

# *The Epistle of Truth*

A STUDY OF  
THE SECOND EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN

THE REV. EDWIN HIRST, M.A., A.R.C.M.

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE Second Epistle of St. John is one of the briefest books in the Bible. Its brevity might give the impression that it is of little importance, but that such an assumption is false is shown by the measure of light that it throws not only upon certain tendencies of thought which were prevalent at the time of its composition but also upon the organization of the early Church.

Several short compositions were received into the New Testament Canon, and to have found a place alongside the longer writings that were included, this epistle must have been revered and treasured from the first. Its writer must have given to it an influence from his own authoritative position and personal character.

## THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In a study of this small compass, it is not desirable to open up the whole question of the Johannine Literature, but it would be unwise to ignore the critical outlook altogether.

Whilst the early Church was spreading, reference would continually be made both to the collected sayings of our Lord and to the writings of the apostles. The Gospels would naturally have the first place as the authoritative records of Christ's life and teaching. At the same time, Christian public worship was developing on the lines of synagogue services in which the reading and exposition of the Law and the Prophets had a place. Several indications of this custom appear in the New Testament. Christ Himself read and taught in the Synagogue at Nazareth. St. Paul was invited

to speak in the Synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia after the public reading of the Law and the Prophets. The Christian assembly would naturally continue to observe such a custom. St. Paul gave direction in one place, "When this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church of the Laodiceans; and that ye also read the epistle from Laodicea."<sup>1</sup> It seems that, under such circumstances, the custom of reading apostolic communications developed, for these letters would be received as having a measure of sacredness and authority. Thus, the Gospels and these letters provided the Churches with a series of documents to which they could refer as a final court of appeal in all questions of faith and conduct.

In course of time, many letters and other works were in circulation. Some received a larger measure of recognition than others, whilst some were held in greater esteem in certain regions than they were elsewhere.

When the Canon was finally settled, the Christian was furnished with a wider scope of reference than was the Jew. At its birth, the Church inherited the Old Testament with its authority. To this collection of scriptures was added those of the New Testament. The formulation of the Canon was a long process, but the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit is evident throughout. Later generations are able to study both of the two Testaments knowing that "every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete; furnished completely unto every good work."<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note any indication concerning the process by which the Canon of the New Testament was settled. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, the Christian historian, is very helpful in this connection, for he gives three categories of the many works then in circulation, and in some cases he mentions them by name. First, there were those books which were "among the accepted writings" acknowledged by all. Secondly, there were those which he describes as "disputed writings which are nevertheless recognized by many." Thirdly, there were "the rejected writings" regarded as spurious. Of this last class he says that they

<sup>1</sup> Col. iv. 16.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

“are all of them to be cast aside as absurd and impious.” Broadly speaking, the test applied to any writing was that of apostolic usage, “and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics.”<sup>1</sup>

## THE SECOND EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN

The Second Epistle of St. John was amongst those of the second category, although the First Epistle was included in the list of “accepted writings.” However, it seems that Eusebius himself fully accepted the Second Epistle in his own list of accredited writings. Fluctuations in the standard of its acceptance were doubtless due to its shortness and personal character. These circumstances would naturally limit its suitability for use in the Church’s public worship. Nevertheless, the Epistle was widely accepted as apostolic. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, so regarded it. Clement of Alexandria was evidently aware of its existence, as is shown by his reference to John’s “larger epistle.” The “Muratorian Fragment” recognizes it.<sup>2</sup> These circumstances indicate that the inclusion of St. John’s Second Epistle in the Canon was due to the recognition of its apostolic character.

It is clear that the three Epistles which bear John’s name have a common origin. This is apparent both in their similarity of style and in their theological outlook. For all their personal character, the Second and Third Epistles alike display their author as one in authority. Their similarities led Jerome to speak of them as “twin sisters.” Yet these are also related to the First Epistle, even though this is more like a treatise, or homily, than a letter. Unlike the Second and Third Epistles, this has neither greetings, farewells, nor any other personal allusions. The spiritual outlook, however, is similar in all three. Emphasis laid upon certain virtues cannot escape notice, be it upon obedience and love, on fellowship with the Father and the Son, or the necessity of knowing, upholding, and remaining in the truth. There are also warnings against deceivers and

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. iii, chapter xxv.

<sup>2</sup> This “Fragment” is part of a Latin list of the books of the New Testament usually dated about A.D. 180.

false teachers. Readers are cautioned against the reception of such persons into their homes, for that would implicate both themselves and their households in a participation of error.

Just as these three Epistles disclose an unmistakable unity, so a like unity is to be observed between them and the fourth Gospel. Key words appear in each, such as love, light, life and truth. Identical phrases also frequently occur, like being "of the truth," "of the devil," "of the light," and "of the Father." This choice of word and phrase cannot be attributed to mere coincidence. It is so obvious that Archbishop Bernard says "We hold that the cumulative evidence thus available from the style and diction of the two short letters sufficiently prove that they are written by the same hand that wrote the Gospel and the First Epistle."<sup>1</sup>

### THE AUTHOR

Tradition has connected these four works with the name of the Apostle John. It is noticeable, however, that in each of them the writer withholds his name, yet in the Second and Third Epistles he designates himself as "The Elder." With an authoritative tone he cautions his people of danger, and assumes the right to regulate Church matters in organization and teaching either by written direction or personal visit. Writing to Gaius (in the Third Epistle) his authority is perhaps even more assertive. Here he rebukes the tyrannical attitude of Diotrephes, who evidently had declined to accept the writer's authority set forth in a former communication. This Diotrephes, who evidently was an Elder, did not receive "the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth, and casteth them out of the Church."<sup>2</sup> In the Old Testament, the term "Elder" is used to designate an official class having jurisdiction both civil and religious; and, in his "Bible Studies," Professor Deissmann has shown that the Septuagint used the term "Elder" ("presbyteros") where the original implied an official position. This usage, he tells us, is to be "explained by the fact that they found "presbyteros" already used technically in Egypt for the

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on St. John*, vol. i, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> 3 John verse 10.

holder of a communal office."<sup>1</sup> Dr. Milligan gives an instance of yet another usage of the term in his "Selections from the Greek Papyri," citing a report of an enquiry made by five "Elder-priests"<sup>2</sup> into the conduct of one of their brother-priests serving with them in the temple of the crocodile god Socnopaeus. This title is one of dignity, for each of these elder-priests had supervision over one of the five courses into which the priests were divided for ministerial duties.<sup>3</sup> A similar use of the term is found in Asia Minor, showing that "Elder" could indicate a position of importance in the religious world of that age. It would be easy and natural for the idea thus expressed to be carried over into the Christian Church of the Apostolic Age. That such was the case is indicated in the words of Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis: "When a person came in my way, who had been a follower of the Elders, I would enquire about the discourses of the Elders—what Andrew, or Peter, or Philip, or Thomas, or James, or John, or Matthew, or any of the Lord's disciples said, and what Ariston and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord, say." In this connection, the Rev. H. P. V. Nunn's conclusion seems to be correct. "To him (Papias) the Apostles were plainly the 'Elders'."<sup>4</sup> When writing his First Epistle, St. Peter styles himself as a fellow-elder with other Christian ministers.<sup>5</sup> Further, as scholars usually date the Second and Third Epistles of St. John at about the close of the first century, and agree that they were written from Ephesus, the evidence points to the conclusion that the writer's position was one of prime importance in that area such as could be held only by one of Apostolic standing.

The early Church recognized certain qualifications for the Apostolate. These were indicated quite early, for they were set forth when the necessity of filling the place of Judas presented itself. "Of the men therefore which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must

<sup>1</sup> *Bible Studies*, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> *Selections from the Greek Papyri*, p. 83. See also *Here and There Among the Papyri*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> See St. Luke i. 5-8.

<sup>4</sup> *The Son of Zebedee*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter v. 1.

one become a witness with us of his resurrection."<sup>1</sup> These qualifications are most comprehensive, and it certainly seems that the writer of the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles could meet all these demands. From his profound knowledge of the Old Testament, together with the details he gives of Jewish ceremonial and social customs, we gather that the writer was a Jew. His knowledge of Palestinian geography in general and of Jerusalem in particular lead us to the conclusion that he was a native of the country he describes. The record has the authentic stamp of that of an eye-witness who truly "went in and went out" with Christ and His disciples. There is, in the narrative, a feeling of confidence born of an intimate knowledge of Christ's life and teaching. Although the writer of the Fourth Gospel treats his material in a manner that differs from that of the Synoptists, there is a relationship between his record and theirs which is truly complementary. The Eternal Sonship of Christ is set forth in the Fourth Gospel from the very first; and the Gospel draws to a close on the same note. "These (signs) are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name."<sup>2</sup> In the last chapter, which bears the character of an appendix, the same truth is emphasized: "This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true."<sup>3</sup>

Although by no means so prominent, the same truth of Divine Sonship appears in the synoptic records. "All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him."<sup>4</sup> Christ had been thanking the Father for the spreading of His message and for His revelation of the Father by means of the mission of His followers. It would seem as though the vision of a fully redeemed humanity had opened before Him. Knowing His unity with the Father, and being conscious that all had been delivered into His hands, He felt that He could receive all

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 21, 22.

<sup>2</sup> St. John xx. 31.

<sup>3</sup> St. John xxi. 24.

<sup>4</sup> St. Matt. xi. 27. See also St. Luke x. 22, and St. Mark xiii. 32.

mankind into His embrace. Out of that consciousness He uttered His invitation: "Come unto me."<sup>1</sup> It is a most sublime claim which Christ makes. A study of the original Greek is most instructive. The word translated by "have been delivered" is in the aorist tense, and "the act indicated by the aorist is placed in the eternal past, where the notion of time is lost, but as an eternal fact may be regarded as ever present, this aspect of the aorist is properly represented by the English present tense"<sup>2</sup> as it is in the Authorized Version. This outlook is in harmony with the thought of a pre-existent Messiah, which had a place in Jewish hope. The expectation of a human Sovereign endowed with supernatural powers is very distinct, but in his Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel, Dr. Plummer points out several instances of this loftier ideal.<sup>3</sup> "The Elect One standeth before the Lord of Spirits, and His glory is for ever and ever."<sup>4</sup> The Fourth Book of Esdras has: "no man upon earth can see My Son."<sup>5</sup> The thought of a pre-existent Christ, an Eternal Son, is definite in the New Testament. It is clearly stated in the Pauline Epistles<sup>6</sup> and in Hebrews.<sup>7</sup> Although its fullest expression is in the Fourth Gospel, it is clear that the Synoptists had the principle in their minds. These instances have a likeness to the claim in the Fourth Gospel, where Christ says "I and the Father are One."<sup>8</sup> Strictly, the word means "one thing," for the neuter pronoun is used indicating not one individual or one person, but an "unity"—"one thing." Yet for all his emphasis on the Eternal Sonship of Christ, the Fourth Evangelist gives a place to the human side of His nature. It was a weary and a thirsting Christ who rested by the well of Sychar.<sup>9</sup> His emotion at the grave of Lazarus drew from the onlookers the spontaneous remark, "Behold how He loved him!"<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xi. 28, 29.

<sup>2</sup> St. Matthew. A. Carr, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel.* Dr. Plummer, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> Enoch xlix. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Enoch xiii. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. viii. 3, viii. 32; 2 Cor. iv. 4, viii. 9; Col. i. 15-19; Gal. i. 16, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. i. 2, iv. 14, vi. 6, etc.

<sup>8</sup> St. John x. 30.

<sup>9</sup> St. John iv. 6, 7.

<sup>10</sup> St. John xi. 36.

His spirit was shaken at the thought of His betrayal and His Passion.<sup>1</sup> The divine and the human appear in the portrait of Christ which is penned in each Gospel, and these are complementary, the one to the other. When the Fourth Evangelist plainly states, "We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father,"<sup>2</sup> and in the First Epistle says, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you,"<sup>3</sup> we must understand him to mean what he says. Of this "beholding" (the same word occurs in both Gospel and Epistle) Archbishop Bernard says that the verb is never used in the New Testament of spiritual vision, while it is used twenty-two times of "seeing" with the bodily eyes.<sup>4</sup>

In these considerations the attempt has been made, first of all, to show the unity which exists between the Gospel and the three Epistles which bear John's name. Secondly, that no one but a person of Apostolic standing could have written the Epistles. Thirdly, that there is a real connection between our Four Gospels, each contributing to the portrayal of Christ's person as we know Him, to His teaching and His mission. Fourthly, that the contribution of the Fourth Gospel is the outcome of personal experience, personal intimacy, and personal conviction.

It seems that there is but one person of the Apostolic band who could have done this—St. John, the Beloved Disciple, the Son of Zebedee.<sup>5</sup> There is no lack of evidence to support such a view. The evidence is derived from tradition, from the testimony of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, from Polycarp of Smyrna, from the general acceptance of the Gospel as authentic by so many of the Fathers, from its

<sup>1</sup> St. John xii. 27, xiii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> St. John i. 14.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John i. 1-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Commentary on St. John*, vol. i, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> "Though the enigma of the Fourth Gospel remains unsolved, even here the historical basis of its narrative is widely admitted and the authorship of the Apostle John is not regarded as out of the question." *Essays in Construction*. W. R. Matthews, p. 110.



place in Tatian's Harmony of the Gospels, and from the long residence of St. John in Ephesus.

### THE ADDRESSEE

Because of its personal character, some scholars have suggested that this letter was sent to a private individual ; some have maintained that it was addressed to a Church ; whilst others are cautious, leaving it an open question. The possibility has been put forward that the introduction should read " The Elder unto the elect Kyria and her children," and that the Greek, Kyria, is a proper name, the equivalent of the Hebrew Martha. If this is so, verse five should read, " And now I beseech thee, Kyria, not as though I wrote to thee a new commandment, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another." Verse ten seems to harmonize with this view, which certainly is the most simple aspect, whether the person addressed be the lady Kyria, or even as some have thought, " the lady Elekte."

Differing from this view, there is that of many who consider that the mystical interpretation best fits the sense of the letter, and that it was addressed to a Church. To support this hypothesis, it is pointed out that no actual name is given, whilst in the Third Epistle, Gaius is named as the recipient. Yet, even in this Epistle, a Church is indicated in verse nine, which has : " I wrote somewhat unto the Church." The symbolic interpretation of the salutation has support in St. Peter's message : " She that is in Babylon, elect together with you, saluteth you,"<sup>1</sup> which means literally, " the co-elect in Babylon saluteth you." Dr. Weymouth boldly translates it by : " The Church in Babylon chosen like yourselves by God sends greetings." If the mystical interpretation is accepted the salutation might well read, " The Elder to the sister Church."

The view that Kyria is a proper name seems to be challenged by the evidence of the papyri. In a recovered letter of the first century, a man named Hilarion, writing to his wife Alis, sends greetings by her " to the lady (kyria) Berous."<sup>2</sup> Here, kyria seems to be a term of respect, and not a proper name. Further, if an individual is addressed in the Second Johannine Epistle, it is rather strange that the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter. v. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Milligan : *Selections from the Papyri*, p. 32

writer should add to his own expression of esteem, "whom I love in truth," that of others, "and not I only, but also all they that know the truth." Verse four does not read as though one family is implied—"I have found certain of thy children walking in truth." The last greeting, "the children of thine elect sister salute thee," sounds rather like that of a greeting from one Church to another than a family message, where the children send their salutations to an unnamed aunt, and deliberately omit from their greeting any mention of their mother.

Still another view is that the letter was addressed to the Church at large ; but that idea has never had any appreciable measure of acceptance, and does not seem to be suitable at all.

It might be possible to blend the two first views regarding the destination of the letter. The New Testament has several references to Churches which met in private houses. Buildings dedicated for Christian worship do not seem to have appeared before the third century. This was due to the need for secrecy in some cases and to poverty in others. It would appear that the wealthier members of Christian congregations put one of their rooms at the Church's disposal for the purpose. In Jerusalem the Church seems to have met at the house of Mary, John Mark's mother.<sup>1</sup> In Ephesus, the home of Aquila and Priscilla served as a Church.<sup>2</sup> This is to give but two instances out of several. It might even be that there were more centres than one in a city, for two verses in the Epistle to the Romans seem to suggest this.<sup>3</sup> The New Testament has one instance where a private letter was sent to an individual member of a Church together with a public letter which was addressed to the whole Christian community.<sup>4</sup> These are that to Philemon and the one to the Colossians. Both of these letters were carried by the same person from the Apostle, and it is probable that "Philemon's house was the one meeting place in Colossae, which was a comparatively small town,"<sup>5</sup> for St. Paul sends a message of greeting by Philemon to the

<sup>1</sup> Acts xii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. xvi. 14, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Col. iv. 15 ; Philemon verse 2.

<sup>5</sup> Moule : *Colossian Studies*, p. 304.

Church which meets in his house. It may be that in the Second Epistle of St. John we have two similar types of messages merged into one letter and addressed to a Church meeting in a private house. Hence, what would read naturally to the original recipients presents difficulties to us who look back down the vista of time.

### DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

It would be interesting to know when and where this Epistle was written. But there is little other than tradition to instruct and help in any attempt to fix either date or place. Verse twelve mentions a projected visit on the part of the writer. If this was to be a tour of inspection and supervision, it is probable that this letter was written from Ephesus, the centre of the Asian circle of Churches. It seems that these pastoral tours of inspection were quite customary. In Acts 15, 36, St. Paul says: "Let us return now and visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they fare." It is quite possible that the second Johannine letter was sent to prepare the way for such a visit. Showing, as it does, the calm counsel of age, mature experience, and seasoned judgment, the letter suggests an author who knew the truth of Christ and was stirred with the consuming earnestness of the true pastor, jealous for the safety of his flock. He cared greatly for the souls entrusted to his safe keeping. With our present knowledge, it is possible only to conjecture both as to time and place of writing, as well as the Epistle's destination, which might well have been, and was most probably, one of the Churches of Asia Minor.

### THE OCCASION

In the first century, converts to the Christian faith were drawn mostly from the poor, the uneducated, and the oppressed. St. Paul well knew "that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble"<sup>1</sup> were called. The inclusion of these within the circle of the Church constituted a real problem. Slaves found a new dignity in their Christian manhood, and, noting this, men would wonder how they would use or misuse their spiritual liberty. But

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 26.

we know that "every obscure little Christian charcoal-burner was taught to know the dignity of his calling, that he was a fellow-citizen of the saints, called, by the mercy of God, out of the darkness of his bleak, lonely individualism to share the inheritance of the saints in light."<sup>1</sup> It was a most wonderful thing that Christ worked in men's souls. Yet there were dangers, for privileges are ever accompanied by responsibilities. Having little education, many would be liable to error, and thus they needed sound supervision when attempts were made to mingle corrupt doctrines with the clear Gospel. The Epistles show how sorely such supervision was needed, and, under the circumstances, it is almost miraculous that the deposit of truth was not greatly adulterated. The saving hand of Providence is seen in this act of preservation.

The Gospels show what was taught in the first age, but the Epistles possibly show it more vividly; for in them truth and untruth are often set forth side by side, so that the Christian might be guided to reject the one and cherish the other. Teaching would necessarily be oral in character at first, but this was soon supplemented by the written document designed to confirm the teaching already given. The Gospel of St. Luke was avowedly so planned. "It seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."<sup>2</sup> In most cases the Epistles dealt with contemporary problems and those real dangers which surrounded the infant Christian Church. The old religions of the Roman Empire were decaying, and yet it was not necessarily an irreligious age. There seemed to be abroad a general desire for a new religion. Judaism attracted some followers, but other religions in the field claimed the power of satisfying men in their search for knowledge and for God. The mystery religions offered a symbolic cleansing from sin, yet lacked moral power in life. Moreover, the flow of eastern faiths into the West constituted a real danger. They spread rapidly and found enthusiastic supporters. Their teaching was materialistic. In practice they were corrupt, sensual, and immoral. Springing from

<sup>1</sup> Barry: *St. Paul and Social Psychology*, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> St. Luke i. 3-4.

Eastern nature worships as they did, they could not be otherwise. When these faiths impinged upon Christian doctrine, they tended to subvert the truth of Christ; but as long as Christianity preserved its purity all was well, for it rested, and still rests, upon belief in a moral God. Thus the Christian faith could offer to the world of that age both true knowledge and moral regeneration.

### THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

If we conclude that this Epistle was written at the close of the first century, it throws a measure of light upon the development of the Christian Ministry of that period. The writer simply styles himself "*The Elder*," and we know that this name (presbyteros) and that of bishop (episcopos) were interchangeable terms in the New Testament for the same office. The Apostles naturally took the lead in administration, but apparently not in an attitude of independence from the whole Church. Thus, the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem were promulgated on the initiative of "the apostles and the Elders, with the whole church."<sup>1</sup> The Apostles "act as leaders of the Church and give shape to its resolutions, but those resolutions go forth with the authority of the Church as a whole."<sup>2</sup> The authority exercised by the Church in making this decision was derived direct from Christ, and not through a body of administrative officials. But the Church soon extended her borders, and, as she spread, her ministry had to extend with it. However, as the New Testament stands, it is plain that there is no higher office than that of Elder, "and the New Testament Episcopos is a man with the function of the Elder."<sup>3</sup> As the Apostles rendered their account to God one by one, provision had to be made for the future. It is how that provision was made that we wish to know more precisely, but information is scanty. Dr. Sanday says, "The Christian Ministry, like most other administrative forms, it is probable, rather grew than was made. And that by a process which if we could have seen it we should very likely have described as quite simple and natural—though because natural it is

<sup>1</sup> Acts xv. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Sanday : *The Conception of Priesthood*. p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Griffith Thomas : *Principles of Theology*, p. 337.

not to be supposed that it is any the less Providential."<sup>1</sup> In our view, the Elder who wrote this letter was the last of the original disciples. Yet whilst writing as an Elder, or rather The Elder, he assumes a position of authority as something taken for granted. He has evidently no need to assert his position, for it was well known and acknowledged. This is clear from the directions given in this Epistle, and also in the Third Epistle, by his intervention in the high-handed actions of Diotrephes. These facts have led to the conclusion that, in all probability, Church administration and the Ministry had reached a stage in Asia Minor where an Elder-President presided over a group of Churches, each local Church being supervised by its own Elder. Whilst remembering that Elder and Bishop are interchangeable terms in the New Testament as embracing the same office, we are inclined to the view that the writer of these letters had both a position of eminence and a measure of supervisory authority over the Churches around him. Although he contests the Johannine authorship of the Epistles, Canon Streeter says: "Partly as President of the mother church in Asia, partly, perhaps, in virtue of the personal influence he enjoyed, he assumes the same kind of responsibility for the smaller churches of the province as Clement's epistle shows the Roman Church exercising at about the same date over churches within its sphere of influence, or which Ignatius wields a little later in the region of Antioch. We note, however, an essential difference. Clement writes merely as the anonymous mouthpiece of the Church of Rome; the Elder writes, like Ignatius, in his own name. Indeed, to describe his office, the title 'Archbishop' would—of course, without the formal implications of later canonical law and usage—be even more appropriate than that of 'Bishops.'"<sup>2</sup>

Danger of departure from the truth was the occasion of this Epistle. We, too, need to know more and still more of God's truth for which we pray in the beautiful "Prayer of St. Chrysostom." Perhaps it is fitting that this prayer—which in all probability was penned by St. Chrysostom himself within the communion of the Eastern Church, where so many of the errors which attacked the faith once delivered to the saints were contested one by one—should still inspire

<sup>1</sup> Sanday: *The Conception of Priesthood*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *The Primitive Church*, pp. 88-9.

us to seek those two blessings on which happiness in both worlds depends—"knowledge of Thy truth" and "life everlasting."

Whilst considering the manner in which this Epistle contributes to a clearer understanding of contemporary thought in the period when it was written, it is as well to remember that it has a message suited for all time. Conditions of life vary and modes of thought change, but principles endure. Human nature is much the same to-day as it was in the day of the "Apostles," although the conditions of life have vastly changed. This fact establishes the truths set forth in St. John's Second Epistle as being of vital import now, even as they were when the epistle was first penned.

The Epistle speaks of the truth of God, and we know that "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that seek after him."<sup>1</sup>

Then there is the truth of the Incarnation. Christ said of Himself: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father."<sup>2</sup> Apart from Christ, our knowledge of God is but fragmentary; hence it is on the Word made flesh that we fix our trust—the Word in all the glory and fullness of His Divine Person, both for redemption in this world and for the bliss we anticipate in the world eternal.

Great emphasis is laid in this Epistle on the truth. The question "What is truth?"<sup>3</sup> was once asked in an attitude either of despair or cynicism; it may be that in it both dispositions were blended. But the Apostle was not in doubt as to the truth, for he had known Him who claimed to be "the way, and the truth, and the life."<sup>4</sup> He also knew the power of His spiritual presence in the soul; so that to abide in the truth was to have "both the Father and the Son."<sup>5</sup>

If it was necessary to abide in the truth, it was equally necessary to beware of untruth. Truth and untruth are not blank forces. Truth is of God; untruth is of antichrist. Both truth and untruth are personally directed, and must

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

<sup>2</sup> St. John xiv. 9.

<sup>3</sup> St. John xviii. 38.

<sup>4</sup> St. John xiv. 6.

<sup>5</sup> 2 John verse 9.

have a relation to personality if they are to be personally apprehended.

As these principles are of an enduring quality, and as human nature with its untold possibilities for good or ill remains much the same as it was centuries ago, this Epistle must have a message for mankind until time gives place to eternity, and our present imperfect understanding is at last illumined in the glorious presence of the Lord.

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#### WHAT ABOUT HEAVEN ?

*By W. Graham Scroggie, D.D. (Pickering & Inglis) 6s. 6d.*

This helpful book has a touching dedication by the author, the well-known preacher and Keswick speaker, Dr. W. Graham Scroggie, to his wife Florence who for over thirty-nine years was his constant companion and best friend, and who made possible his world-wide ministry.

After dealing with pagan and Hebrew ideas of Life after Death showing strong beliefs in an after life among many nations, the author passes on to Christian ideas quoting a number of hymns with thoughts of joy and reunion.

He then goes on to the Answer from Revelation, and speaks of the Intermediate State before the Second Advent.

This state shows the persistence of the human spirit, and its consciousness, though many Scriptures call it a period of Sleep. He discusses the place of Paradise, the unclothed condition of the Spirit and its powers.

From this contemplation he passes on to the ultimate State which he believes will be ushered in by the Second Advent, and in this section speaks of Resurrection, Judgment, Progress and Glory.

This book has a very firm Scriptural basis, the bulk of the references being to the Word of God! There are also quotations from non-canonical books, early Fathers and modern writers.

The chapter on Judgment is specially striking, as here is clearly pointed out the difference between the Bema at which all Christians will appear for reward or loss, and the Great White Throne of Revelation xx. To the Christian there is no question of Salvation or condemnation, that is already settled. No Christian will appear before the Great White Throne. He also refers to the Judgment of the Nations.

This is a book for believers. Little is said even as Scripture says little about the unbeliever in the world to come.

The weakest point seems to be the argument that the departed saints may pray for us.

The chapter on Resurrection is helpful and richly suggestive.

The book should be a great comfort to mourners, and would be a valuable gift at a time like this.

H. A. E.-J.