

Irenæus, when he says that any one who destroys the form of the Gospel is "an empty-headed and impertinent ignoramus" (*vani et indocti et insuper audaces*), and then explains his meaning by saying that all who reject St. John's Gospel "set aside at

once both the Gospel and the prophetic spirit" (*Against Heresies*, iii. xi. 9).

If this latter view be correct, we at once obtain an adequate explanation of the one discordant testimony which we have found to exist prior to A.D. 200.

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

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### CHAPTER III. 13-18.

**"Marvel not, brethren, if the world hateth you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth."**

VER. 13. What John means is this: you and the world are related in precisely the same way as were Abel and Cain. Therefore, marvel not if the world, whose works are evil, hates you (because of your righteous works, *i.e.* because of your living in brotherly love). For the thought, cf. John xv. 18, xvi. 1 ff., xvii. 14, and 1 John iii. 1. In the expression "marvel not," there is implied the collateral idea of not letting themselves be led astray. The Christian must count upon the hatred of the world. If he takes offence at this, he cannot, in opposition to it, maintain himself in the way of his Master. This hatred, it is true, surprises the Christian, who is full of brotherly love. When the world experiences hatred, it is no surprise to it; for hatred is the characteristic spirit of the world. But among Christians it is otherwise.

Ver. 14. The apostle proceeds: No, we do not let ourselves be led astray (in the matter of loving the brethren) by the hatred of the unloving world, which befalls us simply on account of our brotherly love. We know (experimentally) what (how much) we possess in this brotherly love. Nothing less, to wit, than the *life*, into which we know ourselves to have been translated out of the former condition of death. Thus our brotherly love gives us the consciousness of standing in life. He who knows that through brotherly love he stands in eternal life cannot let himself be moved by the hatred of the world to answer it with hatred. For he knows this eternal life as a life that cannot be touched by

the hostility of the world; and he knows also that by ceasing to love even this hostile world, he would pass out of eternal life. The clause, "because we love the brethren," states the ground of the consciousness of having passed out of death into life. It does not do so, however, in the sense that from the fact of our cherishing brotherly love we merely infer this transition (so that the life spoken of would really be something yet future), but in the sense that we are experimentally conscious of our brotherly love as a state of life, and therefore, in comparison with our former state of hatred, as a having passed out of death into life. We have the absolute certainty, first, that we were in death; and secondly, that we have passed out of it, and have already really entered into the state of life. The peculiar consciousness of the Christian is the outcome of this twofold consciousness; it is the result of the reduction of this dissonance into full harmony. In comparison with the life of the Christian, the ordinary life of humanity is tame and languid; and the Christian life is strong because of this peculiar consciousness. The life in which the Christian is conscious of actually standing, he knows more precisely as a life of brotherly love. In the fact that he loves the brethren, he has an immediate experience of the fact that he lives; for the notions of life and of love are, for the personal creature, identical. Only in the passing of the individual out of his own narrow limits; only in this communicating of himself to others, and there-

by taking up others into himself and enriching and enlarging his own limited being by the fulness of the being of these others, which is communicated to him—only thus does the human individual become aware that he lives. When he knows his brother as united with him, then he becomes aware that he lives, and indeed that he lives a real, imperishable, eternal life.

In order to show how earnest he is in making this assertion, the apostle immediately adds that in point of fact he that does not love his brother abides in death. Brotherly love is the appropriate and certain living token of the new birth. John regards man's natural condition as a state of death. He does so for the express reason that it is a state void of love. Thus understood, this assertion of the gospel should be plain even to the man who is not inclined to believe the gospel. Even so-called natural reason must acknowledge that a state in which lack of love reigns cannot be called life, salvation and well-pleasing to God; nor can it deny that man's natural condition is such a state. It is self-evident to one who has an experimental knowledge of love, that wherever love is lacking, life also is lacking, and that death reigns in its stead. In the following verse John states why it is that the state in which love is wanting is a state of death.

Ver. 15. In this grounding of ver. 14 John substitutes for him that does not love his brother, him that hates his brother. He therefore makes no difference between the two, and this is confirmed by the comparison in iv. 20. In doing so he is really justified; for the lack of brotherly love has at least one side, from which it is essentially hatred of one's brethren. We often regard lack of love towards one's neighbour as being mere indifference to him. But lack of love is indifference only so long as between us and our neighbour there is no contact or no collision of interests. Whenever, however, such a collision occurs, the character of indifference shows itself: it becomes real hatred. It is a prerogative of human nature that man cannot bear himself towards his fellowman in a merely indifferent manner. But sin has an interest in concealing hatred under the appearance of indifference. What John, therefore, means is this: whosoever hates his brother is a murderer; it is acknowledged that a murderer has forfeited eternal life; his state is consequently a state of death.

*Whosoever* (used again to denote inner necessity) hates his brother is a murderer, viz. *potentia*, if not also *actu*; there is in him essentially the disposition, which at a certain stage of intensification breaks out into actual murder. In Matt. v. 22, 27, 28, we find the same point of view. Regarding the murderer, however, it is agreed between us ("ye know") that death is his destiny. The question arises, How do the readers know that? The answer is, They know it immediately from their Christian consciousness. Lücke regards it as probable "that John reminds his readers of the Old Testament law of capital punishment for a murderer, and that he understands this law in a purely spiritual sense, and makes it refer to the forfeiture of eternal life in the Messianic kingdom." There is no need of this roundabout interpretation. The thought that the portion of a murderer is not eternal life, but death, John expresses by saying, "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (cf. John v. 38); he describes his death or his non-possession of eternal life as a forfeiture of eternal life; and he does so because he is speaking here of Christians, who, as such, have some participation in eternal life. But, says John, this their possession of eternal life cannot possibly be an abiding possession if they are murderers; their state is, therefore, in reality an abiding in death. The statements made in vers. 14 and 15 are a strong reinforcement of the exhortation to brotherly love in ver. 11.

The assertion that he who hates his brother is a murderer seems to contradict experience. But John is speaking expressly of hatred of one's neighbour as being a hatred which is associated with the consciousness of the brotherly relation, which should subsist in accordance with God's appointment. Such a hatred is in itself so evil that it may be compared morally to murder. But it may also be compared to murder, inasmuch as it is the source from which the murderous deed springs, and the natural, full consequence of hatred is nothing less than murder. We should always in our consciousness attach this superscription to hatred, that it is murder. It is not safe to trifle with sin, and least of all with hatred. Where it may lead cannot be calculated. Although the divine hand so restrains most people that hatred does not become murder, that fact should not lull them to sleep; it should not quench the fear which the consciousness that they have hatred within

them should fill them with. If people who cherish hatred would consider that they are justly to be compared to murderers, they would be filled with dismay; whereas they rather find in hatred, which is an energetic vice, a certain satisfaction of their vanity and pride.

Ver. 16. John now describes what kind of brotherly love he means; what he will allow to pass for brotherly love. In the first place, the brotherly love which is active in behalf of one's brethren even to self-sacrifice; the love which we have learned to know in Christ. The love spoken of here is neither God's love to us (John iii. 16; Rom. v. 8), nor Christ's love to us; but love in itself, love absolutely, genuine, perfect brotherly love. In the self-sacrifice of Christ for us the full, clear thought of love has dawned upon us. The idea of love in all its purity and greatness has not grown up in the natural heart of man; we owe it to the divine revelation in Christ. It is in truth the loftiest thought that has ever entered into the mind of man. It is in accordance with this standard that we have to measure our love, and not in accordance with the standard of human love, as we are in the habit of doing.

*We ought also:* the inference to be drawn from what Christ has done. It is our duty also to lay down our life for the brethren. The ground of this inference is found in our relation to Christ; we could not thankfully acknowledge the love of Christ, if it did not impel us to a similar love. It is true that the occasions are rare upon which we have to sacrifice our physical life for the brethren; but the ready and hearty disposition to do so should and can be always ours; and we can test the reality of our having such a disposition by our being willing to make small self-sacrifices out of love for the brethren. Such small self-sacrifices often cost us more than great ones; for by means of them we acquire no special honour; there is nothing splendid about them in our eyes. Accordingly the purity of brotherly love is all the more evidenced in them. No one, therefore, lacks opportunity to satisfy this demand of the apostle. Moreover, we can frequently render greater service to our neighbour by self-denial in small things, by patience and considerateness, than by the sacrifice of life itself. For the gladness of the mood in which our neighbour lives depends to a very large extent upon these comparatively small matters. We can thereby in no common

degree enable him to be faithful in the discharge of duty.

Ver. 17. If genuine brotherly love involves the sacrificing of one's own life for the brethren, how can he be said to love the brethren, who does not even give of his earthly possessions, when it is necessary to alleviate the need of the brethren (Jas. ii. 15, 16)? The case supposed is very common; and John points out the features in it that clearly set forth its anti-Christian character. "The world's goods" are the means of earthly sustenance. The word "world" implies the insignificance, the nothingness of earthly possessions; they are not to be compared with the sorrow and the need of one's brother. John thus sets himself in flat contradiction with the common opinion that earthly goods are of prime importance, that earthly needs are the first and most necessary. Compared with the suffering of our brother these earthly goods, whereby the maintenance of our physical life is conditioned, have usually in our eyes a preponderating value. But we should not put earthly good and sorrow into one category; the latter is by far the more important. John assumes the case of our being eye-witnesses, of our *seeing* our brother perishing, and regards it as a psychological impossibility that compassion should not take possession of us. Whenever, therefore, we do not render assistance, we intentionally shut up our compassion. Those who at such a sight would feel no compassion, he would regard as inhuman. But compassion is only too frequently suppressed by considerations of selfishness; for the love of earthly possessions is often still too strong in us. This love of earthly possessions accounts for the unnatural power to which selfishness frequently attains in us.

*How doth the love of God abide in him?* John regards it as pure self-deception if, in spite of the lack of active compassion with a suffering brother, we nevertheless believe that we love God. Whosoever loves at all, must love at once God and his brother. We may also take the "love of God" to be the "love of God to him," in which case the question means, How can God do aught else than turn away His love from such an one? He cannot, as being Love, love pitilessness; provoked to anger He can only reject it. Just as it is a delusion to think that we can love God while we have no love towards our neighbour, so it is a delusion to imagine that we can enjoy God's love while we ourselves

are unloving. He says "abideth," because he is speaking to Christians, who as such must already have love to God in them. His argument rests upon the necessary connexion between love to God and brotherly love. It is not till further on (iv. 12, 16, 20) that he makes this connexion expressly prominent; but here he already assumes it as universally acknowledged.

Ver. 18. The apostle's thought now takes a hortatory turn: let us consider our own interest so sincerely, that we be not satisfied with the word of love. To the *word* John, as Lücke correctly observes, adds the *tongue*, in order to indicate that it is love which is merely seeming that he opposes to love in truth. The two separate members of the antithesis (love in *deed* and in *truth*) are related to one another thus: it is in active love that real, genuine love shows itself. Genuine love is the general idea, the opposite of spurious, seeming love; active love is the opposite of mere love in words. Whoever knows anything of love should also know that it is involved in its very nature to be the surrender of the whole man, that it is the

interest of love to impart itself wholly. And yet in our loving we are always seeking to deduct as much as possible from the wholeness of our impartation. This, however, is at the most a mere being willing to love; and in the use of the word "love," which is so much abused, we should be more precise. If anything whatever is no mere word, but feeling and impulse, and therefore also deed, it is love. Love in mere words is not love of a sorry kind, but spurious love. It is certainly a question whether we can do much or little to make our love active. But a case, in which we could do nothing whatever, will not occur. No work of love is a small one; and the deed, which in itself is insignificant, becomes through love something great to him for whom it is done. Out of the small deeds of love there will very soon arise a great and influential work of love. And herein there is manifest a great wisdom on the part of God in our training, that He assigns us at least small works of love. In connexion with great works of love we should easily become vain.

## Incidents and Emblems.

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### Vapours.

WE all recognise the unequalled charm of the midnight sky under all conditions, stormy or serene. Every man, with a soul in him, finds that, standing out under the midnight sky, he has dormant chords awakened within him,—sympathies with the wide, many-voiced nature-spirit, bringing him into living touch with things far removed in space and time. Power, beauty, and mystery are gathered round him, blending their influence in all the sounds and silences. Occasionally, however, incidents occur which impinge more sharply on the mind, recalling it from mere vague and wandering reveries. A shower of meteors, or the streaming course of some solitary brilliant, at once puts us on the alert, and concentrates and braces our faculties. A similar effect was produced by the following incident, which may be worth mentioning. The night was bright and windy; dark rags of vapour were blown across the moon, with the familiar effect of the queenly planet

seeming to plunge onward in buoyant triumph over repeated waves of obstruction. Away in the north-west was a vast bank of black cloud steadily approaching. It seemed deep and broad enough to quench the clearest moonlight. Bed-time being fully come, one felt inclined to retire before the beauty of the night was entirely blotted out. Still, the humanities of the hour held one in something of the suspense or compassionate interest that watches a bright, brave spirit about to sink in the gloom of overwhelming calamity. The threatening mass drew on, and then this beautiful sight appeared; instead of the moon being lost in darkness, there was seen a great, solid shield of silver, and in its centre the full-orbed luminary herself in exquisite brightness and beauty.

The general analogy was obvious. We are, most of us, familiar with the effect of a good man, still more, perhaps, a good woman, reduced to very humble conditions. Surroundings which before