

STUDIES IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN.

IV.

THE FILIAL CHARACTER AND HOPE (*continued*).

THAT God "is righteous," dealing justly and fairly by all His creatures, in all His relations with them and responsibilities to them, is an axiom of revelation (see in particular Ps. xi. 7, cxvi. 5, clxv. 17, Isa. lix. 17, John xvii. 25, Rom. i. 17, iii. 26, 1 John i. 9, Rev. xvi. 5). The principle is laid down hypothetically (*ἐὰν εἰδῆτε*) for the sake of the consequence to be deduced from it (*γινώσκετε, κ.τ.λ.*), and not because of any real doubt (cf. iv. 12, John xiv. 15, for the form of expression), though indeed our knowledge of the surest certainties of Divine truth is subjectively contingent and faith has its varying moods, its clouds upon the sunniest sky. From this axiom the consequence follows, which the readers are bound to recognize, that "every man of righteous life is God's offspring." In this argumentative form of statement *γινώσκετε* is better read in the indicative than the imperative (the difference is practically very slight); the Apostle is making explicit what is already implicit in his children's knowledge of God and of themselves.¹

Not only is God righteous, but He alone is righteous, originally and absolutely. "None is good save One," said Jesus, "that is God" (Luke xviii. 19). Human excellence in every instance is dependent and derivative—to use St. John's language, it is "begotten of God." What is said of "goodness," is equally true of "righteousness"; while unrighteousness (*ἀδικία*, i. 9) is the characteristic of human-

¹ *γινώσκετε* in the apodosis—the verb proper to truth of acquisition (cf. vv. 5, 18, iii. 19, 24, iv. 6); *εἰδῆτε* (*οἶδα*) in the protasis, indicating a truth of intuition, a matter of established conviction, belonging to one's realized stock of knowledge (cf. v. 20 f., v. 13, 18 ff.).

ity apart from God, for "the whole world lieth in the wicked one" (v. 19). God is the source of all right-being and right-doing. Apart from the Father of Jesus Christ there is no righteousness in any child of man. It follows that the presence of a living, operative righteousness is the sign of a Divine sonship, of that abiding filial spirit which breeds heart-peace and guarantees final victory. "Other tests of adoption are offered in the Epistle: 'love' (iv. 7) and belief that 'Jesus is the Christ' (v. 1). Each one, it will be found, includes the others" (Westcott *ad loc.*).

May we take this reasoning of St. John's in the full breadth of its application? Can we say that every righteous man is born of God—even if he be palpably heterodox, if he be an unbeliever, or a heathen? We are bound to do so. But we must understand "righteousness" and "unbelief" in the strict Christian sense: ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην (not δικαιοσύνην). St. John intends by "the righteousness" that which deserves the name and has the genuine stuff in it, which "exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt. v. 20) and differs in its intrinsic quality and flavour from all morality of that stamp. This means doing right by God Himself, first of all. When St. Paul speaks of "Gentiles which have not the law, doing by nature the things of the law," "showing the work of the law written in their hearts," of "the uncircumcision keeping the righteous demands of the law" and being so "accounted for circumcision," when he describes a type of man who is "a Jew in secret" and has a "circumcision of spirit" that is "in heart, not in letter," and "whose praise is not of men but of God" (Rom. ii. 14 f., 26-29), we cordially admit the existence of a righteousness availing before God that we cannot label or authenticate, that extends beyond the pale of orthodoxy, that does not take the form of creed-subscription nor reveal itself to any of the stated and necessary tests of religious com-

munion. There are moral paradoxes in the connexion between faith and practice—cases of men who rise quite above their admitted and conscious creed—that are baffling to our shallow and partial knowledge, secrets of the heart inscrutable except to its Maker; their solution stands over to the Judgement-day. Certain we may be of this, that whatever righteousness shows itself in any man comes from God his Father, whether the channel of its derivation be traceable or not; that whatever light shines in a human soul radiates from “the true light that lighteth every man,” whether the recipient knows the Sun of righteousness that has risen upon him or the clouds conceal its form.

2. Behind the first encouragement lies a second. If the Christian believer's right-doing evidences God's paternal relation to him and interest in him, this proves again *God's fatherly love* bestowed upon the man. Over this the Apostle—here alone in his Letter—breaks into exclamation; argument gives place to wonder. “Look,¹ what a love the Father hath given to us!” The soul's rock of assurance is God's manifested love. If the final crash should come, if the ground should crumble beneath our feet and the graves open and heaven and earth pass away like a scroll that is rolled together,—amid that dread shattering convulsion, to which our Lord's prophecies and John's Apocalypse led the Church to look forward and which a moment ago (ii. 28) was called up to the reader's imagination, the heart finds refuge and strength here; this anchor of the soul holds through the wreck of nature. St. John's saying is St. Paul's in other words: “Hope maketh not ashamed, because *the love of God* hath been poured out in our hearts” (Rom. v. 5); or again, “I am persuaded

¹ He uses *ἴδτε*, however, the proper imperative governing an accusative object—not the intrjectional *ἰδοὺ* or *ἰδέ*, the latter of which is common in St. John's Gospel. He wishes his readers actually to “see” what they had not adequately realized; cf. Rom. xi. 22.

that neither death nor life . . . nor things present nor things to come . . . will be able to separate us from *the love of God* that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The sense and emphasis of the words demand a pause at the end of verse 1*a*, after *ὁ πατήρ* and before the continuing *ἵνα*. Let the readers for a moment contemplate, as it stands alone in its own wonder and glory, "the love that the Father has given" them! The clause that follows is not one of definition or explanation—as though God's love consisted in giving us the name of children. *How* God loves men—to what length and in what fashion—will be shown later; and the *ποταπή ἀγάπη* finds its exegesis in chap. iv. 9–14: the incarnation and the atonement of God's Son expound the sentence, "God is love." Here we ponder the bare fact, put in the briefest words and brought home to experience¹—God's bestowed and all-inclusive gift of His fatherly love in Jesus Christ.

The love of God, lodged in the heart and bearing fruit in a righteous life that mirrors His own righteousness (ii. 29), tends toward a certain mark for those who possess it: *ἵνα τέκνα Θεοῦ κληθῶμεν*. Unless we are to rob *ἵνα* of its purposive force, this clause imports a vocation still to be realized, an intention on God's part, *the aim of His love*,² reaching beyond actual experience. He has *given* His love; but that love means more than it can now give: *ἵνα κληθῶμεν* must be read in the light of the *παρουσία* (ii. 28), and by contrast with the *καὶ ἔσμεν* (of the true text) immediately interjected, and the *νῦν τέκνα Θεοῦ ἔσμεν* of verse 2. "We are children of God"—the Father's love has made us actually such already; we are to be *called* so³—pro-

¹ *δέδωκεν*, "hath given us," the perfect of abiding result; cf., for the tense, and for the experimental bearing of *διῶμι*, iv. 13, v. 20; also the perfects in i. 1 f., iv. 14.

² Cf. Eph. i. 4, 5: *ἐν ἀγάπῃ προορίσας κ.τ.λ.*, "having in love foreordained us unto filial adoption to Himself"

³ *καλέω* implies beyond the mere *naming* or *designating*, an *entitling*,

nounced and acknowledged as His sons and on this title summoned to the heritage. *ἐὰν φανερωθῆ* and *ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ* (ii. 28, iii. 2) are the tacit adjuncts of *τέκνα κληθῶμεν*. This declaration is identical with what St. Paul describes as "the revelation of the sons of God," the event for which creation waits with strained expectancy (Rom. viii. 19), the occasion when the Son of man, according to His own words, "will say to those on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. xxv. 34). These are they whom the Son of God will not be ashamed to own as brethren, "when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark viii. 38); this owning of the sons of God by Christ and the Father before the universe admits them to the full rank and rights of children; it is the goal to which all the bestowments of the Father's love look onward.

That we shall be called "children of God," being addressed as such and invited to the children's place in His house, is a hope that "maketh not ashamed." "Boldness," indeed, will be theirs in the dread day who hear the Judge pronounce, "Come, ye blessed ones of my Father!" That sentence, however, will but declare the fact which already holds good. The words *καί ἐσμεν*, abruptly thrown out, correct the false implication that might be drawn from the previous clause, as though the Divine sonship of Christians would be constituted at the *παρουσία*, by the future pronouncement of Christ the Judge. When the true bearing of *ἵνα κληθῶμεν* was lost and it was referred, as by nearly all interpreters, to the present adoption of the saints (to the *νιοθεσία* of Galatians iv. 5 instead of that of Romans viii. 23), the eager assertion

instating. St. John uses the verb here only in his Epp. and rarely in the Gospel (but see Rev. xix. 9). For this pregnant sense of *καλέω*, cf. Matt. v. 9, *υἱοὶ Θεοῦ κληθήσονται* (parallel to *τὸν Θεὸν δύνοντα*, v. 8, and to *αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τ. οὐρανῶν*, vv. 3, 10), xxii. 45, Luke i. 35, John i. 42, Rom. ix. 25 f., Heb. ii. 11, James ii. 23; similarly *λέγω* . . . *φίλους* in John xv. 15. With St. Paul the *κλησις* is already past.

“and (such) we are” naturally dropped from the text; it appeared otiose and superfluous. But with St. John’s *κλήσις* rightly understood, this *καί ἐσμεν* of the present fact stands out in relief against the purpose of future acknowledgement and investiture. What we shall then be *called*, already *we are*. “These are my sons,” God will say of His pilgrims coming home; they are His sons already in exile and obscurity.

“For this reason,”¹ the Apostle remarks, “the world knows us not.” The sons of God are at present under a veil, and their “life is hid” (Rom. viii. 19, Col. iii. 3); things are not seen in the true light, nor called by their right names. How should the world recognize us—“it did not know Him!” *God* was unknown to men—to the wisest and deepest in research (1 Cor. i. 21)—and this was proved to the world’s utter shame by its treatment of Him in whom God was: “Ye know,” Jesus said, “neither me nor my Father” (John viii. 19). “The rulers of this world,—none of them knew the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. ii. 8) beneath the servant’s garb; they had no eye for character, for the moral beauty and dignity of Jesus, for the Godhead in Him. For the same reasons the world ignored or despised His companions; they treated His Apostles, God’s messengers to them, as “the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things.” The more Christians were like Christ and were conformed to the image of God’s Son, the less the world appreciated them. They must not be surprised at this nor take the world’s scoffs amiss. Nay, they should “rejoice and be exceeding glad,” counting this contempt their beatitude (Matt. v. 11 f.) and a pledge that as they suffer with their Lord they shall share His glory. Thus the whole of verse 1 goes to sustain the confidence of St. John’s little children, who shrank needlessly from the thought of Christ’s near and sudden advent.

¹ διὰ τοῦτο, as regularly with St. John, rests upon the foregoing context, and finds its confirmation and further explanation in the following *εἰς* clause: cf. John v. 18, viii. 47, xii. 18, 39.

3. The assurance which the Apostle gives his readers is carried to its height, and their fears receive a full reproof, in the words of verse 2. Crowning *the active righteousness* of sons of God and their *conscious experience of the Father's love*, they have, springing out of all this, *the hope of sharing the Redeemer's state of glory*: "We know that, if He should be manifested, we shall be like Him." This central clause of verse 2 is its vital statement. The first two clauses resume and interpret verse 1: "Beloved, we are now God's children, and it has not yet been manifested what we shall be"—we are children away from home, wearing other names and the garb of exiles, awaiting our "manifestation" as the Son of God awaits His; our "call" to the filial estate, our full "adoption" and enfeoffment, is matter of promise, not of attainment; it is a "hope not seen" (Rom. viii. 24). But it is a sure hope—"we know" (*οἶδαμεν*) that it will come about, as we "know the love that God hath toward us" (iv. 16) and the fidelity of His promises (ii. 25); our guarantee is in the character of God, whom "the world knew not," but "ye know Him," said Jesus to His disciples, "and have seen Him" (John xiv. 7; cf. ii. 13 f. above).

While the subject of *οὐπω ἐφανερώθη* is given in the following clause (*τί ἐσόμεθα*), *ἐὰν φανερωθῆ* is pointedly resumed from ii. 28, the verse in which this train of thought took its commencement. "If He should be manifested"—the hidden but ever present Son of God, the Judge of men—we shall not view Him with guilty dread; nay, "we shall be like Him!"¹ The awkwardness of referring, within the compass of seven words, the all but identical forms of *φανερόμαι* to distinct subjects is relieved by the consideration that the two subjects are closely kindred and identified in the writer's thought: "What we shall be" and what He is—the glory of the redeemed and the Redeemer—are one in nature and coincident in manifestation, since "we

¹ We note the unconscious transition back again from *God* to *Christ*, made in verse 2b, the reverse of that which took place in ii. 28, 29.

shall be like to Him" (cf. 2 Thess. ii. 14, 1 Cor. xv. 48 f., Col. iii. 4, Phil. iii. 21).

This future likeness of Christians to Christ, along with their future call to the state and place of God's sons, is for the present a mystery; it involves an unimaginable change in the conditions of human existence (1 Cor. xv. 51). "Not yet was it manifested what we shall be." St. John speaks in the past tense (*ἐφανερώθη*), referring to the great historical manifestation of "the life," which he has summed up at the beginning of his Letter (i. 1 ff.), the revelation of the Son of God made flesh. But through all this great disclosure the life of the hereafter remained under the veil; many wondrous secrets of God were made plain, but not this. The form of Christ's risen body, and His appearances in glory to the dying Stephen, to Saul of Tarsus, and to John himself in the Apocalypse, might give hints and prompt speculations touching the conditions of the glorified state and its mode of being; but they supplied no more. One thing "we know"—surely it is enough: "We shall be *like Him*." This is one of the certainties of Christian faith.

Profoundly ignorant as we are of the future state, how much we know if we are sure of this! Such final resemblance of Christians to their Lord appears to be involved in the Incarnation and in our Lord's chosen title "Son of man,"—in the fact that He was "made in all things like to His brethren" (Heb. ii. 17). He has embarked Himself with humanity, identified Himself heartily and abidingly with our lot, so that what was ours became His, and what is His becomes ours. If He has left His brethren, it is, He said, "to prepare a place" for them, that they may be where He is. He has gone to the Father not by way of separating Himself from our low estate, but entering "the place within the veil" as "a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb. vi. 20). He was raised from the dead as "the first-begotten" and "firstfruit of them that fell asleep," the "firstborn of many brethren," who will be assimilated to His external, as they

are already to His internal and spiritual character, and will put off "the body of humiliation" for a celestial frame, a *σῶμα πνευματικόν* and *ἐπουράνιον*, "of the same form with His body of glory" (1 Cor. xv. 20-57, Rom. viii. 29 f., Col. i. 18, Phil. iii. 20 f.). St. Paul's teaching upon the mystery of the heavenly life of the saints explains this allusion of St. John's; it gives substance and content to the *ὁμοιότης* anticipated here, which cannot be a merely interior and moral affinity; for that, as St. John insists, is now attained, or attainable, and "as He is"—in respect of love and righteousness—"so we are in this world" (v. 3, 22, 24, iv. 17, 19, v. 18). *νῦν τέκνα Θεοῦ ἐσμεν*—that is one thing; *τί ἐσόμεθα* is something more and distinct from this.

The nature of the hidden *ὁμοιότης* is indicated by the reason given for expecting it, in the last clause of verse 2: "because we shall see Him as He is." The *αὐτῷ* of verse 2*b* and the *αὐτόν* of verse 2*c* must be *Christ*, who has been reintroduced by *ἐὰν φανερωθῆ*, and not God whom "none hath beheld at any time" (iv. 12; cf. John i. 18, 1 Tim. vi. 16, etc.). *Vision* and *manifestation* are correlatives; "if" and when the Lord Jesus "is manifested," His saints "will see Him as He is." But for vision there must be correspondence—new organs for a new revelation, eyes to behold the supernal light of the Advent day. Like sees like; so "the pure in heart shall see God" (Matt. v. 8). This is St. John's reasoning: Christ is to be manifested, His disciples, as He prayed and promised (John xvii. 5, 24, xii. 26, xiii. 31-xiv. 3), are to behold the glory which the Father has given Him and which was His eternally; but to be capable of this they must be transformed into a state as yet undisclosed and endowed with powers like His own, with faculties of apprehension incomparably higher than those we now possess. "Then shall I see face to face" (*τότε πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον*, 1 Cor. xiii. 12), says St. Paul; but that implies face matching face, eye meeting eye. The transient foretaste of our Lord's celestial glory which the three disciples

(John amongst them) enjoyed with Him in the Holy Mount, was overpowering to their natural senses; and if the vision prefacing the Book of Revelation was a veritable experience of the writer, he was well convinced that one must pass into a very different mode of being if one is to realize the present glory of Jesus Christ and to bear the weight of His manifestation. Accordingly St. Paul, in his sketches of the *παρουσία* in 1 Thess. iv. 16 f. and 1 Cor. xv. 50 ff. and 2 Cor. v. 1-3, implies that a supernatural change, simultaneous with the raising of the dead, will supervene upon the living saints to prepare them to meet their Lord. There is nothing that gives the Christian so exalted and entrancing a conception of the future blessedness certified here, as the thought of being in the Saviour's company, admitted to the sight of His face and taking part in His heavenly and eternal service. Such approximation presupposes an environment, and powers of being, incalculably enlarged and ennobled. "In treating of this final transfiguration the Greek Fathers did not scruple to speak of men as being 'deified' (*θεοποιείσθαι*), though the phrase sounds strange to our ears" (Athanasius, *de Incarn. Verbi*, iv. 22, cited by Westcott). As the Son of God humbled Himself to share our estate, so He glorifies men that they may take part in His.

The other interpretation of *ὅτι*, regarding assimilation as the *effect* of vision ("we shall resemble Him, for to see Him as He is will make us such") instead of the precondition for the sight of the glorified Redeemer, contains a true idea; but it is hardly relevant. Westcott's attempt to combine the two renderings makes confusion of the sense. Moreover, as he himself points out, *γενησόμεθα*, not *ἐσόμεθα*, would be the proper verb to express a consequent assimilation to Christ in the future estate of the saints, the growing effect of companionship with Him (cf. John xv. 8, 2 Cor. v. 21, Heb. iii. 14, etc.).

The future assimilation of state is prepared for by the pre-

sent assimilation of character; and the hope of the former is a keen incentive to the latter. This is the purport of verse 3, which brings us round again to the ground of assurance laid down in ii. 29. "Every one that has this hope set on Him (*ἐπ' αὐτῆ*:¹ on *Christ*, in continuation of verse 2; the hope of seeing Him *καθὼς ἐστίν*, of witnessing with full apprehension His *φανέρωσις*), purifies himself as He is pure." Moral likeness of spirit is the precondition of the likeness to their Lord in body and faculty constituting "the glory which shall be revealed to usward" (Rom. viii. 18). The transformation works from within outwards, according to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The future body of the redeemed, as St. Paul teaches, will be "a spiritual body," fitted to the spirit that it clothes, whose organism and expression it is designed to be (1 Cor. xv. 42-49); and those who are like "the Heavenly One" in temper and disposition, will be like Him at last in frame and function. The ethical rules the material, which has no other use or significance but to be its vehicle. Place and state wait upon character and conduct: "If any man serve me," said Jesus, "let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be" (John xii. 26).

This imitation was enjoined in ii. 6: "He that saith he abideth in Him (in God), ought himself so to walk even as that One walked," words pointing to the earthly course of Jesus. What was there imposed as matter of plain duty and consistency, is here urged on the ground of hope and preparation for union with Christ in His heavenly estate.

¹ *ἐλπὶδα ἔχειν*, as distinguished from *ἐλπίζω*, is to *hold, possess a hope*, thus regarded as a characteristic, or a cherished belonging, of the man; cf. *παρηγοίαν ἔχειν*, ii. 28, *κοινωνίαν ἔχειν*, i. 3; also Acts xxiv. 15, Eph. ii. 12. *ἐλπίς* (*ἐλπίζω*) *ἐπί* with *dative* occurs here only and in 1 Tim. iv. 10, vi. 17 in the N.T.; and with *accusative*, in 1 Tim. v. 5, Rom. xv. 12, 1 Pet. i. 13. The force of the preposition is the same that it has with *πιστεύω*, *πέποιθα*, and other verbs denoting mental direction; it signifies a *leaning against, a reliance upon* the object. Our Lord's promises on this subject were the specific occasion and warrant of the hope in question. The *ἐπί* construction is common enough in the LXX.

The vivid demonstrative is again employed—"That One is pure"; while ἐπ' αὐτῷ and ἐκεῖνος here relate to the same person (Christ), there is this difference, that using ἐκεῖνος one looks away ("that one yonder"), not to the present *Christ* waiting to be manifested, but to the historical *Jesus*, whose pure image stands before us a living ideal, an abiding pattern of all that man should be.¹

The broad moral term δικαιοσύνη, defining in chap. ii. 29 the practical Christian character with its prototype in God, is now substituted by the fine and delicate ἀγνότης exemplified in Jesus. Both adjective and noun are rare in the New Testament; this is the only example afforded by St. John. The word does not signify a negative purity, the "cleanness" (καθαρότης) of one from whom defilement is removed (as in i. 7, John xv. 3, Matt. v. 8, etc.), which would never be ascribed to Jesus; this is a positive, chaste purity (cf. 2 Cor. xi. 2, Phil. iv. 8, Jas. iii. 17), the whiteness of virgin thoughts and an uncontaminated mind. The purity of the ἀγνός imports not the mere absence of and deliverance from corrupt passion, from baseness of desire and feeling, but a complete repugnance thereto, a moral incompatibility with any foulness, a spirit that resents the touch and breath of evil, that burns with a clear holy flame against all that is false and vile. The man who hopes to be like Him as He is, must be thus like Him as He was. To see Him, we must follow in His train; we must catch His temper and acquire His habit of mind, to breathe the atmosphere in which He dwells. The heavenly glory of the Lord Jesus, that He shares with His saints, is but the shining forth in Him, and in them, of the purity intrinsic to Him and veiled in the earthly state of discipline and testing. If this character is hereafter to be revealed, it must first be possessed; and to be possessed it must be learnt of Him.

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¹ Hence the present ἐστίν,—"as He is (not *was*) pure," since the example has become perpetual and holds good for ever; cf. iv. 17.