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THE  
CHURCHMAN

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OCTOBER, 1904.

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ART. I.—THE SECOND EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.

THE Second and Third Epistles of St. John may seem to some readers to be doubtful or insignificant additions to the canonical Scriptures. Brief letters they are, and curious documents. How and why did they survive? From the archives of what Church derived? Addressed, received, preserved, we know not where; presenting for a moment persons otherwise unknown; fragments of a non-extant history. Yet have they sufficient and admitted evidence, and make their own contribution of information and instruction, possessing, moreover, an interest that is quite unique, as being probably the last words that we have from the last Apostle—a parting gleam of light at the close of the Apostolic day.

Standing as an appendix to the First Epistle, in closest connection with its phraseology and its thought, these letters bring in addition a note of life in their practical application of its teaching to cases at the time. In dealing with these, the writer takes more the tone of pastoral rule—the teaching passes into action, and the doctrine comes in contact with facts. We find, in consequence, that fresh lights have fallen on the mind and character of the writer, and also on the course of things in the Church. In these two respects lies the real interest of the Epistles, and in these respects will they be treated here.

The letters have one of the best qualities that letters can have: they are very characteristic. When we have read them we know St. John somewhat better than we did. One who applies himself to the study of this Apostle's character is at first disappointed by the paucity of material in the history. There it seems almost purposely withheld. The disciple whom Jesus loved, eminent among the chosen Twelve, first to adhere, last to survive, whose Apostleship covers the first century, whose witness to the manifestation of the Son

of God has ruled the Christianity of all the ages—how little is told us of what he spoke and did! Scarcely is he ever seen alone, save by the cross and at the grave. In the Gospels it is James and John, in the Acts Peter and John. They move together, and the elder companion takes the lead. Through the critical years of the Judaic Church there are intimations of his presence at Jerusalem, but no word of his is recorded; and James has the local precedence. He, indeed, had a sacred charge in the care of the mother of Jesus, which is silently fulfilled and silently ended. When that is over, and when many things have happened; when the Gospel has spread far and wide, and rooted itself in the great centres of life; when Peter and Paul are dead; when the fatal blow has fallen, and the Romans have come and taken away both the place and nation, then St. John reappears as being at the headquarters of the Church in the region of Asia, for a time “in the Isle that is called Patmos, for the work of God and the testimony of Jesus”; then as resident at Ephesus, the last scene of his evangelical testimony and Apostolic work. Cherished memories of his words and acts remained there to after generations, but they have no place in Scripture narrative. The only records of the kind are the little letters which we have before us.

These are resonant of truth and love—St. John’s watch-words, his reigning ideas, the characteristics of the teacher and of the man. The letters are addressed “to an elect lady and her children whom I love in truth,” and “to the beloved Gaius whom I love in truth,” and the salutation invokes blessing “in truth and love.” Love is the grace specially associated with his memory. As St. Paul has been designated the Apostle of Faith, and St. Peter of Hope, so has St. John been distinguished as the Apostle of Love. As such he speaks here. To the “elect lady” the prelude to what he has to say is the general exhortation “that we love one another,” and to Gaius that love expresses itself in the most natural language of personal affection.

Yet it is not for the expression or promotion of love that the letters are written. There is another motive and aim. They are written in the cause of truth, in the one case from watchful anxiety for its security and defence, in the other from warm-hearted interest in its extension. St. John’s mind is possessed with the thought of truth as, perhaps, no other mind has been. So it appears in this Second Epistle. In a few lines how is the word reiterated, and with what various applications! Walking in truth, loving in truth, knowing the truth, for the truth’s sake, the truth in us now, the truth with us for ever—these sayings are consecutive. It is lan-

guage peculiar to the man, and to understand his mind we must take a little time for reflection on the great word in itself and in these connections of thought.

Truth in what we say and do, in converse and dealing with one another, we understand as a feature of character, we appraise as the bond of society. The natural man knows its worth and power, as well as the influences in the world which disguise or pervert it. But there is a deeper truth behind it—viz., truth in ourselves—"truth in the inward parts," says the Psalmist; "in the inner man," says St. Paul—thinking truly, seeing things as they are—at least, the habitual desire and honest purpose to do so—in all things with which we are concerned. But what things are these? Present interests, practical questions, all that concerns us in this life on earth? No doubt; but also in the vague feelings of men in general, in the intense feelings of higher minds, things which concern us include relations with God, with the order of the universe, with the spiritual and the eternal, with the moral government of the world, if such there be, and for us, in that connection, with judgment, righteousness, and salvation. Yes; but how shall these things be known? For all this region of thought, where shall wisdom be found? In the hearts of men of all nations lay the unanswered question, What is truth? It came from Pilate's lips in the supreme hour of human history, lightly spoken then, his only reply to the great affirmation ("the good confession" St. Paul calls it) which was the last word of Jesus to the world: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice." Through His coming in the flesh the incarnate Word made the revelation of truth, Himself its Author and its Subject, the Revealer and the Revealed.

Some there were even then among St. John's hearers who were "of the truth," having in their measure spiritual affinities with it. Chief among these was the most apprehensive observer, the most beloved companion, destined and prepared to transmit the full witness to the world, of whom it was said long afterwards, "This is the disciple who beareth witness of these things, and who wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true." So was the Fourth Gospel authenticated and attested by persons who must have been deemed competent to do so. The witness borne (present participle) is the recognised and habitual witness by oral discourse ("testabatur, sermonibus, superstes," says Bengel), and then at last bequeathed to the Church when he "wrote these things." This writing, then, is not, as some suggest, the doubtful recovery of recollections in old age, source of a new Christ-

ology, but the perpetuation of a lifelong testimony, a word which was from the beginning.

From this written record of what he beheld with his eyes and heard with his ears we know what was the truth which he saw in Jesus. It was the truth of essential Deity, the truth of assumed humanity, the truth of all that was wrought in the flesh, of all that was taught in the flesh—the truth of their consequences to man in redemption, life, and salvation. This truth, abiding in the believer, becomes truth in the inner man, in communion with God, in dealing with self, in converse with others. It appears in that truth of character and conduct which the Apostle loves to describe as “walking in truth.” That is a comprehensive expression, showing the man who holds and confesses the truth as governed by its principles and imbued with its spirit. It is a distinguishing expression, recognising the contrast between the world as it was and the sincerity, integrity, and purity of the Christian standard exhibited in the consistent lives of believers.

The digression (if it be a digression) may assist to give its full meaning to the oft-repeated word so prominent in these letters and so characteristic of the writer's mind. It is in view of persons walking in truth that both letters are written, in thankfulness and joy of heart. To the elect lady he says: “I rejoice greatly that I have found (certain) of thy children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father.” So also to Gaius: “I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and bare witness unto the truth, even as thou walkest in truth. Greater joy I have none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.” Gaius is one of his own children in the faith. Not so the children of the elect lady, whom he had met with on some unexplained occasion; but in both cases there was the same walking in truth, and we have seen what that intends. But what precise meaning shall we give to the other expression in both salutations, “whom I love in truth”? It means more than “I truly love,” expressing, not simply the sincerity, but the source and character of the affection. Love includes great varieties in its causes, which we cannot always account for, and special characters not easy to discriminate. The love which speaks here has its origin in the reception of the truth in Christ, and its character in the mutual attractions and responsive sympathies of those who have found in Him the same principles of thought and life. This enlarges the circle of love, as it is said: “Not I only, but also all they that know the truth, for the truth's sake, which abideth in us.” That is an actual experience, a consciousness which unites us now. But then comes a change of note, “and it shall be with us for ever.”

The present passes into the future, and "in us" is changed for "with us." He thinks now, not of the living persons, but of the life of the Church, and is sure that the truth will continue with it for ever. It *has* continued, and is "with us" still. It has a life of its own, enduring as the Church itself, expressed in creeds, confessions, celebrations, and testified by successive generations of believers. To-day, in presence of assaults, perversions, and virtual surrenders, we repeat the Apostle's words, "It shall be with us for ever."

Confidence in the future does not dispense with watchfulness in the present, and there was fresh and urgent call for it. Watchfulness against error became the special and painful duty of St. John's last days, and it was the motive for the present letter. Intercourse with the faithful brethren whom he had met made him think it well to address a warning to the Church from which they came before the danger which was abroad should reach it. That danger had arisen under his own eyes in the central Church of Asia. St. Paul's foreseeing words to the elders of Ephesus had come true: "I know that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them." Even so it was. From their own order pastors of the flock arose teaching (*διεστραμμένους*) perverted, distorted things, which they sought to incorporate with the Gospel of God. Soon they had left the Church. "They went forth from us," it is said, "because they were not of us." And they went forth to propagate their theosophic doctrines in a too congenial soil. The Gnostic heresies, intolerable to our apprehension, had a strange fascination for the Asiatic mind, which found a strong temptation in the claim of progress to a higher and more mysterious knowledge. St. John saw this movement at its commencement, and his spiritual insight went straight to the heart of the matter, the denial or evasion of the truth of the Incarnation. So he speaks here: "Many deceivers are gone forth into the world: they that confess not Jesus Christ coming in flesh." The expression is peculiar, the present participle not meaning only the past manifestation in the flesh, but condensing in one word past, present, and future, the coming, first "in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin" (Rom. viii. 3), then in the resurrection life and the glorified humanity. Whether such comprehension of thought is to be traced here or not, it was included in the apostolic doctrine and denied by the deceivers, "who confess not Jesus coming in flesh. This (says St. John) is the deceiver and the antichrist." "Look to yourselves," he adds, for it is a pressing personal matter;

grievous, if not fatal, loss must follow any admission of this pretended progress. "Everyone that leadeth onward (*σπρωγέον*), and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God; he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son."

What a contrast of spiritual histories! The self-styled progressive has left behind him "the teaching of Christ" (*i.e.*, not the teaching concerning Christ, but the teaching of Christ Himself), and has lost his hold on God; for his higher knowledge of God is practically no knowledge. He that abides in the teaching of Christ not only has that knowledge as prophets and psalmists had it, but that fuller, deeper knowledge which Jesus gave—the knowledge of the Father, who sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, and of the Son by whom that will of the Father is accomplished and in whom the Father is revealed. And this is a knowledge which becomes fellowship (which in the case of persons is the only true knowledge). So it is said: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." These things and the like St. John says elsewhere, but here he only affirms with characteristic brevity and intensity that he who leaveth the teaching of Christ "hath not God," and that he who abideth in that teaching "hath both the Father and the Son."

In view of such an alternative, what counsel shall be given? There is no hesitation: "If anyone cometh to you [the construction expresses not what may happen, but what will happen]—if anyone cometh to you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into [your] house, and give him no greeting [wish him not joy], for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works." This is spoken, not of one holding false doctrine, but of one who comes to teach it—who arrives at the place in question as an emissary to propagate error, and that error fundamental. In a critical time, and in the case of such deceivers, decision is necessary, and decision at the first start; for it is a matter of loyalty to the truth and to the safety of souls. Hospitality must be restrained, and even conventional greetings withheld, lest they be taken as tokens of welcome, and create complicity with evils that will follow. These admonitions remain in the sacred page as apostolical counsels for critical times when the like emergencies occur.

The passage which contains this lesson of warning at the same time throws a strong light on the mind of the writer, and brings into relief some features of character which we might scarcely have looked for in the Apostle of Love. We note the penetrating insight into the religious situation, the

immovable hold on the essential doctrine, the firm insistence on that decisive test, the severe epithets, the unsparing condemnation, and the stern tone of the practical directions. We note these things, and remember past years, recalling tokens of natural character in the early disciple. This is he who came to Jesus saying: "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us." This is he who, with James, his brother, in hot indignation against unfriendly Samaritans, proposed to "call down fire from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did." We remember how the Lord, who knew what was in men, named these sons of Zebedee Boanerges, expressing the reserve of force and fire which He saw in their natures, and which He would in time use in their ministry. This vehemence we may suppose it was which at a critical time made James the chief object of public anger and the first martyr of the Twelve.

In St. John's mental history as the disciple whom Jesus loved it came under a special and sanctifying influence, but one which did not lessen the intensity of the natural feelings. That character of mind endured to the end of life, and showed itself in all its force before the rising spirit of antichrist, animating the last testimonies to the truth of the Incarnation and the glory of the Lord.

There remains the question whether this letter is to be taken as a private or a public one—whether the elect lady and her children were a Christian family or a church and its members. Though the sentiments and counsels of the letter are not affected by the question, it is interesting on other accounts.

The difficulty is in the address. The writer's designation of himself is one which he knows to be recognised and understood, as it well might be. There were elders in all the churches. The Apostles were elders to the whole Church. The surviving Apostle was now in a unique sense *the Elder*, by office and age. But in regard to the person addressed, there is not only uncertainty, but difficulty, even more than appears in the English rendering. The title *κυρία* was not one in use as is the word "lady" with us, and has therefore been taken as a proper name, *Kyria*, one of which scarcely an instance has been found. But then the construction would be strange. "It is in the highest degree unlikely that St. John would have written *ἐκλεκτῇ κυρίᾳ*, and not *κυρία τῇ ἐκλεκτῇ*." So Westcott. He thinks that "we must recognise that the problem of the address is insoluble"; but he also says: "The general tenor of the letter favours the opinion



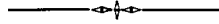
that it was sent to a community, and not to one believer " ("Epistles of St. John," p. 214).

If Kyria be taken as a personal name, she has an "elect sister" in the place from which St. John is writing, whose "children" at the end of the letter send their salutation. Thus there will be two elect ladies—"widows," Bengel says, "or distinguished for piety beyond their husbands." Each has children; the first of them apparently has many, some of whom the writer has met with elsewhere, the rest recipients of the letter. They are widely known and highly esteemed in Christian societies—"whom I love, and not I only, but all they that have known the truth." To them the deceivers will come, and all the instruction to them is couched in the plural number. Bishop Lightfoot, in a footnote to his "Commentary on the Epistle to Philemon," says: "I take the view that the *κυρία* addressed in the Second Epistle of St. John is some church personified, as, indeed, the whole tenor of the Epistle seems to imply. The salutation to the 'elect lady' from her 'elect sister' will then be a greeting sent from one church to another, just as in 1 Peter the letter is addressed at the outset *ἐκλεκτοῖς* in Pontus, etc., and contains at the close a salutation from *ἡ ἐν βαβυλῶνι συνεκλεκτή*." These two passages certainly go together. As Alford says, "if a person be meant in the one, then a person is meant in the other." That conclusion he adopts, as does the last commentator on St. Peter, Dr. Bigg, both persuaded by the addition "and Marcus my son." But nothing could be more natural after the greeting from the elect community at Rome than to add a message from one who did not belong to it, his companion there, known as his "son" to those who would receive the letter. It needs a better reason than that for taking "she that is in Babylon co-elect" as meaning St. Peter's wife—a designation as incongruous as it is hypothetical. It is surely a lack of imagination which fails to apprehend the impression that would be made by the position of the elect society in the pagan imperial city, and the analogies that would readily occur to the mind of the Jewish Apostle.

Yet, further, the title "elect" given to a single person is unusual in the Apostolic style. It is used collectively in application to churches, but not to individual believers. Once only is it found attached to a personal name—Rom. xvi. 13: "Salute Rufus, the chosen in the Lord"; and there the expression, occurring among numerous salutations to persons discriminated by characteristic notes, seems to have some particular reference to personal history. On the whole it appears that the distinctive epithet "elect," used by St. Peter

and in this Epistle by St. John, would be exceptional in application to individuals, but most natural as a designation of Christian churches.

T. D. BERNARD.



## ART. II.—LOISY'S SYNTHESIS OF CHRISTIANITY.

### VI.

THE point I have been pressing in these papers is that the foundation-stone of Christianity, whether realized by the individual or asserting itself objectively by means of its peculiar institutions, is Jesus Christ as the actual manifestation of Deity on earth. For Loisy this is an ecclesiastical dogma, posthumous and adventitious. As I read history, it is the *raison d'être* of the religion. The most that the Church can do is to respond as adequately as is possible to the demand for an intellectual "setting" of a truth whose provinces are primarily the spirit and the heart.

I have dealt sufficiently with the evidence furnished by our canonical literature. It seems to me that even when we have eliminated the Fourth Gospel and palliated the arbitrary excisions in the Synoptic story desired by these high critics, the conduct and letters of the first teachers of Christianity offer an unassailable proof that Jesus had made the claims which lie at the foundation of our creeds. It is a natural sequence when the Acts presents, in connection with these claims, a story of the effusion of the Holy Spirit's power and His attestation to the labours of the first teachers. There is not a particle of evidence that this book, which stands or falls with the Third Gospel, is unhistorical. And I take it that the Christians, who in many cases incurred obloquy and risk by embracing the new creed, were at least as alive as we to the necessity of having a reasonably accurate account of their religion. The class of society which furnished the bulk of proselytes was not one addicted to mystic speculations, but rather one that asks for practical demonstration. It is incredible to me that under such conditions the Church should have launched out thus early in Haggada, and, supplementing a non-historical Jesus with a non-historical revelation of the Holy Spirit, evoked for its fictions the names of John the beloved disciple, and Luke the fellow-traveller of St. Paul. Loisy, however, I gather, accepts the historicity of the Acts, though disowning that of St. John's Gospel, and so far deviates from the critical lines of Harnack. For his early Church history, if not for his Christology, he accepts the