

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN.

IV.

THE FILIAL CHARACTER AND HOPE.

And now, little children, abide in Him;
 So that if He should be manifested, we may have confidence,
 And not shrink with shame from Him in His coming.
 If you know that He is righteous,
 You perceive that every one doing righteousness is begotten of Him.
 See what manner of love the Father has given to us,
 Purposing that we should be called children of God!
 —And so we are.

For this reason the world knows us not,
 Inasmuch as it knew not Him.
 Beloved, we are now children of God;
 And it has not yet been manifested what we shall be!
 We know that if He should be manifested, we shall be like Him;
 Because we shall see Him as He is.
 And every one who has this hope set upon Him,
 Purifies himself according as He is pure.

—1 *John* ii. 28—iii. 3.

HAUPT¹ is right in attaching *vv.* 28 and 29 of the second chapter to the third, and in marking at this point a main division in the structure of the Epistle. “With the exception of *μένειν* at the beginning of the two verses,” he observes, “all the ideas in them are new and enter the Epistle for the first time”; and these “special ideas, touched here for the first time, are the ever recurring constitutive elements” of its second half. “*φανερῶσθαι* is taken up again in iii. 2–5; *παρησίαν ἔχειν* is elucidated in iii. 19–22, iv. 17 f., v. 13 ff.; *ποιεῖν τὴν δικαιοσύνην* forms the fundamental thought of the first ten verses of chap. iii.; *ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγεννησθαι* is not only repeated in *τέκνα Θεοῦ*, iii. 1 f., but also from iii. 24 onwards is more closely considered. The thought announced in ii. 28 is precisely in the same sense the theme of the

¹ See his *Commentary* (Eng. ed.), pp. 142 ff.

next part of the Letter, as i. 5 was of that which has just closed." The abrupt opening of iii. 1 suggested to the chapter-dividers the break they have made there; but one has only to read on into verses 2 and 3 to find that the writer's mind is following closely the vein struck at the close of the previous chapter; the thought of the Lord's approaching "manifestation," raising solicitude for the state and posture in which His people should then be found, holds him fast. The exclamatory ἴδετε of iii. 1 is the sign not of logical discontinuity, but of emotional disturbance. Striking for the first time in his Letter on the idea of the believer's *sonship* toward God (γενένηται ἐξ αὐτοῦ), the writer falls into astonishment at the love thus disclosed in God, at the fact that He should care to be our Father and should design to give us the name and status of children to Himself. But he quickly comes round again in the εἰς φανερωθῆ of verse 2 to the point of view assumed in ii. 28; the "hope" which is held out in verse 3, of "seeing Christ as He is" (v. 2), is at the same time the hope of standing before Him with "boldness in" that "coming" which the readers were led to expect in ii. 28.

The introductory words of address, "And now, little children" (cf. 2 John 5, Acts iii. 17, x. 5, xiii. 11, for καὶ νῦν as a rhetorical form of transition, continuative and resumptive; for τεκνία, introducing a fresh topic, cf. ii. 1, 12, iii. 7), call attention to the prospect rising before the writer's mind. With the watchword μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ St. John opens the new line of appeal, as he closed with it his former protestation, in the last words of verse 27. "Abiding in God" by retaining "the chrism" of the Spirit, who "teaches about all things" (v. 27), the readers will not be led astray by antichrists and false prophets appearing in this "last hour," who deny the Father and the Son and gainsay the word heard in the Church from the beginning (vv. 18-26). But more than that, by so abiding—by loyalty to the apostolic

message and to their own convictions of spiritual truth—they will prepare for Christ's coming and will be able to meet Him without fear or shame. They will thus assert their filial character, and realize the inconceivable blessedness of their inheritance as the children of God, whose glory is as yet unrevealed and who have in God's righteousness and in the purity of Jesus reproduced in themselves a pledge of the loftiest hopes. Such is the gist of the paragraph we are dealing with; and such appears to be its connexion with the foregoing context, to which it is linked not only by the double *μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ*, but also by the foreboding words *ἔσχατη ὥρα* of verse 18 and "the promise of eternal life" in verse 25, which lead the way to the *παρουσία* announced in verse 28.

At this point, however, it is possible to take a wider survey of the course of the Epistle. From i. 5 onwards to ii. 27 St. John has been working out and expanding on all sides the idea of fellowship with God and in God, realized through the message brought by Jesus Christ, under the conception of dwelling and walking "in the light." Over against the true light is set "the darkness" of sin, which combats it at every stage and under every form of contradiction and deceit—in the individual soul (i. 6–ii. 11), in the world (ii. 15–17), and in the Antichristian movement that has developed within the Church (ii. 18–27). But from this section onwards the *κοινωνία* of the soul and God takes on a more intimate character, a more vivid colouring and a warmer tone. We no longer read of "light" and "darkness," "the truth" and "the lie," of those who "walk in the light" or "the darkness," who are "of the truth" or "who lie and do not the truth," who profess truly or falsely to "have known God," but of "the children of God" and "of the Devil" respectively, of those who "have confidence toward God and do the things pleasing in His sight" or who "shrink away in shame before Him" and in "the fear that

has punishment," because they "are of God" or "are not of God" in either case. Where the ideas of the first half of the Epistle are called up again in the second half, as indeed we find them repeatedly, they reappear in a more concrete and personal form, with a livelier turn of expression and viewed in a more historical and experimental aspect. In the progress of the Epistle the general gives place to the particular, the metaphysical to the psychological; the doctrine heard from the beginning and the light shining evermore in the darkness are represented now as a "seed" of God's Spirit germinating amid the world's evil growths and overpowering them, as a holy love and will working mightily for salvation and winning their victory over hate and falsehood. This second half of the Epistle, like the first, sets out from the thought of the *φανέρωσις* of Christ (cf. *ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη* i. 2; and *ἐὰν φανερωθῆ*, ii. 28, iii. 2)—there His past, here His future manifestation; the first, that from which faith springs, the second, that to which hope looks; the first that which begins, the second that which completes the victory of God's light and love over human sin.

It may be observed that in this short course of *Studies*, which are not designed to cover the whole of the Epistle, we have leaped from verse 11 to 28 of the second chapter. Three sections are thus omitted: *vv.* 12–14, distinguishing, on the common basis of Christian experience, *Religion for the Old and for the Young*; *vv.* 15–17, warning the readers against *The Love of the World*; and *vv.* 18–27, an extended paragraph denouncing the antichrists who had arisen in *St. John's Last Hour* and guarding the Church from their seductions.¹ Important as these sections are and weighty in practical instruction, they are comparatively incidental and parenetic in scope, so that in passing from the earlier part of chapter ii. to its concluding verses we

¹ This section of the Epistle the writer expounded, under the title given, in the *Expositor* of an earlier date, Series V. v. pp. 241–255.

scarcely miss any chief topic of the Epistle or overlook any of its leading and determinative ideas, except indeed that of the *χρῖσμα* in verses 20 and 27. This notion of the "chrism" (unction), which constitutes true *Christians* and is wanting to the *Antichrists* (see the Paper mentioned in the note below), supplies a conception of the Holy Spirit's office peculiar to St. John; and it gives to the above passage a unique significance and value. But for the rest, chap. ii. 12-27 serves mainly to apply in exhortation and polemic the substance of the Apostle's message as it has been declared in chap. i. 5 and onwards, and there would be little in the way of doctrine lost—however much would be lacking in point of illustration and application of the leading ideas—by proceeding at once from verse 11 to verse 28.

The stress of the sentence in verse 28 lies not on the imperative, *μένετε ἐν αὐτῷ*, which is carried over from verse 27, but on the reason therefor, *ἵνα ἐὰν φανερωθῇ παρρησίαν σχωῶμεν κ.τ.λ.*: "Christ is to be manifested in His promised advent,—when we know not, but it may be soon; and we must appear before Him, with shame or confidence. Abiding in Him, you will be prepared whenever He may come. If the present should prove to be the world's last hour and the Lord should appear from heaven while we are yet on earth,¹ how welcome His appearing to those who love Him and are stedfastly obedient to His word! So the aged Apostle wistfully explores the future,—he of whom his Lord had said, "If I will that he tarry till I come!" (John xxi. 22). His *ἐὰν φανερωθῇ* echoes the *ἐὰν θέλω αὐτὸν μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι* of the Lord's memorable saying about him. After those words of Jesus, the possibility of His coming within the Apostolic era and while John

¹ Cf. 1 Thess. iv. 15, 17, 1 Cor. xv. 51, for St. Paul's impression on the subject at a much earlier date, when he classed himself, provisionally, amongst the *περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου*. But no such expression recurs in his later Epistles.

remained in the flesh was bound to be entertained ; and the prolongation of the Apostle's life to the verge of human age might well encourage the hope of an early advent,—delayed indeed, but to be expected before the veteran Apostle's departure, and now therefore quite imminent.

That such an impression prevailed in the Church, in some minds amounting to a certain expectation, the reference in the appendix of St. John's Gospel indicates with tolerable plainness. The preceding paragraphs have brought the Apostle's readers to the verge of the Last Things. They see "the world passing away," the antichrists arrived, portending the great Antichrist who was predicted to arise before Christ's return. Unbelief seems to have reached its limit, faith to have attained its full development in the teaching of the last surviving Apostle. It is a time of crisis, perhaps the closing hour of the Church's trials. "The Judge is at the door"; Christ stands waiting to return. At any moment the heavens may open and He "may be manifested," who is all the while so near us since the cloud received Him out of our sight, walking unseen amongst His Churches.¹ The conditions of the time have revived the prospect of the Lord's *φανέρωσις*, and bring it near to men's imagination. The Christian man, susceptible to these impressions, is compelled to ask himself, "What if my Lord should now appear? How should I meet Him if He came to-day? with joy or grief? with shame or rapture?" It is a test that, on many occasions, it becomes Christ's servants to put to themselves. Not for His first disciples alone did the Lord say, "Let your loins be girt about and your

¹ Cf. Rev. i. 12 ff., ii. 1; John i. 10, xiv. 18; Matt. xxviii. 20. It is noticeable that the Apostle John does not use *φανέρω*, as St. Paul used *ἀποκαλύπτω*, both of Christ's first and second coming; for he conceives the Eternal Word, the only Life and Light of men, as always present in creation and in humanity, but *manifested*—shining forth and made visible and cognizable—at these two great epochs.

lamps burning, and yourselves like unto men that look for their Lord, when He shall return from the wedding" (Luke xii. 35 ff.). If suddenly the clouds should part and the unseen Saviour and Judge stood revealed, if "the day of the Lord" should instantly break on the world "as a thief in the night," or if we should ourselves without further notice or preparation be summoned to His presence, amid the vast surprise could we then turn to Him a glad and eager face?

In this one instance St. John writes of the *παρουσία*, using the language of St. Paul, and builds on the anticipation of the definitive eventual return of the Lord Jesus. The fact that he does speak of it in this way, though but once, and that he lays this serious stress on the expectation, proves his agreement with the prevalent eschatology of the Church. The enigmatic saying of our Lord respecting John himself, with which his Gospel concludes (xxi. 22 f.), implies a literal "coming"; such words the subject of them would be the last man in the world to forget or to explain away; even supposing the Apostle were not the writer of the above chapter, it embodies a genuine Johannine tradition. This isolated allusion to the Parousia supplies a caution against inferences too readily drawn from the presence or absence of this expression or that in any particular writer, as to supposed differences of belief amongst the various schools of New Testament teaching. It has been argued that St. John conceived only of a spiritual coming of Christ and a moral and inward judgement effected by His word amongst men, so that the external Parousia and the great judgement-scene sketched in the Synoptic prophecies and in the preaching of St. Paul were transcended in his doctrine and became superfluous. This passage and the kindred saying of chap. iv. 17 f. show that St. John himself drew no such consequence from his principles, that he felt no contradiction between the

thought of Christ's spiritual presence and action upon mankind with the gradual process of sifting effected thereby, between this constant visiting and judging of the world on the one hand, and on the other hand that ultimate *φάνερωσις* and supreme *κρίσις* at the *συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος*, which dominates the New Testament horizon generally. Here the Apostle John contemplates the coming of the glorified Jesus to the world in judgement as explicitly and solemnly as does the Apostle Paul when he declares, "We must all be manifested before the judgement-seat of Christ" (2 Cor. v. 10). There is a difference, but it is that of emphasis and prevailing standpoint: St. John dwells on the process, St. Paul and others on the issue—he on the evolution, they on the *dénouement* of the great drama of Christ and the world. The Gospel of John, in contrast with the others, spends itself in working out the development of principles and character. He traces the catastrophe of our Lord's manifestation back to its antecedents eternal and temporal, showing how it was prepared for and contained in the moral forces operative in the world as these collided with the character and the purposes of God disclosed by the coming of His Son; the tremendous issue is, in many of its features, rather indicated and presupposed than drawn out in description. The *παρουσία* and the *ἡμέρα κυρίου* take in the theology of the Apostle John much the same relative position that the scenes of the Passion occupy in his Gospel narrative. They are held, so to speak, in solution throughout, and are presented in their latent preparations and preludings more than in their patent outcome and consummation.

Assuming then, in common with all who relied on the word of Jesus, His return as the King and Judge of mankind and entertaining the possibility of His near approach, the Apostle calls his readers to consider how they would face the Advent; they must desire to meet their Lord *with*

confidence of bearing (*παρησία*)¹ and without the shrinking of shame. If found, when the Lord comes, out of Christ instead of "abiding in Him"—suddenly confronted by the awful Presence which John saw in his Patmos visions, and standing before His tribunal—they must be overwhelmed with confusion and struck dumb with shame. The great "appearing," which should be the goal of Christian hope and satisfaction, brings to the unprepared inconceivable dismay. The admonition is brief as it is affecting, and stands almost alone in St. John's writings (see however iv. 17, 18); but it recalls the purport of our Lord's prophetic warnings given at length in the Synoptic discourses on the Last Judgement; and it echoes the frequent appeals of St. Paul to the same effect. In face of this august and heart-shaking event, such as must dash all self-complacency and trust in human judgement, what is St. John's confidence for himself and for his children? This appears in the sentences that follow, in verse 29 and verses 1 and 2 of chap. iii. The ground of it lies in *the filial consciousness*. This is the spring of Christian happiness and courage in view of death and judgement, and of the eternal issues of human destiny.

We cannot but note, at this place again, how completely St. Paul and St. John are at one and how

¹ Using the word *παρησία* (= *παν-ρήσις*, *saying everything*; then *frankness of speech, unreservedness, publicity, confidence or courage of bearing*), as also in iii. 21, iv. 17, v. 14, St. John might seem to be drawing again on the Pauline vocabulary; cf. 2 Cor. iii. 12, Eph. iii. 12, 1 Tim. iii. 13. The aorist *σχῶμεν* (not present, *ἐχωμεν*, as in the other places) after *ὅτι* seems to imply the *gaining* rather than the continued possession of courage, and points to the testing *occasion* of the Advent; "that we may take courage, and not be put to shame (*aorist, ἀσχυνοθῶμεν*), shrinking from Him in His coming." Cf. for the aorist of *ἐχω*, Rom. i. 13, 2 Cor. i. 15, ii. 13, 2 Pet. ii. 16, where in each instance it signifies not a continued state of mind, but an *experience* associated with some particular occurrence. For the pregnant *ἀπό* (of separation) in this connexion, cf. i. 7, Rom. vi. 7, ix. 3, Col. ii. 20; and after *ἀσχυνομαι*, Isa. i. 29, Jer. ii. 36, xii. 13, Sir. xxi. 22, xli. 17 ff.

surely they came round, by their very different paths, to the same central points of experience and of theology. It is in the doctrine of the believer's "adoption" that St. Paul's exposition of the Christian salvation culminates in Romans viii. "If children, also heirs," is the argument that reassures him against all the counterforces and unknown possibilities of evil looming in the future. "Beloved, now we are children of God!" is the ground on which St. John stands in the same joyous certainty of a life eternal already won, that is rich as the love of God and sure as His sovereign will.

But the sonship in question, which is to supply the keynote of the Epistle from chap. iii. 1 onwards, is not affirmed at once; it is inferred in ii. 29 from the correspondence of character that links the Christian to his God. "If you know that He is righteous, you are aware that every one who does righteousness has been begotten of Him." *God*, and not Christ, is the subject of the assertion *δίκαιός ἐστιν*; for God is, in all consistency, the antecedent of *ἐξ αὐτοῦ* in the principal clause immediately following. Of "the Father" one "is begotten" (cf. iii. 1, 9 ff., iv. 4 ff., v. 1, 4, 18 f.): this goes so much without saying, that in passing from verse 28 to 29, having in his mind the final *γενένηται*, the great predication on which his thought is fixed, the writer makes the transition of subject unconsciously; he does not observe that the *αὐτοῦ* of the second sentence is referred, without explanation, to a person other than that denoted by the *αὐτοῦ* of verse 28 foregoing. For grammatical clearness, *ὁ Θεός* should have been expressed in verse 29. The righteousness of God (i. 9) and of Christ (ii. 1) is, however, so identical that the *δίκαιός ἐστιν* forms in itself a link of transition; the subjects appear to be undistinguished in the writer's mind; the idea of Christ melts into that of God. In Him God "is righteous," to our knowledge; the Divine righteousness is rendered into

human character, made imitable and communicative. But if *δίκαιός ἐστιν* does not, *γεγέννηται ἐξ αὐτοῦ* does involve distinction of Father and Son; one cannot extend the saying of Jesus, "I and the Father are one," to the point of making the former also the *begetter*; when believers are said to be "born of the Spirit," in John iii. 6, 8, *πνεῦμα* is opposed to *σάρξ* and *ἐκ πνεύματος γεννηθῆναι* is tantamount to *ἐκ Θεοῦ γεννηθῆναι* (John i. 13). *γεγέννηται* in this passage finds its interpretation immediately in the next verse: "Begotten of *Him*, I say; for look at *the Father's* love to us!"

1. The first ground of confidence on which the Apostle would have his little children rest—a ground derived from the vindication he has now made of the Christian character—lies in *the practice of righteousness*. This proves a Divine filiation in the Christian man: *ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται*. St. John seeks to encourage and calm his readers. The prospect of Christ's coming as Judge of mankind is fearful to the imagination. The descriptions of the Apocalypse clothed His person with an overwhelming majesty. The Apostle knows that his children are leading upright and worthy lives, and that most of them have no need for fear in this event. He bids them take courage, since they show by their daily walk that God's Spirit is in them and their "doing" is such as Christ must approve. Under similar terms—dwelling now on disposition, now on conduct—St. John has previously described filial life towards God; he holds up the same ideal throughout the Letter: he who "walks in the light" (i. 7), who "keeps God's commandments" and "His word" (ii. 3, 5), who "loves his brother" (ii. 10), who "does the will of God" (ii. 17), becomes now the man "who does (executes) righteousness," so approving himself, the Apostle shows in the sequel (iii. 7-9), as "begotten of God," in contrast with "the doer of sin" who is "of the devil." On the

same principle, in chap. v. 2, the one evidence of brotherhood that St. John will allow is that of "loving God and doing His commandments." *Doing* is the vital thing. Sentiments, high notions, pious talk, go for nothing unless they be put into performance. Not "word and tongue," but "deed and truth" are in requisition (iii. 18).

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(To be continued.)