

enabled to scan the human framework, the more reverently shall we acknowledge the presence of the Spirit that pervades it.

Frankly to accept the teaching of science, and the results of criticism, is no concession to scepticism on the part of the Christian student; it is but a step forward in the recognition of God's way of making known His will to man. That such a step is not incompatible with the loyal and reverent treatment of Holy Scripture, I have endeavoured, even at the risk of wearying my readers, to make

plain at each stage in the course of the series which I now conclude.

Very imperfect at the best, as I am too well aware, these studies have been; but it is my prayerful hope that at least the temper and spirit in which they have been conceived, if not the actual line of thought which has been pursued, may have been welcome to some who have wished to recognise the claims of science and criticism in the reverent interpretation of "The Early Narratives of Genesis."

## Exposition of the First Epistle of St. John.

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### CHAPTER II. 18-23.

"Children, it is the last hour: and as ye have heard that the antichrist cometh, even now have there arisen many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour. They have gone out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they had to be made manifest; because not all are of us. And ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you that ye know not the truth, but that ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also."

VER. 18. In ver. 17 John had supported his exhortation to renounce the love of the world by pointing to the fact that the world passeth away. He now, in verse 18, strengthens the force of this latter consideration by remarking that the moment of the passing away of the (material) earthly world is near at hand: "*It is the last hour.*" This expression denotes the juncture of the dissolution of the world (*consummatio mundi*), which juncture occurs with the reappearing of the Redeemer. Jewish theology divided the whole duration of the world into two great periods or æons, which were separated by the appearing of the Messiah, viz. into the present and the future æon. At the close of the present period the long-looked for Messiah would appear, redeem His people, judge the heathen nations, and begin His reign on earth. This notion was cherished also by the Christians along with the terms expressing it; but as entertained by them it had to undergo an essential modification. From the Christian point of view the line of demarcation between the two æons could not be the appearing of the Redeemer that had already taken place, but only His still impending second appearing in Messianic glory, His reappearing.

They, therefore, looked upon the last hour as still future. John must also declare to his readers upon what it is that he bases his statement, that it is already, in this sense, the "last hour." He says that the peculiar sign of the immediate nearness of the last hour, the appearance, viz., of the antichrist, is already plainly manifest. When he adds that his readers had already *heard* this, he takes for granted that this doctrine was an element of the evangelical teaching as generally proclaimed (*vide* Matt. xxiv. 5 ff., 11, 23-26; Mark xiii. 22 f.; Acts xx. 29 f.; 2 Tim. iii. 1 ff.; and more especially the Apocalypse). John expressly distinguishes the *antichrists* from the antichrist. The former are the forerunners of the latter; the elements, as it were, out of which he is to be formed by their suddenly uniting together. According to vers. 19-23, iv. 1-3, 6; 2 John ver. 7, they are false teachers. From the coming upon the scene of many such antichristian false teachers, John now infers the existence and activity of the antichrist himself. But who is this antichrist? This expression is found only in John's Epistles (here and in ver. 22, iv. 3; 2 John ver. 7). Like the expression "he that opposeth" of 2 Thess. ii. 4, it denotes

the power that is opposed to Christ and His kingdom. This notion also derives substantially from Jewish theology. As a sure token of the coming of the Messiah the Jews thought of an evil, grievous time with great moral corruption, false prophets, war, desolation, and the like, whereby the appearing of the Messiah would be equally hindered externally and hastened on inwardly. And just as they connected all salvation with the *person* of the Messiah, so they began very early to think of all the evil of the wicked, troublous time, of all anti-Messianic wickedness and power, as united in an ideal person, a caricature of the Messiah. To this ideal person later Jewish theology also gives the name Armillus; the earlier Jews usually call him Gog (so also Rev. xx. 8 ff.), the source from which this notion at first proceeded being the passage in Ezekiel regarding Gog (Ezek. xxxviii. 8), to which was afterwards added the description in Daniel of the anti-theocratic Antiochus Epiphanes.

The presupposition, from which John starts here, was the general presupposition of those early Christian days; but the result did not confirm it. It overleaped the whole historical process between the appearing and the return of the Redeemer. Even yet the Christian heart is apt to do so; for the Christian would fain see the present age attain its goal, because he seeks, and is sure of finding, his true life only in the future. But God has not made the task of His people so easy and agreeable. This has been the experience also of all the following generations. They had to betake themselves to the historical work of Christianity upon the world. We now rather believe that the kingdom of the Lord can only come very slowly. We are only too apt to give up the faith and the confident expectation of an actual kingdom of the consummation of all things as the outcome of all these developments. But we should not surrender this faith, notwithstanding the growing clearness of our insight into the necessity of a long and tedious development. Although the chiliasm of these early Christian days was mistaken in its calculations, it belongs in its essential contents to Christian hope; and the latter is necessary to the healthiness of Christianity.

The expectation of the antichrist John also sets forth as being generally entertained by Christians. In his opinion the eschatological doctrines are an essential part of the Christian faith. Nowadays

they are looked upon as merely incidental appendages of the faith. But we cannot have a theory of the universe without the condition, with which the process of development closes, becoming clear to us. This end of the process of development alone sets before us the goal, with reference to which all the steps of our own walk in life must be calculated. Among these doctrines John distinctly includes the notion of an antichrist. He clearly expects that the development of the world will involve an absolute opposition to Christ. He does not proceed upon the assumption that the world will be overcome without a contest; but that over against the kingdom of Christ there will be formed a hostile kingdom, the opposition of which will become more and more pronounced. In proportion as the knowledge of Christ unfolds its whole ethical activity in the world, aversion to Christ will also become decisive enmity against Him; which enmity presupposes the knowledge, and indeed the right knowledge of Him. John conceives of this kingdom as one that grows gradually. The antichrist is the culmination of a series of relatively antichristian manifestations within the Christian world. It is only gradually that absolute hostility to Christ develops beyond the stage of the mere aversion to Him, which still goes hand in hand with a relative ignorance of Him. Thus the life of the Christian and of Christian humanity appears in a very earnest, but by no means gloomy light. On the one hand, the glory of the Christian life is continually growing; it strikes deeper and deeper roots into the general life of humanity. On the other hand, it becomes involved in an ever harder battle with the antichristian powers. The battle becomes hotter and hotter; more and more it becomes a mortal combat.

Ver. 19. The mention of the many antichrists leads the apostle to give a fuller explanation of the many false teachers who arose in the midst of Christendom itself (Acts xx. 30). They were certainly a phenomenon calculated to surprise and disturb his readers. An apostolic instruction, which told them how they should judge of such teachers, must have been very acceptable to them. John shows them, first of all, how such a phenomenon, which was startling to their Christian consciousness, to which an apostasy from faith in the Redeemer must have seemed psychologically impossible, was to be accounted for; and then, in the second place, what purpose it was designed to

serve in the plan of the divine government. He thus prevented it from becoming an actual occasion of stumbling to them. The apostasy, he says, of these false teachers from Christ is intelligible; for it is no real *apostasy*. They never really belonged to Christ, notwithstanding the fact that they formerly belonged externally to our fellowship. He distinguishes sharply between a Christian fellowship that is inner and therefore real, and one that is only external and therefore merely seeming; a distinction which remains valid for all time, but by which the worth of external participation in Christian fellowship must not be depreciated. This external participation, it is true, is by itself insufficient, just as internal participation is by itself alone insufficient. But external fellowship may become for every one the natural occasion of attaining to inner fellowship, and is indeed the condition of such attainment. The expression, "*they went out from us,*" describes the going forth and separation of these teachers from external Christian fellowship. "*But they were not of us,*" i.e. they did not belong to us inwardly (John viii. 23). For he who has once really belonged to the inner and real Christian fellowship cannot possibly ever fall away from it. Psychologically also an apostasy from Christ and from Christians seems unthinkable. For him, who through faith and love really knows Christ and fellowship with the brethren in Christ, it is psychologically impossible to give up this fellowship. He may take ever so many retrograde steps, but he cannot dissolve it altogether. Wherever, therefore, we find an actual apostasy in the case of one, whom we formerly regarded as belonging to Christ, we may confidently assume with John that his previous fellowship was merely seeming and external. This joyous confidence that, if he once belongs to Christ, no one will pluck him out of His hand should dominate the Christian. But he must belong to Him entirely; otherwise the most deplorable retrograde steps are possible (*vide* iii. 6).

The apostle now also points to the fact that this apostasy is not an accidental occurrence, but that it clearly serves a divine purpose, viz. to bring to the light the false Christians who are to be found in the Christian community, and so to occasion a necessary sifting within it (cf. 1 Cor. xi. 19). "*Because not all are of us*" states the reason why the making manifest of the false Christians was a divine purpose. This making manifest had become necessary, because, contrary to the natural

presupposition, *not all* who belong externally to the Christian community also belong to it inwardly and truly. If this is so, then it is an urgent necessity for the Christian community that its false members be unmasked, and that it be rid of all illusion regarding them. Every such sifting, however painful it may be, is an essential furthering of the Christian community. It is not afraid of becoming smaller; for its real interest is not in its magnitude, but in its purity. It is upon the latter that Christian life actually depends. Siftings are necessary in Christendom at all times; and the times when they occur are always blessed times.

Ver. 20. The instruction we have just developed regarding the false teachers awakens in John the fear lest it might perhaps do some damage to his readers. It might suggest to them that he did not credit them with such insight into the matter, and that he looked upon them as being exposed to the danger of being led astray by these false teachers. He accordingly at once expressly guards against such a misunderstanding. He says to them: ye yourselves know all this perfectly in virtue of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you and enlightens you. I have not written it to you as if I were of opinion that you do not know how to counsel yourselves in this matter. It is rather distinctly implied in my words that ye have a clear consciousness of the truth. He, at the same time, indicates the source from which he derives their knowledge. Their illumination is not the consequence of a natural intellectual development, it is a communication of the Spirit which proceeds from Christ; it is the *anointing from the Holy One*. That the Holy Spirit is to be understood by this anointing, is clear from iii. 24 and ii. 27. Just as Christ, the Holy One, was anointed with the Holy Spirit in all its fulness (John iii. 34), and is therefore called the Holy One (the Christ), so they that believe in Him have also been anointed with the same Holy Spirit, each in his several measure (2 Cor. i. 21, 22), and for that very reason are, and are called, Christians. (This passage certainly does not contain an allusion to the anointing that took place on the occasion of a man's baptism; it is more natural to suppose that it was made the apostolic and canonical basis of that rite.) The Holy One, from whom they have the anointing, is Christ; for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit is always represented as being the peculiar function of Christ (John xv. 26, xvi. 7, 13-15; Acts ii. 33); for which reason

the Holy Spirit is expressly called the Spirit of Christ. Verse 27 compels us to decide here in favour of this interpretation. There we read: "The anointing which ye have received from Him," which is said unmistakably of Christ. The emphasis lies here upon Christ's holiness. The new principle, by which his readers are permeated, is a holy one; and therefore a fellowship with the false teachers and the false teaching, an illusion as to the true character of these, is to them impossible; they have an abhorrence of everything that is contrary to God. It belongs to the idea of holiness, that our self-consciousness stands related in a negative attitude to everything that is sinful, and reacts against it.

"*Ye know all things,*" i.e. everything that I am able to teach you in regard to this matter. It is natural to suppose that John is led to express himself thus because the Holy Spirit is expressly characterised by the Saviour Himself as the Spirit of truth, who will teach His disciples all things, and guide them into all truth (John xiv. 17, xv. 26, xvi. 13). In virtue of his anointing with the Holy Spirit the Christian is in complete possession of that fundamental knowledge whereby all error is, in principle, excluded. The Christian certainly cannot boast of omniscience; his knowledge also is in part; but the great distinction between the limitation of his knowledge and that of the natural man consists in this, that in the knowledge of Christ Himself and in the knowledge of God in Christ the Christian possesses the ultimate elements of all knowledge, the principles of the knowledge of all truth, the key to all knowledge. Thereby everything appears to him in its true light. All that is now required is that his eye increasingly apprehends, with perfect clearness, the individual objects, for the perception of which he has gained the right point of view. The knowledge of his Redeemer and of his God in the Redeemer must be to him the ultimate certainty, in accordance with which he estimates all the rest of his knowledge.

Ver. 21. In this verse John adds that in what he wrote in vers. 18 and 19 he was far from expressing any doubt as to his readers' knowledge of what he there imparts to them; that he rather expressed his conviction of being in thorough sympathy with them. The *truth*, which his readers know, is the Christian truth, the evangelical truth as a whole. I have written unto you, he adds, that no lie is of the (Christian) truth, and conse-

quently that that deceitful false teaching does not derive from the Christian truth, does not have its principle in it; that it has, on the contrary, sprung from the antichristian principle; that the false teachers in question have never really stood within Christianity. With this John resumes the thought, from which he had been turned aside by vers. 20 and 21, and develops it further in what follows.

Ver. 22. It is presupposed in the last clause of ver. 21 that the false teaching spoken of in this section is a lie, and nothing less; that it is by no means a mere unconscious error. This presupposition, however, required a justification, which John gives here by an appeal to the consciousness of his readers. Have I said too much when I called the false teaching, which we are considering, a lie? *The liar* is the liar strictly so called, the fundamental, essential liar, the liar in all his magnitude. What else is the real fundamental lie, if not the denial that Jesus is the Christ? As regards the false teachers spoken of here, it seems, at first, as if this denial should be understood not absolutely, but only relatively. For, according to iv. 2, they merely denied docetically that Jesus actually existed *as true man*, not that He was the Messiah. But with the denial of the reality of His human existence they in point of fact, by an inevitable consequence, did away with the reality of the Messianic work, the work of redemption. Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ is not merely the real, genuine liar; as such he is even (as already stated in ver. 18) the antichrist, the very arch-liar. In the idea of the antichrist is implied not merely the denial of Jesus as the Christ, but also the denial of both Christ and God. According also to 2 Thess. ii. 4 the denial of the Father is implied in the idea of the antichrist. In this denial there is presupposed the knowledge of Jesus and the knowledge of Him as the Christ, which knowledge the false teachers had, seeing they had formerly belonged to the Christian community. Precisely because the knowledge of Jesus as the Christ, the Redeemer, is the ultimate certainty to him who really possesses it, John cannot comprehend how such a one could deny this truth without at the same time renouncing truth altogether. It is denied that Jesus of Nazareth is the One through whom the needs of the naturally sinful man find their real and full satisfaction. Whoever denies this must have given up all inner sense of truth whatever. If one has this inner sense of

truth, he cannot behold Jesus without finding in Him all that he needs for his specific human wants. Every one will have this experience who really knows Christ and believes in Him.

Ver. 23. The assertion that the false teachers in question also deny the Father is justified here by the further assertion that the denial of Jesus as the Christ, or the denial of the Son (which denial naturally presupposes a real knowledge of Him), of necessity involves also the denial of the Father. This assertion lies at the very root of John's whole Christian theory of the universe (John iii. 18, viii. 19, xiv. 1, i. 14-18, xii. 44 f.; cf. also Matt. xi. 27). Seeing God is in Christ in an essential manner, one cannot deny the Son of God in Christ without therewith at the same time denying God Himself. This thought John expresses in the literary manner characteristic of him, now negatively, and now affirmatively. The words, "*he hath the Father also,*" denote the spiritual possession of the Father; the possession of Him in faith, in knowledge, in confessing, in love, etc. But they also imply the idea of keeping, adhering, holding fast. Whoever denies the Son cannot hold fast by the Father; he must inevitably (from the nature of the case) let God go also. For he who in the perception of the man Jesus does not directly behold God Himself cannot have the idea of God as an idea living in him. It is the test of all real consciousness of God that it fully recognises in Jesus, in His human ethical mani-

festation, its true object; and in doing so it receives at the same time an experimental proof of the reality of God. If it is, therefore, really God who dwells essentially in Christ, it is impossible to be ignorant of Christ without at the same time being ignorant of God Himself. He who does not see God in Christ does not know God at all—he must learn to recognise Him in Christ. Thus the denial of Christ as the Son of God involves the denial of God Himself. In Christendom it is idle talk for one to trust in one's faith in God and in one's general religiousness, while one will not acknowledge in Christ the Son of God and ground his piety wholly upon Christ. All those who have formed for themselves an arbitrary notion of God, a notion, *e.g.*, in which full justice is not done either to His holiness or to His love, will naturally not see God in Christ. These, however, do not have the actual God, but only some kind of an idol. Similarly, all those shrink from acknowledging Christ as the Son of God who will not let their God draw near to them, but who would fain keep Him at a certain distance, from which He does not trouble them. The more vigorous and pure the idea of God is in a man, the more heartily does he acknowledge Christ as the Son of God, and all the more does the abstract thought of God recede into the background in comparison with the concrete vision and the living image of God in Christ. This is especially true for such a man's practical life. Hence he also prays to the Father in Christ.

## Short Expository Papers.

### Isaiah i.

THREE conditions of mind are referred to in this chapter:—

I. *Indifference* (ver. 3). It is not a question here of *spiritual* life (that is far off), but of *mental* life. There is predicted of the ox an instinct, or a habit that has become instinct, which recognises ownership and renders obedience. By a species of reflection the ass is brought back to the crib. Self-interest enters into the case, but there is also a sense of dependence and something like gratitude. Israel falls below this when he fails to recognise God's ownership of him, and God's provision for his needs. It is an instance of degeneration. "I have nourished," etc. (ver. 2).

Revolt against right dulls the senses, and the end of the process that begins in revolt is heaviness of nature. God is not sought even from interested motives.

II. *Religiousness* (vers. 11-15). Mere performance. It is one short stage removed from absolute indifference, in that it recognises in a blind, formal sort of way the propriety of religious observances, but it does not inquire into the reason of them, or look for spiritual good to come out of them. A present-day peril is suggested. It is easy to let others do the thinking for us. Temple-treading and ceremonial may be readily substituted for true worship and service.

III. *Rational thought and action* (ver. 18). Anything into which reason and reflection enter