son of God is come, the object of all blessing where all was evil and wretched, and He has given us an understanding that we should know the true One. And we are in the True, in His Son Jesus Christ, for they are inseparably one. Day of the worst evil as it was, what can match the calm confidence of victory over sin and Satan, of belonging to God and His nature above a lost world, of a spiritual understanding to know Him that is true, and to be in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ? "This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols." The deceptive power of the enemy in the evil day is recognised; and we need the divine safeguard. "But be of good cheer: I have overcome the world."

## § 52. 2 JOHN.

These two lesser Epistles of the beloved disciple could yield no such large or minute testimony to Christ as the first and longer one; but they are no less admirably suited to fulfil the work given him to do on our behalf, who face the dangers and difficulties of the last time. Each has from God its own special object. The Second Epistle is mainly to warn and direct where the doctrine of Christ was not brought; as the Third is to cheer and confirm those who zealously helped the true witnesses of Christ, and none the less but the more if self-seeking men sought to exclude and malign them. As in the First Epistle, the truth, even Christ, is insisted on as of all moment in them both.

But the evident peculiarity of the Second is that the Holy Spirit addresses this inspired letter to "an elect lady and her children." This is so novel as to indicate an extraordinary crisis which called for it. And the crisis is that "even now are many antichrists." The lady and her children were exposed to danger in this respect: which is so great in itself, and so aggravated by the absence of a Christian head of the family, that it pleased the Lord to send them a solemn caution, and indeed a peremptory

command. Nor do we hear of any assembly near at hand. We can easily understand that the antichristian may have been a friend, perhaps in former days used to preach and teach Christ, nay possibly to their conversion. In any case it seemed no small self-denial to close their door. Was she not a woman, and as such forbidden to teach, or to exercise authority over a man? Hers was but a private household. Why should she and her children be required to discharge so stern a duty? The apostle meets any such excuses

"The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all who have known the truth, for the truth's sake which abideth in us and shall be with us for ever. Grace shall be with us (or, you), mercy, peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I rejoiced exceedingly that I have found of thy children walking in truth, according as we received commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as writing to thee a new commandment but that which we had from the beginning, that we should love one another. And this is love that we should walk according to his commandments. This is the commandment, according as ye heard from the beginning that ye should walk in it. Because many deceivers went out into the world, those that confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh: this is the deceiver and the antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we\* lose not what we wrought but receive a full recompence. Whosoever goeth forward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God: he that abideth in the doctrine, he hath both the Father and the Son. If any one come unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not at home, and give him no greeting; for he that biddeth him greeting partaketh in his wicked works. Having many things to write to you, I would not with paper and ink, but hope to come unto you, and to speak mouth to mouth that our joy may be filled full. The children of shine elect sister salute thee" (vers. 1-13).

\* The various readings here in ancient and good MSS. are due to a misunderstanding of the sense: "ye" was adopted to make it easier, Compare 1 John 2: 28, which has the same sense; and here all agree to "we."

All heterodoxy is evil; but not to bring the doctrine of the Christ, perfect man and true God in one person, is fatal and admits of no compromise. Neither a mother nor her children can plead innocence if they yield. It is high treason to admit friendly terms, if we own Christian ground. The lady might be ever so orthodox: but to welcome to the house one who, claiming to be a Christian teacher, denied Christ's deity or humanity (*i.e.* their union in one person), is to give up the foundation implicitly; and he or she who receives out of courtesy, liberal feeling, or any other human motive, becomes partaker of "his wicked works," even if the evil doctrine be declined. The truth of Christ admits of no neutrality. Truth, love, and obedience must be in those who, believing in Christ, have life eternal and the Holy Spirit. We go right as Christians only as the eye, the heart, is true to Christ. Not "transgressing" but going forward, instead of abiding in the doctrine, loses all. "Transgressing" is spurious: it was development rather, which cannot consist with the truth.

For the active mind of man confides in its own ability, loves to discover what is new, writhes against absolute subjection to the written word, and fails in reverence to Him, Who became not more truly man than He is the Son only known by the Father. To allow a lowering thought because the Lord deigned to become a bondman, and this also to be a propitiation for our sins, is to accept Satan's basest lie, and to affront God's love and truth in the tenderest point. This alone accounts for the peremptory command laid on a Christian woman and even her children, when exposed to such temptation from the evil one. And if it applied so unsparingly in the circle of private life, how much greater the guilt if the Christian assembly deliberately shrank from fidelity to Christ and His personal glory!

## § 53. 3 JOHN

The Third Epistle deals with the good side in the evil day. We are entitled to have and enjoy it in the worst of times. As the lady and her children were appropriately warned not to yield through fear of being counted narrow, bigoted, and uncharitable, with no less fitness the apostle writes to the gracious Gaius that he might persevere in his loving care for all faithful servants of Christ, whatever be the party or personal opposition of any. John here too insists that it be love in truth and walking in it. One must have the truth intact before we can speak of love or exercise it: else we may be helping Satan against Christ under the name of charity. Even here truth has the first place; how indeed could it be otherwise?

"The elder to the beloved Gaius whom I love in truth. Beloved, I desire that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health according as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced exceedingly when brethren came and testified to thy truth according as thou walkest in truth. Greater joy I have not than these things, that I hear of my children walking in (or, in the) truth. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest toward the brethren, and this strangers, who testified to thy love before the assembly; in sending forward whom worthily of God thou wilt do well; for they went out for the Name, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth. I wrote to the assembly; but Diotrephes that loveth the first place among them accepteth us not. For this reason when I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words; and not content with these, neither himself accepteth the brethren, and those that would he forbiddeth and casteth out of the assembly. Beloved, imitate not what is evil but what is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God. Demetrius hath been testified to by all and by the truth itself; and we also testify; and thou knowest that our testimony is true. I had many things to write to thee, but I am unwilling with ink and pen to be writing to thee; but I hope soon to see thee, and we will speak mouth to mouth. Peace to thee; the friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name" (vers. 1-14).

The hearty love of the apostle goes forth to Gaius, because his love was governed by truth. The right rendering corrects making his prosperity to be the prime desire, but that in or about all things it might be, and even his health too, as his soul was prospering. For how often, when the soul gets lax, God uses trial and sickness for good! His exceeding joy was brethren's testimony to Gaius' cleaving to the truth and walking in it; as he had no greater joy than to hear of this in his children. Nor does he fail to name Gaius' fidelity toward those labouring in the word, though strangers, not only in hospitality on the spot, but in setting them forward "worthily of God." And these labourers were worthy, for the Name was their motive; and they declined the world's favours. Even the apostle was glad to range himself as a fellow-worker with them and the truth.

But his writing to the assembly provoked the pride of Diotrephes who disliked these earnest witnesses for Christ, so as not to accept his words, and to go the length of babbling wickedly against an apostle. How soon the ruin came, and how audacious! Nor was it in word only, but in hostility to the stranger brethren and to those who honoured them for their work's sake, We discern here the spirit of the evil house-servant who beat his fellow-servants, and may be assured that Diotrephes was not (like John, Gaius, and these visitors) longing and looking for Christ; to him it would be an enthusiasm if not a delusion. For the Lord traced such misconduct to this very cause, to the heart saying, My lord delayeth. But his evil way should not be forgotten when the apostle came: for the church is holy ground. Gaius was to imitate not the evil but the good; so to do is of God.

Then he speaks of Demetrius as one testified by the truth itself and his own testimony, which he knew would have the greatest weight with Gaius. It was a green spot in the midst of ruin. If we have

seen much of Diotrephes that cannot be overlooked to our sorrow and shame, let us make so much the more of a Demetrius and a Gaius. All turns on the truth. Diotrephes no doubt assumed to respect order, but had no heart for the truth: else he had valued the working of the joints and bands in furthering and spreading it. His notion of order proved itself unsound, because of his indifference to the truth; for not content with opposing the visiting brethren, he ventured to despise the apostle's word on their behalf and ill-treated such as walked in truth and love. But be the declension ever so real and painful, the truth abides to walk in, and the love that is of God is its sure accompaniment. Such is the consolation in this the last Epistle of our apostle. If there was an elect lady with her children to warn gravely, Gaius and a Demetrius were there to be encouraged, with devoted labourers who went out for the Name, taking nothing from the Gentiles. That evil too should rise more impudent than ever can surprise none who heed the solemn admonition of the Lord and His apostles.

### § 54. JUDE.

The characteristic form and aim of this Epistle will become clear to every attentive believer. No other resembles it so closely as the Second of Peter; so much so, that many learned men have contended that the one must be copied from the other, and that the copy at any rate must be spurious. But this reasoning only betrays their spiritual ignorance and presumption. Both Epistles are not only of profound interest but evidently inspired of God; and each has its own specific object in the mind of the inspiring Spirit. Hence the distinctions graven by divine wisdom cannot fail to be seen to the great profit of him who reads in the dependence of faith which gives intelligence.

In the Second Epistle of Peter we have seen that the dominant truth is God's righteous government, not as in the First Epistle dealing with the saints in their daily path and with the house of God too, but with the unjust and the guilty world even to the day of the Lord, in which the now heavens and the earth, kept for fire unto a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men, shall be burnt up. Jude was given to portray the same evil in the yet deeper and more solemn aspect of departure or apostasy from God, and so from the faith and holy will of God, rather than from righteousness. This gives occasion to the nicest points of difference which have escaped these carping critics, who, instead of admiring the perfect word in its astonishing consistency with the requisite variety, blindly turn it against the Holy Spirit to their own sin and shame and folly.

"Jude, bondman of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to the called, beloved in God, [the] Father, and kept by (or, for) Jesus Christ: mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied" (1, 2). There can be little doubt that "beloved" represents the true and certainly more ancient text. It is also singularly in keeping with the tried and perilous circumstances of His called ones exposed to evil within, which they are summoned to resist at all cost, and therefore need the comforting assurance of His love (compare 21), and of their preservation for Christ, as an abiding state. There is also the remarkable "mercy" in the address to all, as to Timothy in his delicate and difficult path: all the true-hearted have it here in the most emphatic way looked at as a state.

"Beloved, while giving all diligence to be writing to you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write to you, exhorting [you] to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men got in privily that were of old prescribed unto this sentence (or, judgment), ungodly, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ" (3, 4).

It was the writer's joy to be writing of our common salvation, the blessed alphabet of the gospel; but the danger of the saints laid on him the necessary duty of exhorting them to contend earnestly for

the faith. In days of apostasy the urgent call was to the converted, where shallower faith would be absorbed in the unconverted: the saints themselves were exposed to deadly peril. The faith itself once delivered to them, once for all, was not menaced only, but undermined within. For there had got in unnoticed certain men that of old were beforehand written of; and their ungodliness had the special trait of turning the grace of our God into licentiousness, and of denying the right of Jesus Christ as sovereign Master that bought all, and as our Lord that redeemed us who believe. Compare 2 Peter 2: 1, who only speaks of the former; but Jude adds and specifies "our Lord" as well as their changing the grace of our God into dissoluteness.

"But I would remind you, though once for all knowing all things, that [the] Lord, having saved a people out of Egypt's land, in the second place destroyed those that believed not" (5) This is quite peculiar to the epistle before us, because it marks the doom of apostates. Peter does not allude to it, but speaks of "an old world" not spared, and Noah, preacher of righteousness, preserved with seven others, whilst a flood overwhelmed "a world of ungodly ones." Can we conceive of more exact thought and language in the two letters? Both draw warning from angels, but we readily see that even here each writes with exquisite propriety which unbelief overlooks. "And angels that kept not their own beginning (or, original state), but abandoned their proper dwelling, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under gloom unto [the] great day's judgment; as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, having in the like manner with them greedily committed fornication and gone after strange flesh, lie there an example, undergoing judgment of eternal fire" (6, 7). Jude points out departure from original position, whether of angels or of the cities in question. They went away from nature; and they suffered accordingly in a manner wholly uncommon. Peter, true to God's purpose there, writes of "angels having sinned," and of cities made an example to those that should live an ungodly life, and of "righteous Lot" saved (for the righteous man tormented his righteous soul from day to day), the Lord knowing how to deliver godly men out of trial and to keep unrighteous ones unto judgment day to be punished.

"Yet likewise these dreamers also defile flesh, and set at nought lordship, and rail at dignities. But Michael the archangel, when disputing with the devil he discussed about Moses' body, did not dare to bring against [him] a railing judgment but said, [The] Lord rebuke thee. But these rail at whatever things they know not; but whatever they understand naturally, as the irrational animals, in these things they corrupt themselves (or, perish)" (8-10). Here Jude depicts the apostate spirits of Christendom in their giving up all respect for authority, and railing against it; and cites Michael in particular, as Peter does angels generally with those that sinned, for marked contrast; and speaks of them as like irrational animals, receiving unrighteousness' reward, and so dilates on their grievous immoralities

Then we have the awfully concise judgment which Jude pronounces on that which outwardly bears the Lord's name. "Woe to them! because they went in the way of Cain, and rushed greedily into the error of Balaam's hire, and perished in the gain-saying of Korah. These are spots (or, hidden rocks) in your love-feasts, feasting together, fearlessly pasturing themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumnal trees without fruit, twice dead, rooted up; raging sea-waves, foaming out their own shames; wandering stars for whom hath been reserved the gloom of darkness for ever" (11-13). Peter too alleged the way of Balaam who loved the hire of unrighteousness; but Jude prefaces that prolific error with Cain's apostasy from God, and finishes all with the rebellion of Korah against Moses and Aaron, the known types of Christ the Apostle and High Priest of the Christian confession. This is and will be perdition: ministry or service arrogating to itself what pertains to the Lord Jesus only, the closing apostasy, but carrying throughout the sad marks which show that the corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption.

Very striking too is Enoch's earliest warning against "these" who perish at the end of the age. "And Enoch, seventh from Adam, prophesied also as to these, saying, Behold, [the] Lord came amid his holy myriads, to execute judgment against all, and to convict all the ungodly [of them] of all their works of ungodliness which they ungodlily wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners spoke against him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their lusts, and their mouth speaketh swelling things, admiring persons for the sake of profit" (14-16).

Pretentious and ill-willed adversaries of scripture have availed themselves of the Book of Enoch in the Aethiopic which was brought into Great Britain by Bruce and translated by Abp. Laurence, as if the supposed original of that work could be the source of the quotation. They failed to observe that it yields conclusive proof that it is no prophecy but an imposture; for the concocter, trying to incorporate this very passage from the Epistle, could not even do his evil work correctly. He makes the Lord come in judgment of His saints: a false doctrine in direct antagonism to all scripture, which Jude of course in no way says or implies. It speaks only of condign judgment executed on the ungodly in works and words.

"But ye, beloved, remember ye the words that were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they said to you, In [the] end of the time shall be mockers walking after their own lusts of ungodlinesses. These are they that make separations, natural (or, soulish), not having [the] Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in [the] Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in [the] love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto life eternal. And some convict, when contending, but others save, snatching out of [the] fire, and others pity with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (17-23)

The gracious encouragement in the darkest day is manifest and rich. Mockers, who set themselves apart like the Pharisees, are branded as natural men: the Spirit leads to, and in, fellowship as well as to faith and love. Therefore are saints to build themselves up on their most holy faith. Only here is it so designated What a rebuke to such as would lower the standard and accept laxity to please a party, avoid decision, and shirk reproach! A loose time calls on us more strenuously to build ourselves up on our most holy faith, and for prayer in power of the Holy Spirit, that we may keep ourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto life eternal; for indeed we need both every step of the way through. This will the better enable us to help souls in slippery places such as are described in vers. 22, 23, though the text is as tangled here in the copies as those whose well-being we should seek, imperilled as they are more and more.

The conclusion is in beautiful harmony with the Epistle. "But to him that is able to keep you without stumbling, and to set you with exultation blameless before his glory; to an only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, [be] glory, majesty, might, and authority, before all time, and now, and unto all the ages. Amen" (vers. 24, 25). It is not, as in 2 Peter, looking for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness, but that sovereign grace which will translate us into His presence like Christ Himself, associated with Him actually, yea bodily then and for ever, as now in spirit.

## **§ 55. THE REVELATION.**

It needs little discernment to see that the characteristic design of this book is judicial beyond every other in the N. T. Some may wonder that he who was inspired to present "the grace and truth which came through Jesus Christ" should also by the Spirit write the great book of divine judgments But even the Gospel (John 5: 27) prepares the way for it; for it reveals the Lord Jesus as the Son of

God, the giver of life eternal to him who believes, but the same who as Son of man is the executor of judgment on all who disbelieve and dishonour Him Hence He is seen as Son of man in the opening vision of Rev. 1. There are exceptional words of grace, as we may observe where the saints at His name break forth into a song of praise parenthetically in the preface of the book (1 latter part of vers. 5, and all 6); and so again in the conclusion (Rev. 22: 17), where the Spirit leads the bride in welcoming Him, when He proclaims Himself the bright, the morning Star. How appropriate are both exceptions!

Yet government is the predominant truth, as even in the commencing address "to the seven churches that are in Asia," Grace to you and peace from Him that is, and that was, and that is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. How different from the revelation we have in the Epistles! Christ's coming too, described in ver. 7, is in view of judgment on the earth, without an allusion to the Christian hope as in John 14: 1-3, 1 Thess. 4: 16, 17, 2 Thess. 2: 1, etc.

After the divine seal in ver. 8, John carefully (as the prophets were wont) gives his name, but describes himself in strict keeping with the book, not as the disciple whom Jesus loved, but as their brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Christ (or, Jesus), being in Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. It was on the Lord's day, the first of the week or resurrection day, that he became in the Spirit; and he who knew so intimately the gracious tones of the Good Shepherd heard behind him a voice as of a trumpet, saying, What thou seest, write in a book and send to the seven churches, whose localities follow. A glorious vision truly, but judicial; for He walked Son-of-man-like in the midst of the golden lamps thee represented the churches: the description of His clothing and person confirm it. It is not intercession nor supply from His fulness, still less cleansing their feet, but majestic scrutiny according to their standing in divine righteousness. He who erst lay on His bosom fell as dead at His feet; but the Lord laid His right hand on him, saying, Fear not: I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I became dead, and, behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and have the keys of death and of hades. Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and what is about to take place after these things. The mystery of the stars and lamps is explained; the seven stars as angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamps as seven churches.

Rev. 2, 3 give "the things which are," as Rev. 1 the things John saw. Briefly then, Ephesus is the church, though opposed to evil and zealous, yet declining from first love, and threatened, if not restored by repentance, with the Lord's removing the lamp out of its place (Rev. 2: 1-7). Smyrna suffers not from pretended apostles but from the blasphemy or reviling of Judaizers, Satan's synagogue, and tribulation even unto death (8-11). Pergamos dwells where Satan's throne is, and holds Christ's name and faith, yet has such as hold she doctrine of Balaam and that of Nicolaitans likewise. Hence, if not repentant, the Lord comes quickly to fight with them (12-17). With Thyatira is the change as to the call to hear, which thenceforward follows the promise suited to the overcomers in each. Then the personal coming of Christ is also presented appropriately, now that the state was characterised by the horrible yet pretentious Jezebel, though a remnant had not this doctrine (18-29). Sardis has a name of life but dead, with its works not complete, and threatened, as the world is, with Christ's coming for unwelcome surprise like a thief (Rev. 3: 1-6). Philadelphia has in their weakness Christ before them in spiritual power and liberty: they kept His word and denied not His name; and in particular kept the word of His patience, that is, as He patiently waited to come, so did they for Him (7-13). Laodicea is the saddest contrast of self-complacency, indifference, and lack of self-judgment, so that they lacked all that should distinguish the Christian; and therefore the Lord was about to spue them out of His mouth (14-22).

"The things that are" is a striking expression of these churches, and of itself suggests a protracted

state. But see the wisdom of God, who would not allow any revelation inconsistent with constantly waiting for Christ as the hope. Hence their existence was a fact: but God took care to give light through their varying phases, and the Lord's estimate of all, when one looked back, and nothing was said of the future to put off the heavenly hope. For the elements were there from John's day, and any delay in fact only gave occasion to see more and more of developed display. They were seven, the known figure of spiritual completeness in good or evil. The first three do not express the future coming of the Lord as a terminus, like Thyatira and those that follow, save Laodicea which was the last; and these, though beginning successively on the protracted view, go on severally but together from the rise of each to His coming. "The things that are" last as long as there is any church-condition recognised by the Lord on earth. First, declension and threatened displacing; second, era of persecution and martyrdom by the heathen; third, worldly power, but false teaching; fourth, mediaeval popery with faithful protests; fifth, formal Protestantism; sixth, return to Christ and the heavenly hope; seventh, fatal lukewarmness rejected with disgust. There is no other to follow on earth.

What stronger confirmation could be than that "after these things" the apostle in Rev. 4 is called up by a door set open in the heaven to be shown "the things which must take place after these things," i.e. subsequent to "the things that are" or the church-state up to its end? "And straightway I became in the Spirit" for heavenly things, as in Rev. 1: 10 for the Lord seen judicially dealing with the churches, the sole corporate witness for God on earth. Here again he saw the throne, and the displayed glory of the Eternal Who sat on it, with a rainbow of emerald hue round about it, the emphatic pledge of covenanted mercy while He governed in providence.

But a wholly new sight too is there given to meet his eyes: round about that throne twenty four thrones filled by twenty four elders, mature in the mind of Christ. These symbolise the chiefs of the royal priesthood, not the courses but their chiefs, clothed with Christ as their meet robe, and on their heads crowns of divine righteousness. There they sit in peace, though out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. It was no longer the throne of grace, to which Christians on earth approach boldly to obtain mercy and find grace for seasonable help. Nor was it the millennial throne of God and of the Lamb, with river of water of life clear as crystal proceeding out of it. It was unlike either; and, between both, manifestations of God's displeasure. But the enthroned elders, who had ever seen them before? Not even Stephen, nor Paul. John as the Christian prophet, who saw in the Spirit the church-state closed on earth, saw also the overcomers in heaven thus symbolised as the chiefs of the royal priesthood, and thoroughly at home in God's presence as if they had been there always. Their translation to heaven is thus implied by those seated on the thrones associated with the central throne of God; it is not described, because it was of sovereign grace, and so not falling under the judicial ways of this book. Already had it been announced by the Lord in John 14: 1-3, with details given to correct the mistakes of the Thessalonian saints in 1 Thess. 4: 16, 17, and 2 Thess. 2: 1-8. Cp. also 1 Cor. 15: 51-53.

This vision anticipatively sets before us what will be verified above when the heavenly saints are no more on earth but on high, and the earth becomes the object of God's providential judgments. Hence seven torches of fire burning before His throne, which are the seven Spirits of God: the Spirit not in His personal unity baptising the saints into one body, but in His varied powers governmentally and in consuming energy to deal with what opposed God's glory. Another remarkable proof of the great change at this time is, that before the throne was a sea of glass like crystal. While here below, these elders were cleansed by the washing of water by the word. A sea "of glass" attested that there was no need of purifying more: theirs was now fixed purity. And the cherubim or living creatures are prominent in the midst of the throne or around it, the emblematic agencies (whoever may be the agents) of God's government in power, firmness, intelligence, and rapidity, endowed with swift movement, and

large and inward discernment, as suited to that critical time, seraph-like too in constant celebration of the thrice holy Eternal God Almighty. But the elders worship intelligently as knowing Him, prostrate themselves, and cast their crowns before His throne, owning His creative power and providence.

In Rev. 5 it is plain that the sealed book is the question: who can open it? None but the Lamb so overcame to unroll its judicial announcements, in order to the reception and rule of His inheritance, now utterly alienated. Hence, when He takes it from the Sitter on the throne, "a new song" from elders and living creatures now united rises to Him who bought out the heirs with His blood from every nation and tongue. Nor this only; they are made to our God a kingdom and priests to reign over the earth. The key-note struck calls forth the anticipated deliverance of all creation, "all things" following the joint-heirs. See Col. 1: 20-23, as well as Rom. 8: 19-23.

On the Seals and Trumpets one may here be brief. They each reveal a complete course of judgments on the guilty world while Christ is still on high: the first comparatively ordinary and secret, but in the order prescribed; the second loudly sounding and severe up to the moment when Christ takes His great power and reigns. Each too has a striking parenthesis between the sixth and the seventh in its respective series; wherein we are given to see that God is active in goodness, not to gather into one body Jews and Gentiles, but to prepare out of Israel and out of the Gentiles distinct groups for blessing, when the Heir of all things enters triumphantly on His inheritance. Under the later series we hear the proclamation of the coming kingdom in its wide extent in Rev. 10, and in Rev. 11 the connection with Jerusalem and its temple, inner worship, but as yet a sackcloth prophetic testimony, and the western enemy beginning to be desecrated. In a general way this ends what we may call the first volume of the Revelation.

The last verse of Rev. 11 belongs as a sort of preface to Rev. 12, the ark of God's covenant being first seen in His temple above, not yet found on earth, with even increased signs of His displeasure. But the sources of earthly change appear in heaven also, the sun-clad woman in travail, and the great red dragon in the forms of Roman power. The Son is born, but, instead of reigning now, caught up unto God and unto His throne; while she flees into the wilderness for 1260 days. But the great dragon with his angels is cast out of heaven, to the joy of the heavens and of those that dwell in them. But woe to the earth and the sea during the little while of his great wrath! Still the woman-mother, symbolising Israel (not the bride), is preserved.

But two great vessels of his hostile energy appear on the scene to do his worst (Rev. 13): the Roman Beast or empire revived, for its deadly wound was healed to the wonder and worship of all the apostate earth; and the second Beast in the land imitating Christ's power as King and Prophet, the sign-making false prophet, each greatest in the sphere of the dragon's power. For the restrainer of 2 Thess. 2: 7 no longer acts: Satan is allowed his way for a short space, before judgment falls more openly.

Then in Rev. 14 seven dealings of God come out in their order: 1, a special and large remnant of Jews, who follow the Lamb, seen with Him on mount Zion; 2, the everlasting gospel to every nation and tongue in view of His judgment; 3, the fall of Babylon declared; 4, as also the cup of God's wrath for any who worship the Beast; 5, the blessedness from henceforth of the dead that die in the Lord, for the tables are now turned; 6, the harvest of discriminating judgment; and 7, the vintage of unsparing vengeance on the vine of the earth, its religious falseness and evil.

Then in Rev. 15, Rev. 16 the supplementary Bowls of God's wrath, the seven plagues the last. These are highly figurative like the Trumpets, but intense; and a parenthesis appears between the sixth and the seventh as before. Only here it consists of Satan's last efforts, with his two vassals also, to gather the kings of the whole habitable earth for the war of the great day of God the Almighty. Even

here we may see an inner parenthesis of the Lord coming as thief: not as Bridegroom, for this had been after Rev. 3 and before Rev. 4 for the heavenly saints, as that will be for those converted afterwards, as well as for His other purposes.

Rev. 17 and Rev. 18 are devoted to the fuller description of Babylon, the great whore and the city that had kingship over the kings of the earth, the fall of which had been already announced in Rev. 14. and Rev. 16. First, we have her relations with the Beast, ruling, or hated and destroyed; then, is her fall when the Lord God judged her; and all glasses on earth were her mourners, but heaven called to rejoice, as we hear the loud Hallelujahs on high in the beginning of Rev. 19, the last notice of the elders and the living creatures. For now the Bride prepared herself for the marriage of the Lamb; and we hear also of those that are called to the marriage supper, the O. T. saints presumably, who with the Bride constituted the elders. Next, the heaven is seen set open; and the Faithful and True on the white horse comes to judge and war in righteousness, clothed now with a garment dipped in blood. His unmistakeable name is the Word of God. And the armies in heaven followed Him on white horses clad in pure white byss, the righteousnesses of saints (not of angels). But it was not theirs to wield the sharp sword against the nations; His it is to tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty, though He with them will shepherd men inflexibly. But He alone has on His garment and on His thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. And the carnage that ensues, what a supper for all the birds in mid-heaven! For if the Beast and the False Prophet were consigned alive to the lake of fire, the kings of the earth and their armies fall victims under the sharp sword. The symbols are obvious.

So it is in Rev. 20 clearly: plain narrative prevails therein. The restraint of Satan is one of the marked traits of the age to come. Nothing like it has been since man was created; nor will it be again when he deceives and destroys for a little while after the thousand years' reign is over. He too will then be cast into the lake of fire. But the grand fact is, Christ then reigns over the earth; as He is the exalted and displayed Head over all creation, heavenly and earthly. It is the administration of the fulness of the times, He shining where all else had failed (Eph. 1: 10). Prominence is given to those who had suffered unto death, not only in the first half-week, but still more in the last when the Beast rose into supremacy during Satan's great rage. Only it is an oversight to leave out that John saw thrones with sitters on them, and judgment theirs, before he saw the souls of those who were martyred raised up to join them. The sitters were changed when Christ met them in the air and took them into the Father's house, seen above from Rev. 4 and on, till they follow the Lord out of heaven as His armies for His appearing and day. Two classes of martyrs here follow like them to reign, who now rise as we see. They all comprise the First Resurrection, and so reign with Christ for the thousand years.

Some wonder at the loosing of Satan after that; but why? The coming age, though immensely different from this evil age, is a dispensation; and men would not be tried adequately without the old tempter being allowed to assail them. But though the unconverted may long yield a feigned obedience, ever so long a reign of righteousness and power, peace and blessing, will not turn them to the living and true God. And they too, as men before, listen to the Serpent for their destruction, and muster from the distant quarters of the earth against the beloved city, and the camp of the saints who separate from the mass and congregate there, in marked contrast with the darnel and the wheat growing together in this age.

Nor is it the wicked of that age only that are consumed, but the earth and the heaven fled from His face Who next is seen, seated on a great white throne to judge the dead, the wicked now raised who had no part in the first resurrection. Having rejected Christ, they were judged each according to their works in the other books; and each was cast into the lake of fire, the second death. This was no coming of Christ, for there was no earth then to return to. It was the standing before the throne of those to be

judged who had not eternal life, while earth and heaven had fled. Christ had come long before: these appear before Him for their doom.

Then comes in its due order the end of all, a new heaven and a new earth, not in the inchoate sense of Isa. 65, 66 where it is applied to the renovation of Jerusalem, created a rejoicing and her people a joy, with the earth and the animals too and vegetable creation delivered. But 2 Peter 3 even and Rev. 21: 1-8 go much farther, and show us the everlasting state, which is marked by the sea existing no more, condition incompatible with natural life on the globe. All its former inhabitants who were saved, including the righteous during the millennial reign, were now in unchangeable blessedness for the ages unto the ages. The holy city, new Jerusalem, for so the Bride is designated, retains her pristine place and beauty. The mediatorial kingdom is closed, and God is all in all (1 Cor. 15: 24, 28). Righteousness dwells now, above and below, in perfect peace; it is no longer righteousness ruling as in the kingdom till the last enemy be destroyed. Hence, apart from the church, God's tabernacle, we have simply God and men, they His people, and Himself (like His tabernacle) with them, their God, every tear wiped away, death no more nor grief, but all things made new absolutely. What a bright testimony to the water of life He freely gave! What an awful proof that He is not mocked, in all the wicked cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, the solemn back-ground of the state without end!

It is plain that nothing can historically follow the vision of eternity in those eight verses. But just as there was a supplement to the series of judgments of earthly character about the corrupt city Babylon, so there is one now about the holy city, the Bride of the Lamb, during the millennium. As the city of confusion, full of idolatry, and murder of the saints, was shown in her illicit connection with the kings and the Beast, so we have now the pure and blessed place she, the heavenly bride of the Lamb, is to fill during the millennium, with the homage paid her by the kings and the nations walking by her light; for the glory of God enlightened her, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. Those who take these verses (Rev. 21: 9-27, Rev. 22: 1-5) in continuity with the eight before are involved among other errors in the folly of conceiving kings and nations throughout eternity. They fail to profit by the break with which ver. 9 opens, and the plain analogy afforded with Rev. 17: 1, etc. From 21: 9 to 22: 5 is a retrogressive vision, letting us see the relation of the heavenly to the earth, its nations, and its rulers, during the thousand years.

The rest of the last chapter (6-21) consists of both grave warning and divine cheer. Christ's coming, notwithstanding the predicted events, is declared to be soon, and the time near. Blessed those that wash their robes that they may have title to the tree of life, and through the gates enter the city: without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loves and makes a lie. But how precious when the Lord Jesus provides for testifying these things in the churches: alas, how far from being duly done by His servants!

Here then Jesus presents Himself, not only as the Root and the Offspring of David, but as the bright, the morning Star. An outburst of faith is heard at the end, as we heard another suited to the beginning of the book. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come." It is the Spirit animating the church to welcome Christ's coming; nor only her that knows her bridal relation, but the simplest Christian — "and let him that heareth say, Come." The rest of the verse calls on him that is athirst to come (not to say, Come); yea, he that will, to take life's water freely. This is the call to the unconverted, the gospel call.

Again, after the gravest menace directed against adding to or taking from the words of this prophecy He that testifies responds, Yea, I come quickly. May we by grace join the apostle John in saying, Amen: come, Lord Jesus.

## CHAPTER 6.

### CONCLUSION.

Having now brought to a close the test of divine design in the several books of the New Testament as well as of the Old, I commend the work to the blessing of God on the reader.

It is usual in such treatises to notice objections laid by unbelief against the scriptures. If this were added in any adequate degree to the present volume, it would increase its bulk very considerably. As it already exceeds 600 pages, I think it better to let the positive truth produce its own impression, which difficulties of the kind have no real title to destroy; seeing that the most certain truth, save in matter or in its abstract forms, is necessarily open to such questions. It ought not to be so where God has spoken or caused His word to be communicated in writing. But this is what scepticism disputes or refuses. Legitimate criticism may seek to gather the true test from reliable documents, in time differing more or less through human infirmity or fault. But it rightly supposes an original divine deposit.

No intelligent person would mix this question with God's inspiration: various readings belong to the distinct region of man's responsibility, as scripture does to divine grace. The problem of the true critic is to use all means, external and internal, to recover what was originally written. What is called "higher criticism" is essentially spurious, either denying God as the author or impudently pretending to speak for Him, if they go not so far. Even Christians are in danger of heeding what these enemies of the written word assume, when it is said that it nowhere claims divine authority. Nor is it only inferential evidence that is given throughout the Bible in general, as well as the conclusive proof of the reverence to all then written shown by our Lord, the Lord of all. It is dogmatic truth, that God's inspiration is claimed for every scripture, not merely for all given before the apostle Paul wrote his last epistle, but for that part which remained to be written. For nothing less is the force of 2 Tim. 3: 16: "Every scripture [is] inspired of God and profitable" etc. Had the existing body been meant, the article would have been requisite, as in verse 14 which speaks only of the O.T. Its absence was no less correct for accrediting with the same source and character all that God might be pleased to vouchsafe till the canon was complete.

Indeed the apostle had at an earlier date made in substance the same claim in 1 Cor. 2. Where the Hebrew oracles stopped, the N.T. revealed all that is for God's glory and goodness to communicate (vers. 9-12): "Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those Spirit-taught, communicating spirituals by spirituals," or, if we supply the gap, "spiritual [things] by spiritual [words]." The words were as positively of the Holy Spirit as the thoughts. Such is the essential property of scripture. Thus all was of the Spirit of God, the revelation, the communication, and also the reception. Rationalism denies God in them all, attributing them to man's spirit, which he may elevate in effect to that of God, being in darkness and walking in darkness, and knowing not whither he goes, because darkness blinded his eyes.

Translation again, like interpretation, as well as editing the text from the varying witnesses, belongs to the responsible use of scripture, and is quite distinct from the fact of its divine inspiration. No doubt the conviction that God inspired every scripture would act powerfully on the spirit of every believer who undertook a work so serious, and is intended to make him feel his dependence on God in the use of all diligence and every means duly to attain the end in view. But inspiration means, as one of those employed in it says, that men spoke from God, moved (or, borne along) by the Holy Spirit. Hence scripture is not of man's wit or will, but of God, as no one more clearly than our Lord ever shows, and so of final and divine authority. Hence too the danger and evil for any one to give, whatever the cause

of failure, his own mind and not God's in editing, translating, or interpreting. What God communicated is able to make one wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus. "Is it not written?" if truly applied is absolutely conclusive in His judgment Who will judge living and dead. "And the scripture cannot be broken."

How immense too is the privilege! In its later portion it is the revelation of God, not merely from God, but of Himself, and of God speaking to us in a Son, not the First-born merely but the Only-begotten, the revelation of the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. O the grace too of His Son deigning to become man, that we might have what is absolute made relative to us in the tender affections of very man, yet of One who was and is God as His Father. Hence the total change for us in looking at things, seen or unseen, according to God, where the greatest are brought down to our hearts, and the least we learn to be near to God's love: nothing too great for us, nothing too little for God, as said another departed from his labours to be with Christ. Christ alone, Christ fully, accounts for both; and scripture is the true treasure-house as well as standard of it all, as the Spirit was sent forth from heaven to make it good in us in every way.

No tradition could avail for such a stupendous task. "But the Comforter (or rather, Advocate), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things which I said to you" (John 14: 26). Nor is this all. The Spirit would reveal also Christ's glory on high. "But when the Advocate is come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness concerning me: and ye too bear witness, because ye are with me from the beginning" (John 15: 26, 27). More still of the deepest interest appears in John 16: 12-15: "I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. But when he is come, the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all the truth; for he shall not speak from himself, but whatsoever he shall hear he shall speak; and he will announce to you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall announce it to you. All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine: on this account I said that he receiveth of mine and shall announce it to you."

The permanent result of His presence and inspiration is, one may say, the New Testament, that inestimable and final gift of God in its kind. But the character of the inspiration in the N.T. becomes the higher and the more intimate in consequence. Every spiritual man must have felt this, in comparing the Psalms, which express the heart of the O.T. saints, with the N.T. Epistles, which breathe of the indwelling Spirit animating the Christian and the church. But they are alike God's word: there is no difference as to divine authority.