



# THE INWARD WITNESS OF LIFE IN THE SON.\*

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“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself : he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar ; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son.”—I JOHN v. 10.

**I**N these words, found at the close of the last book of the New Testament, revelation takes its farewell in a final tribute to its own evidences. A few terse, vivid, antithetical statements sum up all that has been said or need be said concerning the relations of the testimony of God, external and internal, to man's faith or unbelief.

The subject makes its appeal to you, dear brethren, by your office of witnesses for the Lord Jesus. To that office you have been set apart this day by the imposition of hands and the consecration of the Spirit. Hitherto you have been probationers, undergoing a preparatory discipline : testing yourselves and tested of others. Called some time since and chosen, you are now counted faithful, and put into the ministry. In that ministry you will have to interpret the testimony of God to mankind, and to take a most solemn part in the process of the decisions of men's acceptance or rejection. It is well

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for you to be reminded of the nature and limits of your responsibility in so solemn a matter. Your hearts will be in sympathy with the subject while listening to the last accents of the Bible on such a theme as this.

But every soul in this assembly has almost an equal interest in the topic I have chosen. It belongs to those themes which make ministers and people one. We are in a certain sense all alike the Lord's witnesses; and while this charge is delivered none will be auditors and spectators only. Of course those to whom it is addressed will have a special lot in this matter which the congregation will not deny them; and they themselves will receive their own portion all the more joyfully because they receive it in common with you all. Let us unite in supplicating the aid of the Holy Spirit, whose witnessing office receives here its supreme tribute, that we may study together these final sayings concerning the testimonies of God externally given for faith and internally sealed to faith. Especially do you, as now ordained to this office, lift up your hearts for your privilege and expect it. While the Spirit is near to us all, He is very specially near to you this day. May you feel His power through my ministry, and my voice be lost in His!

### I.

Mark first the tribute to the one object of all the external testimonies of revelation. "This is the witness of God that He hath witnessed of His

Son." "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." There are testimonies many and witnesses many; but to us there is only one witness of God. Looking back on all the past, the Bible, the depository of unnumbered testimonies, closes with these great words. Gathering up the voices of apostles and prophets, reducing all the books and all the records to their essence, summing all the teachings of Nature, providence and grace through the whole compass of the divine manifestations in every region of truth,—the issue, end and consummation of all is the Son of God, the life of men. The strain of revelation here ceases with the keynote that began it. The unlimited varieties of the divine disclosures at sundry times and in divers manners, on every subject concerning the government of God and our destiny, our sin and His mercy, our separation from Him and our return, our history in time encompassed by His eternity, find here their unity and "agree in one." All that we call the Gospel is here declared to be a twofold witness: as to God, He sends His Son; as to us, that Son is our life, our eternal life. I have to charge you, henceforward interpreters of the divine records, to give to these the prominence which revelation gives them.

As to the former: it is hard to exaggerate the importance of this grand compendium of the witness of heaven to earth. We must not disparage what we call the testimonies of Nature to the "everlasting power and divinity." God had not left Himself unwitnessed before His Son came. But we are taught here that the witness borne concerning His

Son is the final, perfect and consummate revelation of God Himself. This is the last word of theology proper, lighting up all the rest, that the Father of an eternal Son through that Son created and redeemed the world. By this name he was not known to the early fathers. It was the mystery hid from, or hid in, ages and generations, "the mystery of God, even Christ," "the Firstborn before every creature," "the Image of the Invisible God," who created man in His own image and by redemption gave him back that image lost. Remember, brethren, that you are from this day forward witnesses of the Son of God. "Ye shall be witnesses of Me" He said to His apostles, and in your degree He says the same to you: "of Me first, Myself and my Person." Never forget the unspeakable emphasis of this. He left the world,—not as He should have left it on the human theory, commanding His apostles to vindicate the sanctity of the neglected name of Jehovah among the nations, but—making Himself the Filial Representative of the Godhead. "Ye are My witnesses:" it is the very language of the ancient Jehovah. You must know no truth about God but as it "is in Jesus:" you must take every doctrine to the holy mount that it may be, not abolished there, but transfigured. I must press the terse text upon your mind, "The witness of God is this, that He hath borne witness concerning His Son;" even as His Son in turn bears witness of the Father, and the Holy Spirit bears witness of both. The more firmly you hold the Eternal Sonship the more clear will be your convictions as to the Holy Trinity, as

to the relation of the Second Person to mankind, as to the possibility of the humiliation of the incarnate Son, as to the soleness and necessary sinlessness of His personality, and as to the unlimited virtue of His atonement. Here will be one test of your future fidelity. If you testify well of Jesus, the Son of God, we shall be well content with you. Other testimonies you may indistinctly, unlearnedly, falteringly utter. On other subjects, of science and philosophy and the economy of human life, you have strictly speaking no testimony to bear: you are not witnesses of these things, though you may bring them into the service of your own testimony. Your witness is that of God, and it is concerning His Son. That you must deliver with great distinctness; and let me say that your value to us and to the church will be just what your witness on this high subject is.

In the other branch of the witness to the Son, that He is our life, the whole work of Christ has its last and greatest name. Propitiation, atonement, salvation, cleansing, and if there be any other, they all spring from and converge to life. The testimony of Jesus in Old Testament and New, in prophetic type and apostolic teaching, before His coming, when He came, and after His ascension, is always this, that from Him life flows to us. And this word "flows" at once suggests that illustration of the divine testimony which belongs essentially to our text. At the cross of Christ St. John saw—he alone records and probably he alone saw—an absolutely unique and most mysterious event, which he regarded as no less than a miraculous divine

testimony to our life in Christ's death. The centurion cried, when he saw certain tokens that amazed him, "Truly this was the Son of God!" St. John's more personal token, as he stood hard by the centurion, was the flowing of the living blood of our redemption from the Lord's dead and riven side, and from the same dead and riven side, in the same living stream, the water of our regeneration and life. This was no natural event; had no physiological possibility; had little to do, save in the exaggerations of commentators, with any proof of the Lord's death. It was simply and purely a divine testimony. No miracle in the Gospels was more fully miraculous; nor was the voice at the transfiguration more distinct. It said: "This living blood from the dead side of the Son of God, who hath life in Himself, is My token that I receive the atonement for man; and this living water flowing from the same fountain is My token that all who believe in Him shall have within them a well of water springing up into everlasting life." This we know is the only symbolical meaning of blood and water in St. John; and his eyes were opened to read that meaning and no other in the great sight he saw when the sun shone out after the thick darkness. Let me be bold to say, that this was the symbolical, visible and real illustration of the final testimony of the epistle and of the Bible to the finished work of Christ. Just after the "It is finished," the two streams flowed together. Think not too much of the soldier's spear. "He was smitten of God and afflicted:" from above and not from below. No mortal stroke could have unsealed that treasure: it was poured out by the

Father's hand. It was the witness of God that He was testifying of His Son. Again let me beseech you never to forget this. As the value and the beauty and the success and the glory of your testimony will be that it maintains the eternal divinity of the Son in human nature, so it will be in this that you preach and teach eternal life through that Son's atonement: in the stream that for ever washes away human guilt and stain, and in the stream that pours into man's dead soul eternal life. On these two, the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son, hangs all theology; on these two, the Son of God and the life of man, hangs all atoning redemption; and on these two, the flowing blood and the flowing water, hang all the processes of personal salvation. And again I say, my brethren beloved, that you will be all and each, in honour before God and usefulness in the church, just what your testimony is on these subjects also.

Mark now the force of this final teaching as to the external witness borne to these great truths for human probation. We need not very curiously inquire what constitutes the great external record. St. John leaves that indefinite, laying his stress rather on its sufficiency for the purpose of man's trial. There are the documents of revelation: one continuous tribute of God in heaven to His Son on earth, confirmed by every verification that the laws of human nature ought to demand. There is the visible church in the world, as conspicuous a witness of the Son of God as the sun in the heavens is witness of its creator. There is the new life already among men, symbolized at the cross by the water



and the blood and always by the sacraments of the church, giving its argument for Christianity with strengthening force from generation to generation. But I must point out to you that the pith of this final word is, that the whole economy of external evidence is meant for every man and makes every man responsible. The light of this testimony has been kindled, and it lighteth every man who enters this world; waiting for him even as the natural sun waits for him. As to those who are without, we must always remember the Lord's words, "If I had not come they had not had sin, the sin of rejecting Me." Your mission will not require you to determine their case, and if you are wise you will leave them to their Master and Judge. But you must think of every man born under the light of Christianity as opening his eyes on a great foreordained and prearranged witness for Jesus the Son of God. Other foreordained and prearranged witnesses wait for him, but this is greater. The earth he inhabits yields a thousand tokens that he was sent into it to be at once its servant and its lord: to find in it the sphere of his probation. The family and the state wait for him with probationary obligations and responsibilities. So does Christianity. The same voice of God which gives evidence for itself in those other departments gives greater evidence here: it enforces a distinct, clear, imperative claim, the rejection of which makes God, the author of Nature and of man's moral constitution, a liar. We are so framed as to believe on fair evidence. Faith links every man with the unseen, the spiritual, the supernatural order: therefore with this life largely and still more

largely with the life to come ; accepting man's evidence for the former, the evidence of God for the latter. But the witness of God for the things of God is greater : having to do with a transcendently greater object and accompanied by special demonstrations of the Spirit, throwing the responsibility on the unbeliever. The last word of the New Testament about evidence is very bold. It is not in the modern style of apology for unbelief, which speaks so strongly of the difficulties of faith, so tenderly of the victim of invincible ignorance and prejudice, and withal so uncertainly about the Convincing Spirit. We read nothing here out of which all this might be spun.

I must therefore do my duty and charge you to remember the dignity of the Christian claim. It is difficult to say whether the apostle's language is that of indignation or of abhorrence or of sorrow or of satire. One thing is certain : it tells all preachers of the gospel and defenders of the faith—these are now and always one and the same thing—what is the attitude they must take. You must never, brethren, forget that you are champions of the honour and dignity of your Saviour and the God of truth. If men call the truth of God a lie and God Himself a liar you must not be cold apologists ; nor must you allow yourselves to be disarmed because these opprobrious terms are avoided and Christianity is politely rejected. The first witnesses for God and for His Christ took a very high stand indeed. They demanded men's faith as God's right : counting them to lie against their own souls who made God a liar. We too must believe that fact, and the evidence of

fact, were never stronger in their claim on credence than in the general history of Jesus and redemption. Never came a challenge to human acceptance more mighty and with more right to be irresistible than the appeal of the Holy Sufferer for the sins of mankind, confirmed as it is by the Father's signs from heaven and the evidences of man's secret heart. This last seems to be very strong in the apostle's estimation. "He hath made God a liar, because he believes not the testimony of an outward record, and hath not trusted in the witness He bore of His Son." The lack of secret trust betrays something wrong in the very roots of the unbeliever's nature. "We are witnesses of these things," said St. Peter, your forerunner, to as perverse men as ever denied the Lord, "and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey Him." The rejection of Christ is therefore the rejection of the Spirit, and that betokens the moral delinquency of a disobedience to God. Believing that the Spirit pleads for Christ within while you plead without, you must imitate "the boldness of Peter and John." What will give you, especially the weaker of you, this boldness will appear in due course. Meanwhile, remember the dignity of your commission, and speak to men as if they ought to submit to the Lord of all and believe in Him who is the truth. Humbly, reverently, and at a great distance of course, copy the style of him who says, "He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar." To doubt God's existence is a sin and a crime against our own nature: as a sin against God it is unprovided for, because it is strictly speaking

impossible. So to reject the Gospel is, in the man with whom the Gospel pleads, a thing that ought to be impossible, and is "without excuse."

With all this, however, remember the meekness and gentleness of your Master ; always be sure that the Holy Ghost needs no anger of yours to help Him ; and take care never to forget the charity which on your lips should plead the cause of the God of love. Mark that it is the claim of the Son of God, bringing life to man, that you are imperatively to assert and to vindicate, taking no denial. Your lofty and high-toned dogmatism must be strictly limited to this. You may absolutely rely on the Spirit's confirmation of every affirmation you make as to the Son of God incarnate, and His right to the homage of every human intellect, and every human heart, and every human will. You cannot expect too much from the soul "naturally Christian" when you point to Jesus as the Sun of the mental and moral world and ask every man if he sees ought. But you must always remember that till men submit to the Lord, to whom all external testimonies bear witness, you must not expect those external testimonies themselves to be of themselves availing. Do not wonder if men obstinately criticize the documents ; and be not angry with them for that. Rather be extremely forbearing with all doubters whose scruples are provoked by difficulties in the external evidences of Christianity. Reserve the strength of your jealousy for the Lord Himself. Demand submission to Him first ; and your wisdom will in this be justified.

But it must not be forgotten that before St. John

speaks of the unbeliever, he has spoken of the believer who accepts the divine testimony as outwardly presented, and trusts in Him of whom that testimony speaks. The apostle does not here or elsewhere dwell on the inmost secret and mystery of believing. All the light he gives comes from the parallel here drawn. As the man who believes not is one who rejects the testimony given to him secretly by the Holy Ghost, and thus makes God a liar, so conversely the man who believes is one who receives the same secret testimony of the Holy Ghost concerning Christ. As "he that believeth not God," that is, His outward testimony, "makes Him a liar, because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne," that is, does not trust in His Son, so he who believeth God trusts also in the Son of whom He bears witness. Both hear the inward testimony: the one rejects and the other receives it. Most emphatically does St. John say that "the Spirit it is who beareth witness:" to the spirit of both, but with different effect. Yielding to the Holy Ghost, the believer trusts the testimony concerning a Saviour for his sin and a life for his death. He relies on the record concerning the atonement: on the blood which flows for the cancelling of guilt, and on the promise of the living water of life. And of him it is said that "he hath the witness in himself."

## II.

The objective, outward, standing testimony has become the subjective, interior, personal assurance. And this is expressed by that great saying, which

has no parallel elsewhere, "he hath the witness in himself:" that is, the external witness which he received in faith he now HAS as his individual inward possession. Here there are two meanings: the faith that saves is attended by the privilege of assurance; and then the blessing assured of becomes testimony to itself. These two combined are to the believer irrefragable evidence of Christianity itself.

St. John does not say that faith is assurance. His meaning is not conveyed by the paraphrase, "He that believeth is one who is inwardly assured by a secret testimony of the Spirit." The converse is the truth: the believer receives and has the outward evidence more sure in an inward testimony. If this is so, we must mark the calm universality of the statement. The believer "hath"—not shall have, may have, should have, shall have as a rare and occasional privilege—the witness in himself. The series of things testified concerning personal salvation is gone over again to the quick ear of the penitent believer: not bringing him salvation, which does not depend on assurance, but telling him that he has it. This assurance, let it be remembered, is only of those few simple facts, or promises based on facts, which are bound up with that life to which all things converge in the closing Bible. There are many internal testimonies concerning Jesus which cannot be supposed to be respoken within the heart. Let us again limit our illustration, as the apostle does, to the testimony of the water and the blood. Take the latter first. The man who believes as he ought the external testimony of God speaking through unimpeachable witnesses of the crucifixion

of the incarnate Son of God, has a general faith that Jesus was sent to be the Saviour of the world. Convinced of his sin and feeling his condemnation, he lies at the foot of the cross, as it were like St. John watching the blood shed for his redemption, until in the mystery of grace the Spirit whispers the testimony "Behold, the Lamb of God!" the first on the subject found in the New Testament and the first of a long series. Then the general "Ecce" of testimony for all, "Behold, this is the Lamb of God!" becomes the specific "Behold Him for thyself!" The interior eye sees the Saviour crucified, risen, ascended, finding infinite confidence in knowing how they all "agree in one," that is the personal deliverance from guilt. The testimony is spoken to me; as I trusted it before, and apart from any experience of deliverance, I trust it now still more. A witness from a far country has brought glad tidings. The "report is believed;" and then the spiritual eye, ear, or touch carries the testimonies to the soul and it can have no doubt that there is life for it in Christ. But this is not all. He lies at the foot of the cross mourning over his spiritual death—however paradoxical that may sound—until the testimony is heard within: "Awake, thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee life!" He trusts and "has power to become a son of God." But then the assurances, "I am the life," "I am come that they might have life," "Because I live ye shall live also," that had only filled the outward ear, are spoken in clear, distinct, soul-satisfying tones to the inward ear, bearing witness of a life eternal and divine.

Brethren, I must charge you to be faithful on this point too. You have this day been admitted into the fellowship of a body of men who have always maintained in its purity the testimony concerning the Spirit's witness. Not that they have been peculiar in this. The inward witness, which is in the mystery of the Gospel both the cause of faith and its sequel, is so interwoven with the fabric of the New Testament that wherever a faithful ministry has been found it could not fail to be true to this doctrine. Whether called the witness of the Spirit, or the assurance of faith, or the inward light, it has been the watchword of the noblest confessors and mightiest preachers and most Christian representatives of the Christian faith. Give it, I beseech you, the high place it should have in your thoughts as a real testimony of the Spirit to the individual soul. Teach your people to expect it, and never suffer them to rest without it. Let it very frequently be the direct subject of your ministry; and let it enter more or less into the whole tissue of it. For you must not limit this witness. The Spirit is the testifier of all truth: not of one particular privilege, but of all. We make a mistake to dwell too much on one particular witness: the witness of adoption or life. St. John charges you this day to believe and teach that the Spirit seals all the testimonies of Scripture on the believing soul. St. Paul says, "we know the things that are freely given us of God:" the things universally, which are really "the things of Christ." You will hold in your hands the charter of Christian privilege; and the best and the most pleasant part of your function will be to



unfold the promises, the prerogatives of God's people. Now you must always remember that the witness of the Spirit is for all of them. It is the assurance of the saints always, as well as of the sinner at the outset. You tell the sinner to expect the witness, "thy sins are forgiven," the prodigal to expect to hear the witness that shall enable him to say "Father," the unsanctified to wait for the silent seal that shall enable him to say "My God." Teach your people to expect the attesting Spirit on the proclamation of every promise and privilege. "It is the Spirit that beareth witness and the Spirit is the truth." But remembering all this you must not forget that prominence is given to the testimony of life, as was said at the outset.

I must ask you now to observe the distinction between the testimony concerning the life as given to us and the testimony afforded by the actual possession of the life itself. The term "hath," twice used with deep significance, intimates that the believer possesses in his own soul and in his own experience the very things about which the witness is given; and that the Son of God and the life He brings give evidence that is absolutely indubitable, bound up with the new life, being indeed the very life itself, and in its power an evidence self-multiplying to eternity. Let us dwell on these points for a short time.

The regenerate believer, whose spirit is filled by the Holy Spirit, has infallible evidences in himself that the Son of God is in him. It is not that he is conscious of being quickened to a better and nobler life, or that his old life is improved into something

more worthy of its origin : he is divinely conscious that he has in the centre of his being a life altogether new. He is certain of the possession of a specific higher life : with the same certainty that he has of the possession of the ordinary and lower life. And he knows it to be the Son of God in his soul by the testimony of the Son Himself through the Holy Ghost. The interpreting Spirit secretly takes and shows him that word which the Saviour left to His disciples to be the permanent pledge of His own special indwelling. "I will come unto him, and manifest Myself unto him. I will come and My Father will come, and we will make our abode with him." Whatever else these wonderful words mean, they mean a secret assurance given by the Son of God that He dwells in the man who loves Him and keeps His law. That was the profound signification of those earlier words about the "more abundant life." We are familiar enough with the same truth in St. Paul's writings. Just as he has his own peculiar formula for the witness of the Spirit concerning what is done for the soul in the counsels of heaven, so he has his own formula for the witness of the inward experience. For instance, he made the beginning of his own religion "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me," and the continuance of it "I do not live but Christ liveth in me," and the end of it "That I may be found in Him." He knew that Christ, the Son of God, was in himself, as certainly as he knew that he lived in the flesh ; and he everywhere takes it for granted that his fellow Christians had the same internal testimony. You remember one remarkable instance, in which he

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startles us, as he certainly startled the Corinthians : " Do ye not know that Christ is in you ? Does not your examination, or proving, of yourselves shew it ? Unless indeed ye be reprobate."

But St. Paul's " Prove yourselves " suggests another application of St. John's words. It may seem mystical and unreal to speak of a consciousness of the Son of God within, and the apostle really comes to our relief when he says " He that hath the Son hath the life," clearly pointing to the character of the new life as the demonstration within. The grand evidence of Christianity is the special character of the new life, as approving itself in its effects. There is but one kind of life that deserves the name. All life is not the same life : there is much religious quickening and preparatory life which has not reached the point of regeneration, or Christ thus revealed in the soul. And the difference is detected by the genuine evidences of the Son of God within. The apostle has a high and sacred idea of the internal witness to the life ; and when he describes it by its effects he is rather referring to the evidences which comfort the possessor of the life than those which approve themselves to others. You observe that the whole paragraph, in which St. John for the first time introduces faith and closes the Biblical testimony about it, begins by telling of its perfect victory over the world and strength to obey the commandments. And throughout all that follows the sublime declarations concerning the grandeur of the new life seem not so much like descriptions of the way in which men can live as of the way in which God lives in men.

I shall not dwell upon those wonderful little touches of the mystery of the indwelling Son which have been the joy of Christian men from the beginning. How they sparkle and glow here at the end of the New Testament! Collectively and singly among the most amazing words of Scripture, each one saying something that we had indeed heard from the beginning but saying it in new and most moving terms. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him." But of whom can that high experience be asserted? The answer is "whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God." "Herein is our love made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is so are we." What does that great saying mean? The privilege of him who has the inward witness, and in the strength of the Son of God within him purifieth himself "as He is pure" and doeth righteousness "as He is righteous:" thus being—let us not shrink from boldly uttering it—as He is in this world. What a word is this: to "overcome the world" that has enslaved and vanquished every mortal save one that ever trod upon it! The only solution is that the Son of God lives in the believer; and testifies His own indwelling by signs and wonders that never entered the mind of man outside of Christ to conceive. The inward Witness bears this witness to Himself in us.

Our theology has always paid a high tribute to the glory of the Divine life, as bearing witness to itself in the regenerate by signs and tokens of the indwelling of God in man. You must

in your ministry keep up the strain. Teach your hearers to seek for and expect such evidences of the power of the Son of God as shall to themselves at least render all other evidence superfluous. Not that it supersedes or revokes the other: the assurance of pardon, the witness of adoption, the seal of sanctification to God. The witnesses "agree in one." St. John speaks here at least of the only testimony, and that is within. It is needless to discriminate. The believer in Christ has a testimony of the Divine Spirit to his conscience which speaks more loudly than the plea of guilt in his conscience; but he can hardly distinguish that from the sense of unutterable peace which keeps his heart and mind through Christ Jesus: which indeed is the consciousness of being so one with Christ as to be accepted not so much "for the Beloved's sake" as "in the Beloved." He has, St. Paul says, the spirit of adoption strengthening the Abba-cry of the new-born babe; but he can hardly tell the difference between that and the witness of his own new life which in its love shows its heavenly origin, that it is born of God. And St. John says that the believer knows himself to be consecrated to God "by the Spirit that He hath given;" but surely that is the very same thing as the inward witness of a life that has forsaken and abandoned and forgotten the world as a rest and finds its joyful security and perfect felicity in God alone. Dear brethren, learn how to preach on this subject from your own experience. On all questions that concern the assurance of a Christian testify what you have seen and speak what you know. "Joined to the Lord," and "one Spirit

with Him," you will have that indistinguishable inward witness which cannot deceive or be deceived. O live so near to God, so entirely one with Him, and so wholly and perfectly in Him, that your testimony within shall always give confidence to your preaching. Have the life within you strong and full: then will its witness be strong and full. It may not always be rapturous and ecstatic, not always unperplexed by fiery temptation and doubt; but always the witness of a true life, the consciousness of which shall evermore be sure of being from God.

The inward witness of personal life in Christ is a demonstration of the truth of Christianity: not precisely of itself and as internal, but as connected with the external and collated with it. We mark that St. John's argument throughout is a very logical exhibition of the proof which springs from the exact correspondence of the witness borne by God in history and in the Biblical records with the internal experience of every one who casts his soul absolutely on Christ and stakes his salvation on the testimony borne concerning Him. "He hath the witness in himself." The idea is this: "All things that God spake from the beginning concerning salvation in Christ are so perfectly fulfilled in the true believer that he at once accepts the record in its integrity and "sets to his seal that God is true:" that is, that Christianity, with all that is meant by that vast word, is the very truth of God. Allow me to direct your careful attention to a few of the consequences of this combination of the external and internal evidence.

The first is that—whatever unbelievers may say

—the Faith of Jesus ought to be held with the most absolute certainty by His disciples and servants and friends. The writers of the New Testament declare with one consent that true Christians have no doubt of their religion. It would be a pleasant task, young men, to collect a long series of proofs that the strain of the documents which followed Pentecost is not disturbed by the very slightest vibration of doubt. It is not that the writers were enthusiasts rapt into the third heaven and too excited either to doubt themselves or to forecast doubt in others. It was precisely the reverse of this. Each one of them somewhere or other, generally in his final words, looks out upon a future of scepticism and unbelief. There is something inexpressibly affecting in St. Paul's, St. Peter's, St. Jude's, St. John's farewell glances into the great futurity. Reading their predictions, so clear and so sad, alone and without relief, we should be thrown into despair. But we mark that precisely where they thus speak of the unbelief that is to be they assert for themselves and for all likeminded the deepest tranquillity of a secure and untremulous faith. We see as in a glass their future in our days of rebellion against the mysteries of Christianity. Nothing can surpass the sombre colour of scepticism as depicted in these books save the calm and fearless confidence with which those who depict it hold their religion. They themselves live, and what is more they represent Christian people generally as living, in an atmosphere of supernatural light and assurance, under and amidst the very powers of the world to come. And why is it so? Because in those first ages of faith every

believer had the testimony of the Oracles reuttered within his own heart and life. The Saviour ascended into the heavens was also revealed in the interior heaven of their souls. The Holy Ghost spake over again the words of Christ, and greater words for Him than He ever spake for Himself. Their life was one constant, continuous and permanent evidence of Christianity.

Let me, dear brethren, hold you fast a little while on this most blessed theme. Remember that you are to proclaim a religion of clear demonstration, and determine to be worthy and capable by keeping your own internal experience in harmony with the outward testimony. Do not wonder that I am repeating myself: that is of no importance. Your future course will be very much shaped by the theory you form for yourself on the matter of evidences. If you resolve to let the internal at all points verify the external, and live by that law, you will be a happy man. Be very bold in your stipulation with the Holy Ghost; for He is very condescending. Dare to expect that the transcendent revelations of the Gospel shall be revealed over again in you, and thus prove their truth beyond the possibility of gainsaying. It is your privilege to have the entire sphere of your spiritual, theological, ministerial life irradiated by the central Sun which is the light of men, especially of them that believe, and most especially of those who are set apart to bear the burden of the Holy Scriptures weighted with unspeakable mysteries. This threefold gradation is not thrown out rhetorically. It must be firmly believed that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are



in precise proportion and relation to the need of His agents. And surely there is no need more pressing than that the young minister, bearing the doctrinal as well as the ethical cross of Christ on his shoulders, and pledged to help others to bear that cross, should have a deep and clear conviction himself. I cannot think that the gentle Lord would send you out with this book in your hand crowded with things hard to be understood without replenishing you with the strength that is imparted by a profound assurance of the truth of the Bible and all its contents. You may expect a special charism of faith: more than the common privilege which all the pure in heart have of seeing God in His word.

What I commend to you as your present privilege will have, let me warn you, to be prayed and wrestled for. It is one of the penalties of your office that you will of necessity be more familiar with doubtful disputations than you would wish to be. Perhaps you would be very glad, under the influence of this realizing hour, to abjure for ever every thought that looks that way, and join the company of those dear saints who know nothing about arguments for Christianity, to whom demonstrations of the faith are like demonstrations of the reality of an external world. But that artless and lovely unconsciousness of evidence will not be your lot. That is not what St. Paul prayed for, that the Colossians might be "enriched unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding:" not, you see, the full assurance of contemplation, of intuition, of mystical vision, or even of faith; but of the working, the hardworking,

“understanding.” You must toil for, pray for, and get at all costs, plenary conviction based on the foundation of intelligent study, of careful and thoughtful examination of difficulties, of prayer to the Holy Ghost: in other words, the divine gift of assurance granted to the assiduous ponderings of the devout and honest understanding. The word suggests, though it does not strictly mean, a mighty force of interior experience before which all difficulties vanish. You shall always have it, if you take the right order with your evidences. If you keep the external and the internal too wide apart you will be in danger. Laborious investigation of discrepancies and difficulties has its value; but it always leaves something that it cannot do alone. Unless I am greatly mistaken, you will sometimes be at your wits’ end by reason of doubts engendered by the very course of your reading and pastoral duty. The best among you will probably be the most tried. The probation of sifting and doubt is more or less before you all. And that word “sifting” reminds us at once of Simon Peter, our example both of the strength and of the weakness of faith. “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:” not so much the spiritual grace as the belief in his Lord. Whenever your hour comes, carry your baffled mind into the presence of the Lord, and ask Him to light up the whole sphere by “revealing Himself” within you. At such a time as that come to the Meek and Lowly of heart who bade the doubters learn of Him and take the yoke of His theological cross upon them, and so promised them rest. Or spread this text before the Lord, the final testimony to the virtue of

the supreme internal witness, and leave not the presence until you know its truth.

You will not pervert my meaning when I say that this internal evidence must often stand instead of demonstration in regard to matters where that cannot be had. It would not be seriously wrong to paraphrase thus our text: "Whatever things the witness of God fails directly to confirm, to one thing He surely witnesses, the gift of His Son to the world and of the life of His Son to the individual believer." There are many mysteries in doctrine, many marvels in recorded fact, many difficulties in the history and documents of the Faith, which will perhaps never be verified by direct evidence, or have the solution of perfect light thrown on them. But wherever that is the case, the essentials are not involved. The two everlasting essentials, on which for us hang all the issues of time and eternity, are the Son of God and our life in Him. These are verified to us by undecieving testimony. We must be content with some measure of uncertainty as to the rest. Not that I would sanction indifference as to the truth of all detail; or laxity as to the importance of unsolvable mystery. There are two extremes in our difficulties of faith: the very great and the very little. You must do your best, for your own sake and that of others, to bring all into harmony with a reasonable faith. But, meanwhile, there is no better logic than this. "The Book that brings me the Son of God and that life I have must be true everywhere and in all things, whether I can prove it or not. Cunningly devised fable could never be the vehicle of eternal truth. The clear revelation of the

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Son of God within the soul must be vicarious evidence for all those things which have no distinct demonstration of their own."

The tendency of these remarks has been to disparage by comparison external records. We must not close without a word on the other side. Supreme as the inward witness is, it must be checked, controlled and regulated at all points by the external and written word. Here is the defence of the inward light against all hyper-mystical extravagance. It has been said that the light within sheds its vicarious assurance over many dark regions of the documents: let me now add that the documents minister to the security of the inner light in return. There is no more deeply interesting page of theological history than that which records the aberrations of those who have followed the light within neglecting the guidance of the light without. Time would fail me, and patience would fail you, for the illustration of this. Suffice that I point out once more the emphasis of St. John's, "hath the testimony in him." It is the outward testimony reproduced within: no more, no less. Granted that there may be more, that the Spirit may disclose things hidden in Christ of which the Bible does not speak, it will be impossible to authenticate them to others without a renewal of the gift and economy of inspiration. False mysticism—not obsolete since the middle ages but strong and vigorous now—finds its religion in intuitions of God and His Son which, unsupported by the outward oracles, belong rather to imagination than to faith. In a pure and undefiled theology the external and the internal

witness guard and support and protect each other. The inward witness reveals the secret of the outward records ; but does not then renounce the guide that brought it into the wealthy place. That guide has not surrendered its function. There are in the records and documents of the faith promises and prophecies the gradual and ever accumulating verification of which will make the external and internal witnesses "agree in one" for ever.

"For ever:" this suggests a most important characteristic of our final testimony with which we will close. St. John speaks of the inward witness, confirming the outward, as the seal of a present decision or judgment between those who are and those who are not saved. You must mark the sudden change that passes over the strain. From the consideration of the witness given to the truth of the Gospel, the apostle glides into the consideration of the evidence given to the believer as to his own state. It might be said indeed that these are the two poles of the axis round which all revolves : the witness given to the Son of God, and the witness given to our own portion in Him.

Nothing, dear brethren, can be more solemn than the way in which the Scripture here closes with its note of judgment between two great classes. The eternal judgment, properly so called, that is, the appointed day between the present state and the future, is not mentioned here. The judgment in St. John's estimate, and in this final testimony, is not indeed past already but certainly already begun. The two lines of contrast are marked with great distinctness: faith and unbelief, having and not

having the Son of God, having and not having eternal life, sin not unto death and sin unto death, are the alternatives with which Scripture here closes; and they are used in describing the state that now is. It is a very solemn word indeed: there are among those who hear the Gospel—with others we have not to do—two classes of men. One has the new life of the Son of God, including the life of release from condemnation symbolized by the blood, and the life of regeneration symbolized by the water. Another has neither of these. Both classes are living men, as they will be living men for ever. But one has not the true eternal life, the other has. I pray you to remember in all your ministry this lesson. You must preach the judgment that now is, as well as that which is to come. Let the words "hath" and "hath not" retain all their unimpaired significance. If the Spirit of inspiration had meant to say "shall have" and "shall not have," He would have said it: on other occasions, and in earlier utterances, the future is used and with reference to this very subject. But here at the last the inward witness is made the seal of a discrimination or judgment that has already taken place. And you must preach and teach that men are now deciding their eternal state, the future judgment being no other than the final confirmation of that which now is. The existence of the soul as mere existence is common to both and will be the same in both. The eternal life, which is life indeed, the life of the Son of God in us, is added to that existence here; and there no more will be added but the impossibility of losing it. The want of that

eternal life, the absence from the desolate existence of the indwelling Son of God, is the condemnation to the left hand of separation from God here ; and there nothing will be done to that bare existence but to seal to it the impossibility of having the Son and thus being restored to God for ever.

The application of this to the ungodly who have not the Son is not suggested ; and I shall not go beyond the text on which this Charge is based. Otherwise, I might urge you to warn all men against the delusion that not having life in Christ will be found hereafter, what it is not found now, equivalent to extinction. Let me rather close with the apostle's own indication of the end for which he wrote, and all the apostles wrote, and the Holy Spirit for ever teaches and preaches through His servants, "that ye may know that ye have eternal life who believe on the Son of God." Plain as these words seem, and almost needless in their simple iteration, they are really of profound significance. They tell us what is really the conclusion of the whole matter : the end and consummation of all the ways of God with man. As the words stand in our old and authorized text, they are inexpressibly pathetic in their deep artlessness : "that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." Let us not criticize the text of these words or argue about their meaning ; but simply surrender ourselves to their sacred influence. Let us here at the last moment lose sight of our present object, cease to be ordainers and ordained, ministers and people ; and receive this final lesson : to wit, that the secret of

Jesus the Son of God in us is the pledge of eternal life, that while we know that He is in us we are as sure of our everlasting life and happiness in God as if the everlasting doors had already closed behind us, and that the consciousness of this should endear Him to us and knit our souls to Him more and more closely every day. What treasures of joy and of hope are in this word: eternal life is in the Son, the Son is in us, and we are in God for ever! The apostle speaks to us as if we had not known it before: "that ye may know!" And as if we had never believed before: "that ye may believe!" Let us now come to Him as if all our former faith were as nought; and open our hearts to this deeper experience of a knowledge that will be always and eternally new. And to Him who is our life, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed glory for ever! Amen.