

THE  
PULPIT COMMENTARY,

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III. JOHN.

Exposition  
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Homiletics  
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Homilies by Various Authors.  
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# THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.

## EXPOSITION.

FROM very early times some have held the opinion that the Second Epistle is addressed to a community, which is spoken of allegorically as "the elect lady," her "elect sister" being a sister community; but at no time does there seem to have been any doubt that the Third Epistle is addressed to an individual. It certainly would be an extravagant hypothesis that Gaius symbolizes a Church.

Vers. 1—4.—INTRODUCTION. *Address and occasion.* Respecting the address and the title of "the elder," see note on 2 John 1.

Ver. 1.—To Gaius the beloved (Γαίῳ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ). This is additional reason for thinking that *κυρία* in the Second Epistle is not a proper name; if it were we should probably have the same formula as we have here, *Κυρία τῇ ἐκλεκτῇ*. The name *Gaius* occurs elsewhere in the New Testament four times (Acts xix. 29; xx. 4; Rom. xvi. 23; 1 Cor. i. 14); as it was as common in the Roman Empire as *John Smith* is among ourselves, it would be rash to infer that the Gaius addressed here is the same as any of those mentioned elsewhere. In all probability there are at least four persons of this name in the New Testament. In the opening of this Epistle also we have to remark the characteristic repetition of the word "truth," which occurs four times in the first four verses. Deeds, in which Gaius and Demetrius were rich, not words, of which Diotrophes was so prodigal, are what win the approbation and love of the apostle. The thing which he hates is unreality; the object of his special adoration is "the truth;" "to walk in the truth" is nothing less than to follow in the footsteps of the Lord.

Ver. 2.—Beloved, I pray that in all respects (not "above all things"—St. John would

surely never have said that) thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. The apostle wishes that his earthly career may be as bright as his spiritual career is; may he have a sound body for his sound mind, and may his fortunes be sound also. The Greek for "prosper" (*εὐδοκῆσαι*) means exactly to "have a good career."

Vers. 3, 4.—For I rejoiced greatly. We must not lose sight of the "for," which is full of meaning. The elder has just expressed a wish that the external well-being of Gaius may equal the well-being of his soul; and he is quite sure of the latter, for brethren keep coming and bearing witness to the fact. The good report of Gaius is still greater joy to the apostle than the evil report of Diotrophes is a sorrow to him. The language in condemnation of Diotrophes, severe as it is, is not so strong as this in thankful delight respecting Gaius: Greater joy have I none than (to hear of) these things. "Greater" is made doubly emphatic, first by position at the beginning of the sentence, and secondly by the double comparative (*μειζότερον*).

Vers. 5—12.—2. MAIN DIVISION. *Exhortation.* Having thus stated the circumstances which have led to his writing (comp. 2 John 4), the elder begins the main portion of the letter, which consists of three sections; the hospitality of Gaius, and its value (vers. 5—8); the arrogance of Diotrophes, and its results (vers. 9, 10); the moral (vers. 11, 12). The transition to this central portion of the Epistle is marked by a repetition of the loving address. In all three cases (vers. 2, 5, 11), the introductory "beloved" indicates the beginning of a section.

Ver. 5.—It is by no means easy to translate

this verse satisfactorily; πιστὸν ποιεῖς ὃ ἐὰν ἐργάσῃ εἰς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ τοῦτο ξένους. Here we have three difficulties: (1) to determine the meaning of πιστὸν ποιεῖς; (2) to bring out the meaning of ἐργάσῃ; (3) to translate τοῦτο without awkwardness. The reading εἰς τοὺς (K, L) for τοῦτο (N, A, B, C, and versions) has probably arisen from a wish to avoid this last difficulty. Thou doest a faithful act in all that thou workest towards the brethren, and that towards strangers, is a fairly literal and intelligible rendering. But "to do a faithful act" is somewhat obscure. Probably it means "to act as a faithful man would." All his conduct towards the brethren, even when they were not previously known to him, was such as became a faithful Christian. This was his special merit; he treated brethren who were entire strangers to him, not as strangers, but as brethren. He did not pick and choose, showing hospitality to those whom he liked and neglecting the rest. Every missionary was sure of a welcome from Gaius.

Ver. 6.—Who bare witness to thy love before the Church. The thoroughly Greek word ἐκκλησία (which, however, had received a number of Jewish associations through its frequent use in the Septuagint) is used by St. John nowhere but in this Epistle. This witness of the brethren before the Church respecting the good deeds done to them is a type and earnest of the witness of Christ at the day of judgment: "I was a stranger, and ye took me in . . . Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me." Whom thou wilt do well to forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God. No higher standard could well be set. It reminds us of "perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Gaius is to treat them as remembering the Divine declaration, "He that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me" (John xiii. 20). This coincidence, consciously or unconsciously made, between the Gospel and Third Epistle, is lost in the rather colourless rendering in the Authorized Version, "after a godly sort."

Ver. 7.—For the sake of THE NAME. Such is the exact rendering of the true text; the insertion of "his" before "Name" weakens the effect. There was no need to say more. Just as to a Jew "the Name" must mean "Jehovah," so to a Christian "the Name" must mean "Jesus Christ" (comp. Acts v. 41; Jas. ii. 7). St. Ignatius writes to the Ephesians, "I am in bonds for the Name's sake" (iii.); and "Some are wout of malicious guile to hawk about the Name" (vii.); and again to the Philadelphians, "It is becoming for you, as a Church of God, to

appoint a deacon to go thither as God's ambassador, that he may congratulate them when they are assembled together, and may glorify the Name" (x.). Taking nothing of the Gentiles, lest the heathen should suspect their motives, and think, "Like all the quack priests and philosophers, you make a mere trade of your doctrine, and preach to fill your bellies." Nothing wins men over so much as clear proofs of disinterestedness. The missionary who is suspected of self-seeking will preach in vain. That of ἑθνικοί here must mean "heathen" seems clear from Matt. v. 47; vi. 7; xviii. 17, the only other places in the New Testament where the word is found; moreover, the context requires it. There is no need to ask whether the word may not mean "Gentile Christians." The missionary brethren would, therefore, have been in great straits but for the courage and generosity of Gaius; Diotrephes turned them out of doors and forbade others to succour them; and they themselves made it a rule not to ask for help from Gentiles.

Ver. 8.—We, therefore, ought to support such. The pronoun is very emphatic. If no help comes from the heathen, we must give it; that we may become their fellow-workers for the truth. Just as the apostle warned the elect lady that to welcome and support preachers of false doctrine is to partake in their evils works (2 John 11), so he encourages Gaius and his friends with the thought that to welcome and support preachers of the truth is to partake in their good works. It is the Master's teaching in another form, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward" (Matt. x. 41).

Ver. 9.—I wrote somewhat to the Church (reading, with the best authorities, ἔγραψα τῇ) probably means that St. John had written a letter, now lost, and perhaps destroyed by Diotrephes, to the Church to which Diotrephes belonged. That Diotrephes was bishop of this Church is conjecture; as also that he opposed St. John's emissaries "because they were bent on carrying the gospel to the Gentiles, he himself being, no doubt, both a Jew and of the Jewish faction." He may have been an influential layman. But the context favours the view that he was at least a presbyter. This ecclesiastical Cleon is the type of all vain, noisy, self-asserting teachers, whose main object is to get their own way—an object which they effect by browbeating all who differ from them. No authority is respected and no character spared which seems to oppose their policy. Even an apostle is denounced if he ventures to maintain that the truth may be larger than their view of it. Christian ministers now must not be surprised if they sometimes meet with no better treatment.

Ver. 10.—For this cause, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth. The apostle is proceeding on the lines proscribed by Christ. He has remonstrated with Diotrophes privately; he has sent messengers to him to speak in his name, and Diotrophes has declined to receive them. There remains one step more, and St. John means to take it. "If he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the Church: and if he refuse to hear the Church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile [*ὁ ἔθνικός*, as in ver. 7] and the publican" (Matt. xviii. 17). Just as the missionary brethren bore witness before the Church to the Christian love of Gaius, so the elder will bear witness before the Church to the arrogant hostility of Diotrophes. Once more we see that *works* may be *works*. He who sanctions teachers of false doctrine shares in their "evil works" (2 John 11); and the "works" of Diotrophes partly consist in "prating against us with evil words." The same word for "evil" is used in both cases (*πορνός*)—the word used to express "the evil one;" the coincidence is significant. The insolent opposition to the apostle on the part of Diotrophes, and the severe language used by St. John in condemning him, stand almost alone in the New Testament. For a parallel to the latter we must look to our Lord's denunciation of the arrogant and hypocritical Pharisees who opposed him. The Pharisees, like Diotrophes, not merely refused to walk in the right path themselves, but hindered those who were entering upon it (Luke xi. 52). They also "cast out" those who presumed to take a less narrow view than themselves (John ix. 34, 35).

Ver. 11.—This is the moral to which St. John has been leading up. Diotrophes will at least serve as a warning. A Christian gentleman will note such behaviour in order to avoid it. Strengthened by his own previous walk in the truth (ver. 3), and encouraged by the apostle (vers. 5-8), with Diotrophes as a warning on the one hand, and Demetrius as an example on the other, he ought not to fail in proving his heavenly birth by doing good and avoiding evil (see on 1 John iii. 6).

Ver. 12.—Respecting Demetrius we know no more than is told us here. All that we can safely infer from what is stated is that he

is a person of whom Gaius has not hitherto known much; otherwise this elaborate commendation would scarcely be necessary. Conjectures about him are (1) that he was the bearer of this Epistle to Gaius,—which is not improbable; (2) that he was a member of the same Church as Diotrophes, and had done good service in opposing him,—which is possible; (3) that he is the silversmith of Artemis (Acts xix. 24), now "preaching the faith of which he once made havoc,"—which is not probable. The name was a common one. It is not easy to determine the meaning of the statement that Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself. Perhaps it means that those who bore testimony to Demetrius were something more than a large body of unanimous human witnesses, strong as such testimony would be; in giving their witness they were guided by "the Spirit of truth." Or it may mean that the facts speak of themselves: as soon as Gaius knows Demetrius he will see that the universal commendation of him is amply justified. The true reading in what follows is, "and thou knowest that our witness is true" (comp. John xix. 35; xxi. 24). The calm confidence with which the writer asserts his authority, both over Diotrophes and also as a witness, confirms us in the belief that "the elder" is no less than the apostle.

Vers. 13, 14.—3. CONCLUSION (see notes on 2 John 12, 13). Here the pen or reed (*κἀλαμος*) is mentioned instead of the paper, as a means of writing. The word is found nowhere else in the New Testament in this sense. Note the *ἀλλὰ* and the *δέ*, each with its right force, the former expressing a stronger opposition than the latter: "I had many things to write to thee; nevertheless, I do not care (*ἀλλ' οὐ θέλω*) with ink and pen to write to thee: but I hope (*ἐλπίζω*) straightway to see thee, and we shall speak mouth to mouth." "The friends" are perhaps so called in contrast to the hostility of Diotrophes and his party. Instead of warfare, "peace be to thee;" instead of the wicked prating of enemies, the salutations of friends. The elder concludes with his own personal salutation to all the members of his flock who reside near to Gaius (comp. John x. 3).

### HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1-14.—*An apostolic pastoral to a Christian man.* We have here another priceless fragment, giving us a glimpse into the actual Church life of the first century, and of the Christian deeds and difficulties of one of its honoured members. We have no other inspired letter to a private Church member. This serves a double purpose. It enables us to picture, in outline, Gaius, with his Christian work, his character, and his trials. It enables us also to picture a Church as to its fellowship, its constitution, and

its work. Gaius was a member of a Christian Church (ver. 9, *τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ*), though we do not know of which. He was, apparently, one of St. John's own spiritual children (ver. 4, *τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα*), who gave the apostle unfeigned joy (ver. 3), as, beholding his steadfast grasp of the truth (ver. 3) and his upright walk, he regarded this as the greatest gift of God's grace (ver. 4) he could desire to receive. His reputation was so well maintained (ver. 6) that the apostle felt sure enough of his true spiritual prosperity to warrant him in cherishing the wish that he might make as much progress and be in as good health in a worldly as he was in a religious point of view (ver. 2). Gaius was not only a helper of his own Church, but a lover of the brethren, even though they might be strangers to him (ver. 5, Greek); for when men had gone forth among the Gentiles, taking nothing from them, and had spread abroad the Name (ver. 7), it was the delight of Gaius to help such forward on their journey (ver. 6). Still, his work was not easy. Diotrophes, who loved office, was probably jealous of the influence which Gaius had acquired by his unambitious service (vers. 5—9); so that John takes occasion to assure Gaius that what he has done he has well done (ver. 5), and that when he (the apostle) next visits the Church, he will put Diotrophes to shame (ver. 10). It is interesting to note that here, as in his Second Epistle, he speaks of himself as "the elder" (ver. 1). The various expressions in the letter which touch upon the Church life of those days, do, when gathered up and set in order, put before us a Church picture unique in the New Testament writings.

I. THERE IS A DISTINCT CHURCH HERE SPECIFIED OVER WHICH THE APOSTLE JOHN HAD SOME OVERSIGHT. We have before remarked (homily on 2 John) that the apostles' range of superintendence was much wider than that of those who were *only* presbyters or bishops, or overseers (see Bishop Lightfoot, 'Ep. Phil.'). Yet in reference to specific Churches, or individuals in them, it is *as* presbyter that he writes (ver. 1). That there is a distinct Church, to which Gaius belonged, is clear from vers. 9 and 10. The conception of one vast territorial Church does not belong to the New Testament books — "the Churches of Galatia" (Gal. i. 1); "the Church at Ephesus" (Rev. ii. 1), etc.

II. THE MEMBERS OF THIS CHURCH WERE UNITED IN A HOLY FELLOWSHIP, AND RECEIVED EACH OTHER IN CHRIST'S NAME. (Ver. 8; Rom. xiv. 1.) They met together and received reports of faithful Christian service (ver. 6), and were addressed as a community by the apostle (ver. 9).

III. THIS CHURCH HAD A SELF-ACTING CONSTITUTION. (Vers. 9, 10.) This Diotrophes, who loved to have the pre-eminence, and to exercise the power of casting men out of the Church, is one whose lordly ambition is evidently overriding all, and even defying the apostle himself. Evidently this is abnormal. It will be brought to an end. Why? Because the authority of a Church can only be exercised by the Church itself, and cannot be delegated to or usurped by another without a gross invasion of the rights of the Christian priesthood. Of this, more further on. Just now let us observe that the precepts laid down to Churches are such that they cannot be carried out if the Church allows its authority to slip from itself (1 Cor. v.), or if out of any temporal consideration whatever it allows its movements to be regulated by an outer and alien power.

IV. THE OBJECTS SET BEFORE THIS CHURCH ARE CLEAR AND DEFINITE. (Ver. 8.) "That we may be fellow-workers with the truth." It is assumed here that the Church is composed of such as believe and know and exemplify the truth as it is in Jesus. [Though there is no allusion in this letter either to Jesus Christ or to the gospel, yet the phrase, "the truth," bears no uncertain meaning when it comes from John's pen.] These, and these alone, can be fellow-workers therewith. The aim of a Church in its fellowship is not only mutual sympathy, common worship, or the building up of itself from the families of its members. All these are necessary, but these necessary things are not all. The Church is for the diffusion of the truth far and wide. It is bound to send forth men who shall go out among the Gentiles for the sake of the Name, like those to whom Gaius was so conspicuous a friend; yea, and to set forward such on their journey "worthily of God." We gather from the letter that Gaius took such a task upon himself, because Diotrophes would not allow it to be done, but that properly the Church ought to have done it, and not have suffered the whole weight to rest on the shoulders of one man (cf. vers. 5—10). They should have been sustained by the Church from which they went out (*ἐξῆλθον*).

V. THIS CHURCH HAD TO BEAR A SORE TRIAL THROUGH UNSANCTIFIED HUMAN AMBITION. In the preceding Epistle the "advance" man (*προδύων*) is the bane of the Church. Here the ambitious man (*φιλοπρωτεύων*) is such. This spirit showed itself very early among the disciples (Mark ix. 38, 39), and was severely rebuked by the Lord Jesus (Matt. xviii. 1—4). From no other external cause, perhaps, has the Church had to suffer so much as from this. Let the sad and sorry story of Church history be unfolded, and it will tell us a thousand times over that unholiness is the bane of the Church. The latest form of it is "papal infallibility." Priestly assumptions are crippling Churches and ruining souls. Lord-deacons and lordly pastors are a Church's bane. A true and healthy Church life is the analogue of a true and healthy bodily life, where every member fulfils its own functions, and no one interferes with that of another.

VI. THOUGH SOME MEMBERS MAY HINDER AND DISCREDIT A CHURCH, YET THERE ARE OTHERS WHO TRULY HELP AND HONOUR IT. Men like Gaius and Demetrius abound. They are a Church's honour and joy. It is very likely that, owing to their unambitious and unpretending worth, they seldom come to the front, unless compelled by circumstances so to do; but their loyalty to the truth, their holy lives, their kindness and steadfastness, are the honour of the Churches, and the glory of Christ. Doubtless, the "world" will talk more about one Diotrephes than about twelve men like Gaius, and be well pleased to do so. But "the Lord knoweth them that are his."

VII. WHATEVER AND WHEREVER A CHURCH MAY BE, IT IS FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL TO BEAR IN MIND HIS OWN PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH GOD, AND TO ACT ACCORDINGLY. (Vers. 11, 12.) Connection with the holiest Church in the world cannot save us. Association with the most imperfect Church in Christendom cannot hinder our salvation, unless we allow it to do so; in which case, the fault will be our own. Religion is a matter between the soul and God. Strictly so. The question is—Are we born of God? Are we in Christ? Is Christ in us, the Hope of glory? And the *proof* of this lies, not in Church membership, but in the life, and in the life alone. Church membership may be of great service. The fact that it may be made too much of is no argument against it. But ever, ever let us remember that we may be in a Church yet not in the Church. If we are *not* in Christ, we are not in the Church. If we *are* in Christ by a living faith, we are in his true Church, by a right which none can disprove, and which no one ought ever to dispute.

### HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*Ideal prosperity*. "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper," etc. The Authorized Version of this verse seems to carry the meaning that St. John valued physical health and secular prosperity above everything else. The original does not convey such a meaning. Revised Version, "Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth."

I. THE APOSTLE PRAYS THAT HIS FRIEND GAIUS MAY HAVE TEMPORAL PROSPERITY AND PHYSICAL HEALTH. From the expression of this desire in so brief a letter, we may infer that St. John regarded these things as of great importance. 1. *Secular prosperity is desirable*. Non-success in business is to be deprecated. For our own sake, for the sake of our families, and for the sake of our usefulness, prosperity in temporal things is desirable. Wealth is a wonderful power; and in the hands of a wise man it is a great boon both to himself and to others. 2. *Physical health is desirable*. Health of body, for many obvious reasons, is one of God's best gifts to man. It is important also for other reasons which are not obvious to all. The state of the body exercises a great influence upon the mind and soul. It is the organ and agent of both; and, if it be unhealthy, our impressions of the outward will be untrue, and our influence upon the outward will be limited and feeble. Our spiritual feelings and expressions are considerably toned and coloured by our physical condition.

II. THE APOSTLE INDICATES THE REMARKABLE SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY OF HIS FRIEND GAIUS. This is clear from his making his spiritual prosperity the measure of the desired bodily health and temporal prosperity. The next verse also contributes evidence of this prosperity of soul. It was seen in his growing acquaintance with the truth and his growing conformity to the truth. "Brethren . . . bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou

walkest in truth." Perhaps Gaius himself needed this assurance of his spiritual prosperity. "The words of the apostle seem to imply," says Dr. Binney, "that the health of Gaius was somewhat enfeebled. This might affect his feelings, and render the actual prosperity of his soul, while visible to others, unperceived by himself; his excellence was obvious to all who knew him, though bodily infirmity or mental depression concealed the truth from his own consciousness. On this account he was addressed by John in the words of encouragement—words delicately but strongly conveying the apostle's confidence in his spiritual state, and assuring him, at the same time, of his constantly sharing in his supplications and prayers." This spiritual prosperity is more important than material progress and success.

III. THE APOSTLE MAKES THE PROSPERITY OF HIS SOUL THE MEASURE OF THE PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SECULAR PROSPERITY DESIRED FOR GAIUS. This is profoundly significant. Unless our spiritual prosperity be at least commensurate with our temporal prosperity, the latter ceases to be a blessing. All the worldly wealth which a man possesses which is more than proportionate to the wealth of his soul, he will do well to get rid of at once, or by Divine grace bring the wealth of his soul into proportion with it. Without this correspondence we cannot use wealth aright, riches will injure us, the material will crush the spiritual in us. When outward riches are more than proportionate to his godliness and grace, they are a curse to their possessor. But when there is a proportion between the two, wealth is a blessing worthy an apostle's prayer. What astounding revolutions would take place if this prayer were universally realized! What transformations in *health*! Many now hale and strong would become weak and sickly. Many now diseased and feeble would become sound and vigorous. What transformations in *circumstances*! Many pampered sons and daughters of riches and luxury would come to poverty and want. Many of the indigent would pass from the abode of penury to the palace of ease and plenty. "A terrible wish this," says Binney, "if it were offered for and were to take effect upon many a professor: it would blast them in body and ruin them in circumstances; it would render them, like the Church that thought itself rich and increased in goods, 'poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.'" Shall I offer this prayer for you? If this prayer were realized, the physical would bear the true proportion to the spiritual, and the temporal to the eternal. Learn how far secular wealth is desirable.—W. J.

Vers. 3, 4.—*Spiritual prosperity*. "For I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee," etc. In these and some subsequent verses we have some aspects and evidences of the spiritual prosperity of Gaius.

I. ASPECTS OF SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY. "Brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth, even as thou walkest in truth." 1. *Truth appropriated in mind and heart*. Our interpretation of the words, "thy truth," would be superficial and inadequate if we simply said that they express the sincerity of Gaius. The expression involves this, that he was true in religion and in life; but it means that his religious beliefs were correct—that he held the truth concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ. On these subjects pernicious errors had arisen in the Church. Some denied the Godhead of our Saviour; others denied the reality of his manhood. "The first stumbled at his pre-existence and incarnation, because he suffered indignity and anguish; the other, admitting his Divine nature, thought it beneath him actually to suffer, and therefore denied that his body or his sufferings were anything else but illusory appearances" (Binney). Against each of these errors St. John wrote. And by the expression, "the truth," he generally means the apostolic doctrine concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ. "This truth Gaius held; held it as his life; it was 'in him,' as filling his intellect and affections; in his understanding as a source of light, in his heart as the object of love." The apostle, as we have learned from his former Epistles, attached the utmost importance to correct religious belief. 2. *Truth manifested in life and conduct*. "Thou walkest in truth." His practical life was in harmony with his professed creed. The truth he held was not merely a form of sound words, but a living force in his character and conduct. His faith was not a mere speculation or opinion, but a thing of deep feeling and firm conviction. The faith that does not influence the life towards harmony with itself is not faith in the scriptural sense; it is assent, or opinion; but it is not Christian faith, or saving faith. Our real faith moulds the life

into conformity with the truth believed. St. John quite as earnestly insisted upon practising the truth as upon holding it. "He that doeth good is of God; he that doeth evil hath not seen God" (ver. 11; and 1 John iii. 7, 10). Let us, like Gaius, hold the truth, make it our own; and also live the truth, walk in it day by day. Cultivate a true faith and a holy life.

II. TESTIMONY TO SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY. "Brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth," etc. These brethren were probably those who had been commended to the Church by the apostle, rejected through the influence of Diotrephes (ver. 9), and then entertained by Gaius. They probably presented this report on their return to the Church of which St. John was pastor, and from which they had been sent forth (vers. 5, 6). 1. *It is a pleasure to good men to testify to the excellence of others.* 2. *It is gratifying to a good man to receive the commendation of good men.* "A good name is better than precious ointment." "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches."

III. THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY UPON THE GOOD. "Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children," etc. 1. *The tender relation here mentioned.* "My children." It seems that Gaius had been converted through the ministry of St. John. He was the spiritual child of the apostle; his "true child in faith;" his "beloved child," as St. Paul says of Timothy. This relationship is very close, tender, and sacred (cf. 1 Cor. iv. 14, 15). 2. *The great joy here spoken of.* "Greater joy have I none than this," etc. Every genuine Christian rejoices to find men walking in the truth; but the apostle had the additional joy which arose from the dear and holy tie by which he and Gaius were united. The success of a young man in temporal things is a great joy to his parents. To Christian parents it is a far greater joy when their children give their hearts to God, and walk in truth. And to the Christian minister, and the Sunday school teacher, the spiritual prosperity of those whom they have led to the Saviour is a source of deep and pure rejoicing. Such prosperity is a proof that we have not laboured in vain; it is a distinguished honour conferred upon us by God; and it gives a foretaste of the grand final reward, "Well done, good and faithful servant," etc. To hear of or to behold such fruits of our Christian work both humbles and rejoices us.

Christian brethren, let us aim both to appropriate and to exemplify Christian truth.—W. J.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Hospitality.* "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren," etc. We have here—

I. HOSPITALITY EXERCISED. "Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal." 1. *The persons towards whom it had been exercised.* (1) "Strangers." We mention this first because it is involved in the Greek word for "hospitality," φιλοξενία, i.e. kindness to strangers. Entertaining our friends is not properly hospitality. This virtue, says Barnes, "springs up naturally in countries thinly settled, where the sight of a stranger would be therefore peculiarly pleasant; . . . and where the population was too sparse, and the travellers too infrequent, to justify inn-keeping as a business. From these causes it has happened that there are, properly speaking, no inns or taverns in the region around Palestine. It was customary, indeed, to erect places for lodging and shelter at suitable distances, or by the side of springs or watering-places, for travellers to lodge in. But they are built at the public expense, and are unfurnished. Each traveller carries his own bed and clothes and cooking utensils, and such places are merely designed as a shelter for caravans. It is still so; and hence it becomes, in their view, a virtue of high order to entertain, at their own tables and in their families, such strangers as may be travelling." But these strangers were also: (2) "Brethren." They were fellow-Christians. Hospitality should not be limited to them, but it should be shown to them first and chiefly. The New Testament teaches that kindness should begin at home (1 Tim. v. 8; Gal. vi. 10). The apostles were to "begin at Jerusalem." Christian people have sometimes supplied the wants of the drunken, the indolent, and the wasteful, and neglected their own sober, industrious, and thrifty poor in their need. It seems to us that in such ministries the rule should be—our own home first, our own Church and congregation next, other Christian brethren next, and then the irreligious.



2. *The person by whom it had been exercised.* Gaius. But St. John in the text sets forth the exercise of hospitality as specially becoming in Christians. He speaks of it as "a faithful work," i.e. a work worthy of a faithful man or a Christian. Hospitality is frequently in the sacred Scriptures enjoined upon Christians as a duty (Rom. xii. 13; Heb. xiii. 2; 1 Pet. iv. 9). St. Paul mentions it as one of the duties of a Christian bishop (1 Tim. iii. 2; Titus i. 8). At the last judgment, one reason for the reward of the good is that they exercised hospitality, and one of the charges upon which the wicked will be condemned is the neglect of hospitality (Matt. xxv. 34—46). Accordingly, we find that the "primitive Christians considered one principal part of their duty to consist in showing hospitality to strangers. They were, in fact, so ready in discharging this duty, that the very heathen admired them for it. They were hospitable to all strangers, but especially to those who were of the household of faith. Believers scarcely ever travelled without letters of communion, which testified the purity of their faith, and procured for them a favourable reception wherever the name of Jesus Christ was known" (Calmet). We also find that the hospitality of Gaius was hearty; for the brethren whom he had entertained testified to his *love* (ver. 6). "There is," says Washington Irving, "an emanation from the heart in genuine hospitality which cannot be described, but is immediately felt, and puts the stranger at once at his ease." As occasion requires it, hospitality is still a Christian duty.

II. HOSPITALITY ACKNOWLEDGED. "Who bare witness to thy love before the Church." The evangelists, when they returned to the Church from which they had been sent forth on their work, gave an account of their mission, and in so doing testified to the hearty hospitality of Gaius. This report of Gaius differed from that of a minister of whom I have read. This minister "had travelled far to preach for a congregation at —. After the sermon, he waited, expecting some one would ask him to dinner. At length, the place becoming almost empty, he mustered courage, and walked up to an old gentleman, and said, 'Will you go home and dine with me to-day, brother?' 'Where do you live?' 'About twenty miles from here, sir.' 'No,' said the man, colouring, 'but you must go with me.' 'Thank you; I will, cheerfully.' After this the minister was never troubled about his dinner." Gratefully to testify to kindness like that of Gaius must be a delight to those who are worthy recipients of it.

III. HOSPITALITY ENCOURAGED. "Whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God." This refers to a second visit to Gaius, in which they probably brought this letter with them. To set them forward was to enable them to proceed onward by furnishing them with necessaries for the journey. Here is an admirable rule for regulating the exercise of our hospitality—"worthily of God;" Alford, "In a manner worthy of him whose messengers they are and whose servant thou art." We should show kindness as becometh the followers of him "who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not." "It would," says Barnes, "be particularly expected of Christians that they should show hospitality to the ministers of religion. They were commonly poor; they received no fixed salary; they travelled from place to place; and they would be dependent for support on the kindness of those who loved the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Matt. x. 9—15). The exercise of this duty is often richly rewarded in the present. Certain and splendid is its reward in the future (Matt. x. 40—42; xxv. 34—36).—W. J.

Vers. 7, 8.—*Missionary workers and helpers.* "Because that for his Name's sake they went forth," etc. The Bible is remarkable for its universality. Either directly or inferentially, it has something of importance and value to say on almost everything which affects human life and interests. It throws light on many modern questions; and in studying it we are often agreeably surprised to find directions and hints touching many things which we regard as quite modern, and concerning which we had not expected to find much suggestion or light in its pages. Thus in this short letter we have some apostolic notes on Christian missions, which are as applicable to missionary enterprise now as they were to the mission work of the Church eighteen hundred years ago. Here are notes on—

I. MISSIONARY WORKERS. "For the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." Notice: 1. *The motive of these Christian missionaries.* "For the sake of the Name they went forth." In all that we do we are actuated by

some motive or motives. Christian work is no exception to this rule. In Christian propagandism there may be various motives; e.g. zeal for a cause or society, or for the spread of certain doctrines or forms of Church government, etc. Each of these is allowable in its place; but neither of them is the highest and best motive of Christian service. The most devoted workers in Christianity have a nobler motive than any one or all of these. "Go into a large manufacturing establishment. If you will notice carefully, you will perceive a large shaft running the whole length of the building. To this are attached wheels, and bands go from these wheels to other wheels, and in these is inserted short shafting, and to it are attached augers, saws, knives, and chisels; and by these an immense amount of mechanical work is done. But what is the cause of all this motion? Where is the secret power which makes all this machinery do the work of five hundred men? The answer is easily given. It is steam. Let the steam go down, and this whole machinery would become as still and silent as the grave" (C. M. Temple). And the grand motive power for working the machinery of Christianity is love to the Lord Jesus Christ; not zeal for doctrines, however sound, but love to a Person; not the desire to build up the Church, still less to extend a denomination or sect; but a passionate attachment to the living Lord of the Church. Christ himself is the life of Christianity. The great motive of the noblest Christian work is supreme love to him. "The love of Christ constraineth us" is the explanation of the best and bravest work which is done for men. There is no motive like love; and love to a person will always prove a stronger motive than love to a cause or a creed. When Christ is received into the heart he awakens its highest, holiest, intensest love. This love is the mightiest inspiration in Christian service. It can *dare* most, *do* most, *endure* most. The bravest workers go forth "for the sake of the Name" of Jesus Christ. 2. *The policy of these Christian missionaries.* "Taking nothing of the Gentiles." The apostles held and repeatedly asserted the principle "that they which proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. ix. 14). Our Lord taught the same truth: "The labourer is worthy of his food" (Matt. x. 10). But there were cases in which it was not expedient to enforce this principle. The gospel should be proclaimed without charge to those who know it not; for they cannot be expected to prize it before they are acquainted with it. Therefore these early missionaries, by "their own deliberate purpose," took nothing of the Gentiles to whom they went. If they had done otherwise, they might have been suspected of mercenary motives. We should always be able to say to the heathen, both at home and abroad, "I seek not yours, but you." "I coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." But when the heathen are heathen no longer, but have learned to appreciate the gospel, we may say unto them, "If we sowed unto you spiritual things," etc. (1 Cor. ix. 11, 13, 14). In these respects the apostles and the early missionaries are an example for succeeding ages.

II. *MISSIONARY HELPERS.* "We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-workers with the truth." This brings out the duty of the Church to missionary workers. 1. *To support the missionaries.* "We ought to receive such;" Revised Version, "to welcome;" Alford, "to support." The word signifies not only "to welcome," but "to aid and strengthen." And this should be done in a worthy manner—"worthily of God." Workers for Jesus Christ should be treated with kindness, generously entertained, and encouraged in their work. They need this from the Church. Without it they may "wax weary, fainting in their souls;" and in that case the work will suffer. 2. *To co-operate with the missionaries.* "That we might be fellow-helpers to the truth;" Revised Version, "that we may be fellow-workers with the truth;" Alford, "that we may become fellow-workers for the truth." The idea is that, by supporting the missionaries, Gaius would become a fellow-worker with them in promoting the cause of the truth. This is stated as a reason why he should show kindness to them and help them. It is also clearly implied that it is the duty of the Christian to be a fellow-worker in the cause of the truth. Knowing the truth ourselves, we are morally bound to make it known to others. But there are many who cannot do this themselves by preaching or teaching. Then, according to St. John in our text, they should do it by encouraging and supporting those who can preach or teach. "In this way," says Binney, "Gaius was enabled to do much; far more, in fact, in the way of preaching, than if he himself had been the most eloquent of

preachers; for by aiding many, and helping them on their way and in their work, he was virtually speaking, at the same moment, by many mouths, and in the eye of God might be regarded as converting many souls in several places and at the same time, and when otherwise occupied himself—when he was engaged in his worldly business, at home in his family, asleep in his bed, at rest or on a journey, in sickness or in health, living or dead.” Christians, behold your duty and privilege, to be either missionary workers or missionary helpers.—W. J.

Vers. 9, 10.—*Diotrephes: a beacon.* “I wrote unto the Church: but Diotrephes,” etc.

I. THE CHARACTER OF DIOTREPHES BRIEFLY STATED. “Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them.” We do not know who or what this man was beyond what is stated in our text. Whether he was pastor, elder, deacon, or other office-bearer in the Church, we cannot tell. Whatever he was in other respects, we know that he was ambitious of the highest place and of the greatest power in the Church: he would be first and chief of all, or he would be nothing. An evil and dangerous character in any one. “Before honour is humility.” “A man’s pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.” “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.” “Pride goeth before destruction,” etc. “Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister [or, ‘servant’]; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant [or, ‘bondservant’]; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto,” etc. The chiefship is to be given, not to him who loveth to be first, but to him who most humbly and faithfully serves others. “For every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” “Humility is the surest path to exaltation.” “The highest honour is won by the deepest humility.” He who will be first of all, or nothing, will in the end be last and lowest of all.

II. THE CHARACTER OF DIOTREPHES ILLUSTRATED IN HIS CONDUCT. 1. *He rejected the highest commendation.* “I wrote somewhat unto the Church: but Diotrephes . . . receiveth us not.” He would not recognize the authority of St. John, and rejected the letter of commendation which the apostle had sent to the Church. Neither would he receive the missionaries, and that probably because St. John commended them, and he would acknowledge no one to be greater than himself in the Church to which he belonged. He was determined “that not the apostle, but himself, should rule the Church.” 2. *He defamed the fairest reputation.* “Prating against us with wicked words.” Here are two evils, and one worse than the other. (1) Loquacity. “Prating”—running on with speech. “The reproaches were mere tattle, worth nothing, irrelevant.” “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.” “Be slow to speak.” “If any man bridlETH not his tongue, this man’s religion is vain.” Beware of the slavery of the tongue, and the sin of gab. (2) Slander. “With wicked words.” The holiest man is exposed to the venom of the tongue of the slanderer. Arrogance leads to terrible extremes; it dares to calumniate the most beautiful-spirited apostle. When a man has done wrong to another, he finds it necessary either to confess the wrong or to say false and wicked things against him he has wronged, hoping thereby to justify himself. So Diotrephes prated against St. John with wicked words. Therefore beware of the first wrong step. The slanderer frequently assails the best of men. Our Lord was thus attacked. “A gluttonous man and a wine-bibber.” “He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the demons casteth he out the demons.”

“No might nor greatness in mortality  
Can censure ‘scape; back-wounding calumny  
The whitest virtue strikes: what king so strong  
Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?”  
(Shakespeare.)

“Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,  
Thou shalt not escape calumny.”

(Ibid.)

Be not dismayed if you are thus assailed. Loathe this sin. 3. *He prohibited the exercise of a sacred privilege and duty.* “Neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth,” etc. He would neither receive the missionaries

himself nor allow others to do so. "The dog in the manger" is the best exponent of his spirit and conduct. He prevented some from doing two things which are at once duties and privileges: (1) exercising hospitality to the "brethren and strangers;" (2) aiding them in their work of evangelization. How terribly evil was the course he pursued! He injured the apostle, the missionaries, those who would have received them, those to whom they were sent, the whole Church, and the Church's Lord; and yet he was a member of the Church, and the chief man in it! He went so far as to expel from the Church those who would have entertained the evangelists. "And casteth them out of the Church."

III. THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF DIOTREPHES CONDEMNED. In this letter they are justly censured. And further rebuke is referred to: "If I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth," etc. There is nothing vindictive in this. The apostle would vindicate his own authority and the commission of the missionaries, enlighten the Church, and rebuke Diotrephes. "There are awkward men in the Church; men who, if they have any grace at all, have so much of the devil in them still that their grace has but little control over them. Good men should resist such persons. It may be very pleasant to talk of dealing with them in a spirit of charity, and being gentle with them, and forbearing and kind. Up to a certain point this is perfectly right. There is a work which compassion has to do; there is a sphere in which pity may be called into active exercise; at the same time, we are to mark those who cause divisions and offences, and to avoid them; and there is a certain class of men on whom pity has no effect, and compassion is lost; and the only thing which can be done is to 'deliver them over unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme'" (Dr. Joseph Parker).

One masterful, power-loving man in a Church may work incalculable mischief and injury; therefore (1) let us guard against the presence or growth of such a spirit in ourselves; (2) let us take heed that we afford no encouragement or countenance to such a spirit in others.—W. J.

Vers. 11, 12.—*Imitating the good.* "Beloved, follow not that which is evil," etc. This exhortation occurs here very naturally after the mention of Diotrephes. "Beloved, imitate not that which is evil;" do not copy Diotrephes; regard him not as an example, but as a beacon. But imitate the good; take Demetrius as a pattern; copy his conduct.

I. MAN IMITATES. It is implied here that Gaius would imitate either the good or the evil—either Demetrius or Diotrephes. The propensity to imitation is one of the strongest in human nature. It is this which makes example so much mightier than precept. This propensity is one of the earliest to be called into exercise in human life. The tender infant is stirred by it almost before it knows anything. Very frequently we imitate others unconsciously. The extent of our conscious and intentional imitation is very small as compared with our unconscious and unintentional imitation. This tendency plays a most important part in human education. Without intentional imitation instruction would be impossible, as in reading, writing, etc. And unintentional imitation has great influence in the growth of habit and the formation of character. A very important thing is this tendency to imitation.

II. MAN SHOULD IMITATE ONLY THE GOOD. "Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good," etc. Many and forcible reasons may be assigned for this; e.g. that the opposite course must inevitably lead to ruin; that this course ennobles and blesses him who pursues it. But let us confine ourselves to the reasons assigned in the text. 1. *Because the good-doer is of God.* "He that doeth good is of God;" i.e. he that doeth good truly and naturally, in whom well-doing is not the exception, but the rule of life, is of God. He is "begotten of God" (1 John iii. 9). He proves that he is a child of God by his likeness to his Father in character and conduct. He is inspired by God both as to his inner life and as to his outward practice. Notice how practical is the apostle's idea of true personal religion. The godly man is the man who does good; his good works are the evidence of his godliness. We should imitate the good because of their intimate and blessed relation to God. 2. *Because the evil-doer has no true knowledge of God.* "He that doeth evil hath not seen God." By doing evil we must understand not an occasional and exceptional

action, but the general tenor of life and conduct. He that doeth evil is one the general characteristic of whose works is evil. Such a one has not seen God. The beholding of God is spiritual. And the vision of God and the doing of evil are incompatible; because: (1) Purity of heart is essential to the seeing of God, and, where purity of heart is, sin cannot be the general characteristic of the conduct. "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (2) When a man has seen the Lord, he cannot live in the practice of sin. He who has seen and appreciated the highest beauty cannot live in constant and willing fellowship with extreme deformity. And he whose soul has seen anything of the supremely Perfect and the infinitely Beautiful cannot look upon sin with approval; it must appear loathsome unto him. This consideration tends to strengthen faith in the full and final salvation of every regenerate man. He who has tasted the high joys of Divine vision and communion can never be content with the pleasures of sin or satisfied with the things of this world. Do not imitate the evil; for the practice of it darkens and destroys the vision of the soul; it excludes from the highest and divinest knowledge, even the knowledge which is the soul's life. "This is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God," etc.

III. GOOD EXAMPLES ARE GENERALLY AVAILABLE. It is very seldom that we are unable to point to some known example well worthy of imitation. To such a one St. John calls attention. "Demetrius hath the witness of all, and of the truth itself; yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true." Diotrefes was a beacon to be shunned; Demetrius, an example to be imitated. He was probably a member of the same Church as Gaius, and well known to him; and therefore the apostle does not state what his chief excellences were, but from his being named here we infer that they were those which Diotrefes had not. Where the latter was wanting, Demetrius excelled. Good character is not always accompanied by good reputation, but in the case of Demetrius it was. He had a good reputation of: (1) St. John: "We also bear witness." (2) Gaius: "Thou knowest that our witness is true." (3) All who knew him; or, perhaps, of all the brethren mentioned in vers. 3, 5, 10: "Demetrius hath the witness of all." (4) "And of the truth itself." Alford says, "The objective truth of God, which is the Divine rule of the walk of all believers, gives a good testimony to him who really walks in the truth. This witness lies in the accordance of his walk with the requirement of God's truth." That truth, like a "mirror, seemed to place in a clear light his Christian virtue and uprightness, and thus to bear witness to him." The most precious testimony is that of the truth itself. When that is in our favour, we may thankfully rejoice. So manifold and excellent was the testimony borne of Demetrius. In most places and societies there are some who are worth imitating. Let us imitate them in so far as they embody the truth. There are seasons in our experience when good human examples are specially valuable. Sometimes the Perfect Example seems to tower far above our imitation, and we despair of ever copying that with success. In such moods the excellent human example is peculiarly precious. It is not so very much higher than our own level of attainment; it encourages us; and, when our despondency has passed away, we are able to aspire once more for conformity to the Supreme Exemplar.—W. J.

Vers. 13, 14.—*Valediction.*<sup>1</sup> "I had many things to write," etc. What a precious boon communication by writing is when communication by speech is unattainable! How valuable is writing also when accuracy and permanence are desired! Yet writing has its disadvantages as compared with speech, as St. John found at this time.

I. THE APOSTLE'S HOPE. "I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face." He hoped for communication by speech, which, as compared with writing, is: 1. *More easy and rapid.* 2. *More expressive.* 3. *More pleasurable.* The sainted apostle mentions this in closing his former private Epistle. "That your joy may be fulfilled."

II. THE APOSTLE'S BENEDICTION. "Peace be unto thee." A very comprehensive benediction. It comprises: 1. *Peace in our relation to God.* This peace is a consequence of the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation unto God. "Thy sins are

<sup>1</sup> Most of the points stated in this outline are more fully stated in our homily on 2 John 12, 13.

forgiven . . . go in peace." "Being justified by faith, let us have peace with God," etc. The peace also which flows from confidence in God as regards the possibilities of the future (see Matt. vi. 25-34). "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." 2. *Peace in our relation to men.* The absence of jealousy, revenge, bitterness of spirit, etc. The practical recognition of the claims of others upon us. And the exercise of good will, kindness, etc. 3. *Peace in our own being.* The accusations of conscience silenced by the removal of our guilt through the mercy of God.

"I feel within me  
A peace above all earthly dignities,  
A still and quiet conscience."

(Shakespeare.)

The conflict between the flesh and the spirit ended in the victory of the spirit. The rebellion of passion against principle, and of appetites against aspirations, quelled by the power of the Divine life in the soul. By his grace God establishes order in a man's own being, brings the faculties and propensities of his nature into harmony, and so gives to him inward peace. In this way the peace of the Christian soul is complete. Our Lord bequeathed this peace unto his disciples. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," etc. (John xiv. 27; xx. 19, 26). 4. *Perfect peace in heaven.* Here our realization of this peace is variable. Doubts assail us; fears depress us; sickness and sorrow darken and disturb, if they do not distress us. Serenity of spirit is not always ours. But hereafter "God shall wipe away every tear from our eyes," etc. (Rev. xxi. 4).

III. THE APOSTLE'S GREETING. "The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name."—W. J.

Vers. 1-14.—*The aged presbyter's letter to a private Church-member.* "The elder unto Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth." As in the Second Epistle, John takes the familiar official designation of "the elder." The receiver of the Epistle was regarded by John with more than ordinary affection; for he at once designates Gaius "the beloved," and three times in the course of the short Epistle he addresses him by this designation. He was *widely* beloved; for the addition here, while emphasizing the apostle's own affection for Gaius, widens the range of affection for him. "Whom I (for my part) love," he says; i.e. he along with many others, not he in opposition to some who withheld love or entertained hate. He loved Gaius as he loved "the elect lady and her children"—*in truth*. This Epistle contains no statement of the *Incarnation*; but we know that by the apostle the Incarnation was regarded as the vital part of the truth (1 John iv. 1, 2). It was the highest revelation of Godhead, which bound hearts to God, and hearts to hearts in the Christian circle. Attached to the truth himself, he could not love every one alike; but he loved Gaius as a friend of the truth.

I. GAIUS. 1. *His well-being desired.* "Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." This is the salutation thrown into an unusual form. As the foundation of the good wish, Gaius is congratulated on his *soul-prosperity*. This soul-prosperity is brought out, in what follows, in connection with a satisfactory relation to the truth, and specially the practice of hospitality. In the form given to the good wish, it is implied that there is a *relation between soul-prosperity and other prosperity*. To wish a man *success in business and good bodily health* is to wish him well so far; only the wish does not go far enough. For every man has an eternal interest as well as a temporal interest, has a soul as well as a body; and, if we are his true well-wishers, we shall wish him well in the whole, and not merely in part, of his well-being. To wish him success in business and good bodily health *alone* is as though a friend were travelling from Edinburgh to London, and we wished him well as far as York—not saying anything about the rest of the journey. The lower prosperity is not to be sought for a man apart from soul-prosperity. It might seem from the old translation that it is to be sought *above all things*; but there is a mistranslation, which has properly been corrected in the Revised translation. John expresses for Gaius the wish that *in all things* relating to business and health it may be well with him; not, however, without regard to his spiritual con-

dition. His soul was prospering; he was therefore a man for whom this might be safely sought. He was making a good use of his means in the interest of the truth, and so his health was precious. What, then, John wishes for Gaius is in effect this—*more means and better health*, that he might have more to serve God with. The more that such a man as Gaius had, the more good he would do. But we cannot safely wish for every man more means and better health. That might only mean more to serve the devil with. What some need is to get a severe check in business, to be laid down on a bed of sickness; and our wish for them may justly be that this should happen to them, rather than that they should lose their souls. From this it will be seen that a Christian may be *justified in seeking the utmost success in business and the largest measure of health*, provided his motive is to have more means and better health with which to serve God. This may be a greater spur to diligence than even the desire to amass wealth, being attended with the advantage that it leaves the mind free and buoyant. Let us learn the *benefit of well-wishing*. It was no small thing to have John as a well-wisher, both from the office which he held and his great spiritual experience; and the likelihood was that Gaius would get more means and better health because of the aged apostle's wish. Let us, in our letters or otherwise, wish our friends well in their worldly affairs and in their health, not without regard to the degree in which their souls prosper, and God will see to our wishes taking effect. 2. *His relation to the truth rejoiced in.* (1) *Truth appropriated.* "For I rejoiced greatly, when brethren came and bare witness unto thy truth." The joy of John was great because of brethren arriving and testifying to the reception of the truth by Gaius. It is mentioned here as that on which his soul-prosperity depended. One of the lessons taught by the *open flower* in the ornamentation of the temple was *receptivity*. "It lies open to catch the sunshine, and to drink the rain and the dew, shuts up when the sun departs, but expands itself again when the sun's rays touch it. By reception the plant and the flower live; and by reception the soul of man lives and grows." We are to be careful to give the soul its proper nourishment, which is the truth: thoughts of God's love, thoughts of his ends in our life. If we entertain false views of God and of life, we are really taking poison into our souls. Gaius felt the need of the truth to nourish and beautify him. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts." This Gaius had; by assimilation, it had become part of his being. (2) *Truth carried out into conduct.* "Even as thou walkest in truth." This was more than receiving the truth, being its proper *consequent*. The reception of the truth appeared (so that brethren could testify to it) in a higher style of conduct. It is under sunny skies that the finest colouring in nature is to be found. It is in good society that the finest accent is to be found. So it is those who move within the circle of the Divine thoughts, lie open to the Divine influences, that attain to the most attractive style of life. Brethren carry away a good report of them, which is cheering to the souls of veterans. *Appended comment emphasizing the apostle's joy.* "Greater joy have I none than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." The reception of the truth was implied in walking in the truth; therefore it was enough to note the latter. There were many to whom John stood in the relation of *spiritual father* (more than those who owed to him their spiritual birth); he was no stranger to *fatherly joy*. And what gave him joy? To hear of his children, that they were prospering in their worldly affairs, that they were enjoying good health, that they were exempted from persecution. It did cheer him to hear of their lower prosperity; but what cheered him, with more refreshing influence, was to hear of their soul-prosperity, as evidence in their walking in the truth. 3. *Practice of hospitality.* (1) *Commended.* "Beloved, thou doest a faithful work in whatsoever thou doest toward them that are brethren and strangers withal." The truth *binds* the whole walk; it *specially* bound Gaius in the practice of hospitality. While just, he made a free use of his means. The objects of his hospitality were brethren, as it appears, missionary brethren, and missionary brethren who were strangers to him, and therefore had no claim on him beyond their Christian position and calling. He had opportunity of rendering them service beyond simply entertaining them; and, whatever service he rendered, he did it as the truth required, *i.e.* *handsomely*. (2) *Witnessed to.* "Who bare witness to thy love before the Church." It was love that moved Gaius to serve the missionary brethren; and they were mindful of services rendered. On their return to the Church over which John presided, in giving an account of their missionary labours,

they told, in presence of the Church, how well they had been treated by Gaius. Thus the things which were lovely became also the things of good report. (3) *Encouraged.* "Whom thou wilt do well to set forward on their journey worthily of God." The missionary brethren were returning to their labours his way; the apostle, therefore, bespeaks for them a good reception. Let him follow up his former kindnesses, and set them forward on their journey, by providing the necessary rest, and also, as is suggested by what follows, by making some provision against their future needs. He was to do this *worthily of God*, i.e. as representing to them the Divine solicitude. *They were deserving.* "Because that for the sake of the Name they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." The Jews "besought Jesus earnestly for the centurion, saying, He is worthy that thou shouldest do this for him: for he loveth our nation, and himself built us our synagogue." The missionary brethren were worthy that Gaius should assist them by setting them forward on their journey. It was for the sake of the Name that they went forth, i.e. "not for their own occasions and earthly interests," but that the Name of Christ might be magnified. They went forth from the home Church (which was limited in its resources) to convert the Gentiles. That they might not hinder their aim by the appearance of being mercenary, they chose (so far as it was necessary) to labour with their own hands, rather than take from the Gentiles. The accomplishment of their aim, in the formation of a Gentile Christian Church (to be cared for by others while they went further on), was work to which the building of a sacred house was secondary. It was work fitted to exalt the Name, showing the power of Divine love over the hardness of men's hearts and the evils of Gentilism. They, then, whose missionary zeal was kindled by the Name must not be overlooked. *They were representatives of the truth.* "We therefore ought to welcome such, that we may be fellow-helpers with the truth." We are to think of Gaius, in accordance with his known character, *taking the burden* (so we may translate) for these men—making them happy while in his house, and contributing not only for the journey, but for the end of the journey, so that with disengaged hands they might begin their mission; and thus, while not proclaiming the truth himself, earning the praise of being a "fellow-helper with the truth." There is an *obligation* lying on us to take the burden for the missionaries. While, in the interest of the truth, they go forth as bearers of the truth to the heathen, we are, by our contributions, to leave their hands and minds free for their proper work; thus, while not bearers of the truth ourselves (from want of opportunity and qualifications), having an interest in the truth, and having the satisfaction and honour of being "fellow-helpers with the truth."

II. DIOTREPHES. 1. *His resistance of John's authority.* "I wrote somewhat unto the Church: but Diotrophes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not." The particular Church is not named; but we must understand it to be that to which Gaius belonged, so that we have a new element introduced. Gaius entertained the stranger missionaries *in the face of opposition*. The opposition came from Diotrophes. The occasion was a letter from John. This letter has not been preserved; we must think of it as containing a request to the Church to give a favourable reception to the missionaries. The request was only reasonable; but Diotrophes opposed it, not because he disliked John's teaching, or the teaching of the missionaries, but simply because he wished to assert his personal authority. He belonged to the class of those who *love to have the pre-eminence*; who are bent, not on the peace and prosperity of the Church, but on their being first in the Church, even at the expense of its peace and prosperity. And this ambitious member or office-bearer of the Church succeeded for a time; he tasted the sweets of ecclesiastical power, in getting a majority to agree with him against the apostle. We come here upon the design of this letter to Gaius. 2. *His coming defeat.* "Therefore, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he doeth, prating against us with wicked words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and them that would he forbiddeth, and casteth them out of the Church." Diotrophes did not gain his victory without working for it. His works, however, were not such as could bear to be remembered. His punishment would be, on the coming of John, to have his works brought to remembrance. Their true valuation would be his dethronement from power. What he did was to speak against John and his friends. While his words were *null*, they were *mischievous*. Not content with speaking, he had recourse to *action*. He set the example



of shutting his door against the missionaries; and when some (one being Gaius) chose to be guided rather by the apostle's letter, he at once vetoed them, and, on their non-submission to his authority, excommunicated them. But this working, meantime triumphant, would soon, and very simply, be put a stop to. "Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that *the triumphing of the wicked is short?*"

III. DEMETRIUS. 1. *His unlikeness to Diotrephes.* "Beloved, imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: he that doeth evil hath not seen God." While there is evil working in Churches, there is also good working. The evil is there for us to avoid; the good is there for us to imitate. We need to learn to "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not." The Johannine principle of discrimination is simple. He that is associated with the working of good has his life derived from God; he that is associated with the working of evil (whatever his profession) is not in the way of receiving first impressions of God in his true nature, or is not placed so as to make a commencement in the Divine life. 2. *Threefold testimony to his excellence.* "Demetrius hath the witness of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, we also bear witness; and thou knowest that our witness is true." Demetrius had the witness of *all men*. We are to regard the language as hyperbolic, not limiting the "all" to the Christian circle, nor to the few who in the strictest sense could be witnesses, but the many who spoke well of Demetrius are made "all," the more to impress us with their number. Demetrius had a witness greater than of numbers: he had the witness of *the truth itself*. Though there had been not a man to be a witness to him, the truth (to personify it) could have been produced as a witness. Though no man had owned him, the truth would have owned him. Apart from the personification, the idea is that there was a close correspondence between what Demetrius was and what the truth demanded. But to judge of this correspondence requires a competent witness, with opportunity and also with correct intuitions of the truth; and so, in the third place, John comes forward to vouch for Demetrius—a witness than whom none could be more satisfactory to Gaius. We are not told who this Demetrius was; but it is not an improbable conjecture that he was the bearer of the Epistle. If so, then it is to be noted how, by a happy turn, he supplies him with the necessary recommendation.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Reason for not writing more.* "I had many things to write unto thee, but I am unwilling to write them to thee with ink and pen: but I hope shortly to see thee, and we shall speak face to face." It is interesting to note how the writing materials are here, not "paper and ink" (2 John 12), but "ink and pen." He could have put his pen to the writing of many things; for Gaius and he had much in common in their sympathies. He had written meantime to counteract, so far as he could by writing, the dangerous influence of Diotrephes. He hoped soon to see Gaius. When he saw him, and they spoke face to face, he would have more opportunity and freedom to disburden himself. 2. *Salutations.* "Peace be unto thee. The friends salute thee. Salute the friends by name." John was at peace with Gaius; he wished the whole world to be at peace with him. They had common friends. Friends with John (whom the bearer would name) saluted Gaius. Friends with Gaius, he (the receiver of the letter) was first to name singly, and then to salute in this form, "John sends his salutation to thee."—R. F.

# HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

## THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.



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