

BREVIA.

Fellowship with God.

“And this is the message which we have heard from Him, and announce unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”—1 JOHN i. 5-7 (Rev. Ver.).

IN translating *μετ' ἀλλήλων* as in the A.V.—“one with another”—I cannot but think that the Revisers missed an opportunity of giving the true sense of this passage—a sense as precious as it seems to me to be the obvious one. At the same time, since Dr. Westcott, who was so valuable a member of the Revision Company, has given us in his *Epistles of St. John* his reason for rejecting the sense which I shall hope to shew is the true one, and for retaining that of the A.V., perhaps we should not wonder that the Revisers fell in with it.

That the Infinite and the finite could hold direct communication the one with the other seemed to the dreamy but religious mind of the East impossible. Yet earnest souls yearned after such fellowship. Hence those Gnostic fancies—varying in form, but one in origin and aim—of a gradation of intermediate intelligences, reaching from the nearest to the Unapproachable down to those in touch with mortal man, and through whom some kind of communion might become possible. That such dreams had begun to tell, or at least were in danger of telling, upon the Christians of proconsular Asia, in whose capital the beloved disciple spent his last days, is beyond question: and as if he felt that to them he had a message pre-eminently fitted to meet that subtle danger, and was brimming over with it as “the present truth” for that region, he opens with it, in one prolonged paragraph extending to the end of the first chapter. And what is it? It is nothing less than *the Incarnation of the Eternal Word*, in virtue of which that “Eternal Life, which was with the Father,” could be “heard,” and had been heard, by human ears; could be “seen”—for “we have seen” Him “with our eyes,” and we “have looked upon Him”;—nay, could be handled, for “our hands have handled” that “Word

of life"; and "the Life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." Well, "that which we have seen and heard" is what we now "declare unto you." To what end? "That ye also may have fellowship with us." But what good will that do us? Much every way, for "our fellowship is with the Father (the Fountain of it), and with His Son Jesus Christ (the glorious Channel of it)."

Fellowship with God, then—that wonderful, and to the Oriental mind seemingly impossible, thing, in order to which no intermediate agency is either required or permitted, a fellowship as near as the flesh of the Incarnate One is to our flesh—that is the fellowship which we enjoy. And since this is too good to keep to ourselves, we want you to share in it and enjoy it along with us. But observe the *conditions* of it. For this other message we have from Him and announce to you, "that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If (then) we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." For from the very nature of fellowship, it cannot exist where there is no sympathy between the parties. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" As like draws to like, so opposites repel one another. "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship"—with whom? with our fellow Christians? Who would ever expect such a sequence? Our fellow Christians are not in the question now before the writer and his readers. The two parties here are *God* and *we*, and the question is how these two parties have mutual fellowship. Negatively first: "If we walk in darkness, while He is light, we cannot have it, and if we say we have it, we lie"; but now positively, "If we walk in the light, as He is the light, we do have this fellowship." Clearly, therefore, the words should be rendered, "we have fellowship together," or if that be thought not dignified enough, "we have fellowship one with the other":—as Dr. Pope (in Schaff's *Commentary*) expresses it, "our fellowship with God is then not a lie but a reality."

Now what is Dr. Westcott's objection to this? "The supposition that $\mu\epsilon\tau'$ ἀλλήλων means 'we with God and God with us' is against the apostolic form of language (John xx. 17), and also against the general form of St. John's argument, for he takes the fellowship of Christians as the visible sign and correlative of fellowship with

God (iv. 7, 12; comp. iii. 11, 23).” With submission, I think each of these statements is incorrect.¹

1. So far from its being “against the apostolic form of language” to speak of “our having fellowship with God and God with us,” a bolder form of language than this is put into the mouth of our Lord Himself by this same apostle when he was “in the spirit on the Lord’s day”:—“Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev. iii. 20) Observe how each of the parties is specified here distributively—“I with him, and he with Me.” That we should be able to sup with Him, high as that is, we could understand. But that He should sup with us is a word so high, as *Bengel* would say, that we could not dare to utter it if He Himself had not done it for us. Yet what is it after all but what He said to the disciples at the well of Samaria, after His interview with that poor woman which was to issue in the Samaritans themselves being drawn to Him? They had all that time been “away into the city to buy food,” and on their return they said, “Master, eat. But He said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.” In truth, what can “our fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” mean, if it be not what all fellowship of necessity is—mutual? and is it not a little finical (*pace* my honoured friend) to hold that, though the general idea of the thing is allowable, the specification of each of the two parties is irreverent, or not in the Johannine style?

2. This view of the passage is said to be “against the general form of St. John’s argument, who takes the fellowship of Christians as the visible sign and correlative of fellowship with God.” This is to me, I confess, a surprising objection. That in the sequel of this epistle he does treat of the fellowship of Christians with each other, as the outcome and reflection of their fellowship with God, is abundantly clear. But the question is, Is that what he is treating of here? Certainly not. What he is dealing with here is the fellowship *out of which* that other fellowship flows. I

¹ I hardly think it necessary to refer to the passage in John xx. 17, as if that could have any proper bearing on our passage. On the eve of His ascent to that higher sphere in which the old familiarities would be utterly unsuitable, the Lord gently checks it, when Mary is transported at seeing Him once more alive, by sharply marking out the difference between *His* relation to God and the Father and *ours*.

want you (he says) to have fellowship with us in that fellowship which *we* have with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ; and therefore to say that "this high mutual fellowship" is not what $\mu\epsilon\rho'$ ἀλλήλων means, but that *secondary reflection* of it in the fellowship of Christians with each other, which is *afterwards* spoken to, is, in Dr. Westcott, a little surprising.

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P.S.—Dr. Plummer, in his elaborate and most excellent edition of the *Epistles of St. John* (in the "Cambridge Series for Schools"), not only takes Dr. Westcott's view of the passage which has given occasion to this paper, but holds it "certain" that this is the true sense. But as he only repeats Dr. Westcott's arguments, I need add nothing to what I have written.
