

# WRITINGS OF R B JUNR

by R.B. Junr

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*A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by R.B. Junr, compiled for study and devotional reading.*

9 Chapters

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## S. Divine Facts and Human Theories.

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Divine Facts and Human Theories.

It was well pointed out in a recent number of this periodical (in a fragment bearing honoured initials) that "Christianity is a religion of persons and facts." This can be asserted of no other religious system. These may indeed be linked with the name, or give particulars of the history, of some celebrated individual, be it Confucius, Mahomet, or Gautama Buddha. But it is evident that the name is a mere label to differentiate them from other systems; they would be just as true, or rather as false (I speak of them as systems, and not of any fragments of morality contained in them), if some other name were appended to them, whether mythical as in the case of Buddha, historical as in that of Confucius or of Mahomet. In short, they are a tissue of theories with a residuum of sound moral precepts perhaps, though these, at all events in the Koran, notoriously stolen from the Bible. Here then is the high vantage-ground of Holy Scripture, that it presents realities and not surmises. For it is logical to meet facts with facts, as it is altogether Godlike to meet dismal facts such as sin and sorrow, pain and death, with divine facts, even redemption through a divine Person become Man. I contend therefore that on the comparatively low ground of mere reasonableness Christianity can show gain de cause over merely human systems. For how fatuous to essay to remedy facts by mere theories! It may be urged indeed that philosophy is content to explain them, or at least to make the attempt. Be it so. Yet surely the facts of human life remain none the less dismal for the explanation. Nay, sin, sorrow, and death are not thus to be conjured. Theorising about evil has never appreciably lessened the sum total of wickedness in the world; and it were hardly too much to say that the philosophers profited as little as any by their own polished periods, wherein they expatiated on virtue and goodness. Take bereavement again. Eloquent essays have been penned on the duty of stoical recognition of it on the ground of the universality of its sway. More truly sings the poet, "That loss is common\* would not make my own less bitter — rather more." Moreover that the explanations are not very satisfactory, even to their framers, is evident. For are they not ever modifying them, as they are contradicted by opposing philosophies? So much then by way of a brief appraisalment of the relative value of facts and theories.

{\* Tennyson, "In Memoriam."} In the next place it is clear that, if these blessed facts of revelation are duly attested, the whole question is settled. It is vain for me to reject them because they do not square with my theories, which very likely have no securer foundation than an interested will, if not a perverted mind, and a sinful heart. If the evidence be, as it is, overwhelming, what avails impotent theorising? Alas, the evidences of Christianity are deemed inadequate only by such as refuse to behold them in what Bacon called a "dry light," free from the mists of prejudice and dislike. It has been pertinently said by a well-known divine that "the world has never refused its assent to any other facts supported by evidence so cogent as are those of the Gospel History; it has given unhesitating assent to many a strange fact which rests on infinitely less." This witness is true. On the other hand, it is indisputable that no mere intellectual accrediting of God's word will save the soul or bring to God, however legitimate it be to urge the cogency of the evidence as

leaving no excuse for unbelief. No doubt conscience must be reached by the action of the Holy Spirit in order to saving acceptance of the truth. The soul, thus illuminated, humbly and gratefully bows to God's word, and grows into an appreciation of its marvellous adaptation to human necessities, of its infinite loving-kindness and its illimitable grandeur. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself" (1 John 5:10). Of this indeed the unbeliever knows nothing, though to the renewed heart, as one has said, "Christ may be as near and real as the man who touches your elbow"\* — and, I would add, infinitely more so. But the point here pressed is (1) the facts, and (2) the evidence for the facts, which is, as has been said, so exceeding. To sum up the contention of this little paper, without taking the high ground of spiritual evidence to which we are entitled, it is manifest that Christianity is not only a "religion of facts," but of facts irrefragably authenticated.

{\* Bishop Thorold.}

One word more as to theories. Such may be excellent, or at least plausible in their own sphere. Take the fashionable philosophy of the day — Evolution. None but a foolish person would deny that there is such a principle in operation. But is it the only one? Can it account for everything? Emphatically not. Yet the majority of the scientists of the age are overmastered by it, like men so immediately under the shadow of a great building that they are unable to grasp its relative position to other buildings. Yet if this attempt at unification were limited to material things, it would be of less consequence. But now we have men like Professor Drummond trying to embrace all things spiritual and temporal in one sweeping generalisation. It is plain therefore that the danger of theorising is not merely in clinging to suppositions instead of to divine facts, but that the force of the facts themselves is weakened by speculating as to their origin. For, applying their favourite idea of development, the Bible is looked at as merely the record of a partial and rather precarious inspiration, and not as the absolute and exclusive word of God. The fatal doctrine is abroad that the Holy Spirit in the church inspires apart from that word, and that He enables men to judge what is and what is not of permanent value. I believe, I do no wrong to the new teachers; but, if not, on what a perilously inclined plane are they moving! "To the law and to the testimony" (Isaiah 8:20) has ever been the divine criterion. "It is written" is the constant reminder of the blessed Lord. Truly God is jealous both of adding to and taking from that word.

Finally, to prevent misconception, it is well to say that development, in the sense that God did not reveal everything at once, is of course most true, for it was part of His purpose. Hence the saying of Augustine, "In the O.T. the New is latent; in the N.T. the Old is patent." But development of this kind is not what is meant by the new school. R. B. Junr.

## **S. I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God."**

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I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God."

John 20:17.

1897 312 It seems difficult to imagine how any thoughtful mind among believers can miss the majesty of these words. There are indeed writings merely human that are not without a certain elevation, as they are permeated with a charm that appeals to the cultivated intelligence. But how great the contrast between the choicest utterances of the princes of literature and the unique sublimity of the holy scriptures! The difference is as great as in the circumstances that call them forth. It must at any rate be granted, even by a sceptic, that, supposing Christ to have been what He claimed to be, all His words and acts are consistent with His being God incarnate. And more than this, all that is written about Him in the four Gospels, all that is written in the Acts and the Epistles, is stamped with the same consistency. Nay, what, on any other hypothesis, becomes of the innumerable predictions in the Old Testament, that point onwards to a coming Saviour? Whittle down your conception of the nature of Christ, and you are confronted with a bewildering enigma. Bow to Him as "the Word made flesh," and all is plain — not to speak of the incalculable blessing to the soul that does bow.

Now in none of our Lord's words is there greater sublimity than in those that head these remarks. We, to whom, by God's grace, Christ is everything, hear them echoing over the sad tumult of nearly nineteen centuries, and, like sounds of true music clearly caught amid discordant noises, they ring out sweet and clear today. And they have a voice for today. We do not, I think, dwell enough on these great events in our Lord's history here below. Undoubtedly the atonement must ever occupy the central place, when we think of our deep need. Without that "precious death" it were vain to plead the incarnation, indispensable and supreme as that fact is. But we do well to ponder every now and again both the resurrection and ascension. The latter event indeed might have followed at once on the former but for God's purposes of grace. And undoubtedly the blessed Lord at once passed into "the holiest" after He had "dismissed His spirit" (Matthew 27:50). But the ascension was the crowning act of God in vindicating His beloved Son. It is also true that Christ ascended by His own act. "I ascend." Here we have the divine majesty and sublimity of the passage.

I do not dwell at length upon the occasion of these great words of our Lord. We know that Mary Magdalene, in her most commendable love, would have detained the Saviour, not knowing that by her, as by the church at large in the sequel, Christ was to be known only after a heavenly sort. No contradiction between our Lord's manner here, and His permission subsequently to the other women to hold Him by the feet. For did not these typify how Israel will know Christ in the millennium? But Mary's was a higher privilege, though then she might hardly realise it. And so the Lord utters the magnificent words, "I ascend," etc. And is there not exquisite beauty in the fact that

"Father" comes before "God"? It is doubtless the same divine hand that wrote, by the same St. John, "grace and truth." The tenderer relation comes first. Still, as more than one has remarked, it is not "our Father," nor "our God." That could not be. Whatever the grace, never can the interval between the Creator and the creature be bridged — not in that sense. The Lord could tell His disciples in that most comprehensive prayer, which He gave them, "When ye pray, say 'our Father.'" But His is a unique Sonship, though doubtless at the same time there is an emphasising of the truth that His God and Father is also ours. But where in the whole range of human writings, ancient or modern, can anything be found approaching these words? I speak not of mere grace and charm of diction, wherein moderns are only gratified if they can equal the ancients, but in subject-matter. Doubtless there are touches of true pathos as well as sound and lofty sentiments on the vanity of human life in ancient and modern classics. But where is there assurance? where comfort and anchorage for the soul? It is well known that there is none. How could there be? "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought," sang a great but wayward poet. Nay, but the Christian sings most sweetly in his brightest joys. For this we have to thank Christ alone. His was the sorrow, the unfathomable pain. It is easy to write about it. It is less easy to enter into it, and to shape one's life according to it. But at least it is something, spite of shortcoming abundant, to love beyond all else these and like words of our Lord, words that are said to us as truly as to Mary of Magdala — to us, who have not, like her, seen Him in His humiliation, but who, like her, are to see Him in His glory, and be with Him, when we too have ascended to the Father. R. B. Junr.

## S. I could wish myself accursed from Christ."

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I could wish myself accursed from Christ."

Romans 9:3.

I do not suppose these words are often taken as a text. If St. Paul had not given utterance to them, it is hardly too much to say that nobody else would have imputed such sentiments to him. It is true that the English Versions, Authorised and Revised, alike give it a little more strongly than the original warrants. At any rate the Greek simply says, "I was wishing, or praying."\* It was doubtless but an impossible wish of love, such as Moses had felt and expressed before. For Paul was the last man deliberately to wish himself "accursed from Christ." As he more than any man knew and appreciated what it is to be "in Christ," so he must necessarily have had the keenest sense of the infinite misery consequent upon losing Christ — if that were possible. Indeed it could not be. None of all that the Father had given Him can be plucked out of the Saviour's gracious hand. But still the apostle meant it at the time, meant it so much indeed that he was led of the Holy Spirit to record his wish on the imperishable page of scripture, where he solemnly affirms that the same Holy Spirit was a witness of his pain. And, I doubt not, there is more than one lesson to be learnt from it.

[\*The pluperfect would give the wish fixity; the imperfect was exactly the right tense to convey it by, as the aorist would have gone too far in sanctioning it as a fact. — Ed. B. T.]

And, first, it is most refreshing to find that St. Paul speaks out, as always, plainly and fearlessly, as well as most sincerely. We know of course that these qualities must characterise the divine word. Such seems but its low-water mark, if we may so term it. Still there is nothing stilted in the Bible. We no doubt are sometimes in danger of using high-flown language, of speaking or wishing it may be more as we fancy our brethren will approve, than as we soberly realise. We may be too careful at times to keep to the beaten track. Undoubtedly we should guard our words as well as our ways, and seek to speak only as the Holy Spirit would direct. But while, on the one hand, we must ever have this before us, and remember (I refer now to ministry of the word) that if we cannot "speak as oracles of God," or as His mouth-piece, we had better hold our tongues, and restrain our lips and pens, yet we do well, while judging ourselves, not to refrain from speaking out just what we believe in our hearts to be His mind. And this quite apart from the wish to say anything startling or novel, which is of course the opposite fault of mere sanity.

"There are those," an eminent writer\* has said, "who are fond of digging up a meaning from beneath a verse, which they would be amiably sorry to think any other human being had been so fortunate as to discover before them." Of course I would commend nothing so unworthy. But the fact is that, leaving inspiration out of sight for a moment, Paul could afford to be, as I have said above, plain, fearless, and entirely sincere. He touched a harp of many strings. How many tones were in his voice! At one time full of burning indignation, then subdued in pathos, anon quivering with delicate irony, but always earnest, elevated, and fearless before God. And such should our voices be in our measure, always bearing in mind that he was inspired, which we in any true sense

are certainly not. For the word of God is both perfect and complete, and our words are worthless or worse, if they be not an echo of that which was "once for all delivered to the saints." But still we may learn to be large-hearted from the wonderful expansiveness and elasticity, if I may so call it, of the great apostle. It seems to me this is one lesson we may get from the passage.

\*J. Ruskin. But the words of St. Paul become much more striking still when taken with their context. Is it not singular that we should be told of his "great sorrow and unceasing pain" immediately after the grand outburst that closes the eighth chapter? Perhaps, if we except the Ephesians and Colossians, there is no more triumphant language in the whole Bible than this, as there is none loftier in its sphere outside the words of our blessed Lord Himself, whose utterances necessarily have a unique majesty. Paul had just been saying that "nothing could separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Immediately after he speaks of wishing to be not merely "separated" but "accursed from Christ!" Even so, do not our hearts understand it? Do we not recollect in our own history occasions of deep trial following hard upon seasons of special elevation and holy joy in the truth? Surely then it is not written in vain, but for our encouragement, that he who was "not a whit behind the pre-eminent apostles" was momentarily disposed to wish himself "accursed from Christ." No wonder we have our "ups and downs" if Paul felt thus. At the same time it is well to remember that the apostle's anguish was wholly unselfish, which is more than can always be said of ours. It was his consuming zeal for God's ancient people that caused the deep pain he felt at their rejection of his Master. Our sorrows are too often due to our own want of subjection to that Master. Not always indeed. There is such a thing as pure and unselfish sorrow in the contemplating of such a world as this. Those who know it know a little, and only a little, of what the apostle felt for the chosen people of Jehovah. And the record of this sorrow of his is just as much a part of revelation (no doubt a very much less important part) as his preaching of the Cross or his unfolding of the mystery. In this way too, as in those of direct teaching, we are meant through "the comfort of the scriptures" to "have hope." We are encouraged after temporary grief or depression to rise on more buoyant wing. And One suffered even more than Paul (I speak not of the atonement, where He was alone), as His is and will be the greatest joy (Hebrews 1:9). R. B., Jun.

[The writer is alone responsible for modes of expression and his thoughts. Ed. B.T.]

## S. Joh\_14:9.

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John 14:9.

There are innumerable incidents in the Bible, which, although they may not bear directly on central doctrines or upon the great principles of dispensational truth, are nevertheless most instructive and often peculiarly precious. The most conspicuous of these are naturally such as concern our blessed Lord — His ways, His words, or His silence. Side-lights these, so to speak, but not less luminous than the central rays. To pursue the figure, one might compare the broad stream of dispensational truth of divine doctrine generally to beams of undivided light, whereas in these minute touches we have the blue and the purple and the scarlet of the refracted ray. In short, each has its own place and beauty, as the Holy Spirit alone can lead our hearts into the enjoyment of both. The great doctrines of Christianity, we know, are of supreme consequence; nor are those to be trusted who affect admiration of the lovely traits disclosed in a Joseph or Daniel, and still more in Christ Himself, while they slur over or ignore the emphatic warnings of the scriptures as to sin and coming judgments. But when the conscience has bowed to the solemn truth, and the heart believed, and the mouth confessed, then truly we do well to mark every attitude of the Son of God, and to note every word that fell from the lips of Him, "Who spake as never man spake." Such are found especially in the scriptures that seem, not so much to unfold truth about Him, as to present Himself.

Hence I propose to dwell for a moment upon part of the verse indicated in the heading of this paper: not on the whole of it; nor, as intimated above, in its central aspect. The great truth, that the Lord Jesus is the sole Revealer of the Father, cannot indeed be enforced too frequently. It is insisted upon by our Lord in emphatic words in the verse before us; it is stated with wonderful precision and majesty in the first and third of the synoptic Gospels. It is always supposed, whatever the special doctrine under consideration. The revelation of the Father by and in the Son is without controversy the keystone of the entire arch of revealed truth. But the object now is of less wide and far-reaching compass, though what it may gain in limitation is balanced by the necessity for peculiarly reverent handling. Indeed the writer might almost apologise for attempting any more than just calling attention to the words themselves — so closely do they touch the very sanctuary, if one may so say, of the Lord's Person. Comment too often tends to enfeeble, and that in proportion to the loftiness of the theme. Most of all is this the case in dwelling, not so much on the doctrine or even the works, but on the words and manner of the Son of God. Yet after all the record is divine, and so cannot be touched by the infirmity of human language.

"Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip"? They were but a brief period, the years of that holy ministry — the time was short even if we reckon from our Lord's birth. He was crucified just a little past the age when a Jew was considered to have attained full manhood. But to Him (and what spiritual mind can wonder?) it was a long time — long to bear the contradiction of sinners, if not the slowness of heart of His chosen. Nor is this the only occasion on which we learn indirectly what this world must have been to Him, Whose natural home was

heaven, but Who had emptied Himself of every glory save that alone which was inseparable from Him, — the glory of His infinite moral perfectness. "How long shall I be with you, and suffer you?" was His exclamation as recorded by St. Mark, when pursuing His course of beneficent healing. And how much "virtue" must have proceeded from the blessed Lord during those wonderful years! Time indeed is rightly measured by the work accomplished and the sacrifices endured, and the love expended, even in the case of a mere man. He lives longest who serves God. There may be much activity that is merely beating the air. But how infinitely filled up with good works (but which He showed them from the Father) was the life of the blessed Son! It was not merely the "sinless years, that breathed beneath the Syrian blue," but the untiring self-surrender of the Word made flesh, the Servant-prophet, but withal Jehovah. Moreover (but here silence is more becoming than words), did not the shadow of His coming passion lie before Him? "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50)

See then the contrast of Philip, tenderly but unhesitatingly rebuked by Christ for not having known Him. Does it not teach us for the hundredth time how inadequate is human exactitude and reflectiveness in matters that must be spiritually discerned? For we have evidence that Philip was exact and observant as a man, and, perhaps we might add, as a saint. He it was (as an eminent writer\* has remarked) who so clearly defined the characteristics of the Messiah to Nathanael, who was convinced that two hundred pennyworth of bread would not suffice for the hungry multitude, nay, who recommended Nathanael to come and see for himself the wonderful Person, with whom he had made acquaintance. It was not the impulsive Peter or the despondent Thomas who failed in this respect, but the very apostle who seemed particularly observant. Thus all must be the Holy Spirit, or it is vain. We note too a touch of pathos in the Lord's words, underlying the grandeur of the truth He declared and which He emphatically was — and is.

{\* Bishop Lightfoot.}

Unlimited truly are the virtues that open out for learning in reading and meditating on the pages of scripture. It has often struck the writer that we do not dwell as much as we might on what may be called the objective aspect of sacred incidents, particularly such as are recorded in the Gospels. Have we not here, as it were, an endless gallery of divine portraits? Thus it is wise to neglect no part of Holy Writ, to study and ponder again and yet again the great doctrines of individual salvation, of the church, the coming of the Lord and the kingdom; but not to overlook that inmost shrine of blessed truth, which reveals most nearly the ways and words of our adorable Lord. R. B., Jr.

## S. The Unreason of Darwinism.

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The Unreason of Darwinism.

Extract from a letter.

I do not touch upon the grave question whether Darwinism is compatible with a belief in the Bible as the word of God, although having a strong judgment that it is not, but on the contrary that it is foolish and profane. But for my present purpose it is only necessary to show that the system is illogical, and for the following reason. It is not proven. Accordingly it seems to me that it will be time enough to accept the evolution hypothesis of the origin of mankind when those "missing links" are discovered which will raise it to the dignity of a demonstrable system. Meantime it is but a house of cards with no securer buttresses than "ifs" and "must have beens" and such phrases as "it is easily conceived," "we may in that case conclude." Those, it is true, who have the slightest reverence for the word of God, and appreciation of divine principles, of course know that the system will remain hypothetical. But my contention is that, putting aside revelation, fitness of things, etc., it is absurd to settle down in calm acceptance of a mere theory which its fondest votaries dare not claim to have established. It is to be noted also that even Prof. Huxley has carefully guarded against committing himself absolutely to the Darwinian hypothesis. But when we bear in mind the notorious fact that these so-called scientific men reject Christianity in toto (i.e. as a revelation), and that some (I grant not all) have gone so far as to say "we have no need of the hypothesis of God," one need not hesitate before rejecting their theories. The pet dream of modern scientists — a dream by which Prof. Drummond, for instance, has been led astray — is that all things are what they are in virtue of their environment. And of course the evolution doctrine stands or falls with this. But it is an undoubted fact that there have been found in savages latent capacities, physical as well as spiritual, that no environment can have coaxed into being (as they are utterly opposed to it), but which bear eloquent testimony to primitive endowment. It is seen in the structure of the hand, and in the mechanism of the voice; it is witnessed in the capacity to receive spiritual truths. This, however, I am aware that you would not question — as to the spiritual fact at least — inasmuch as you hold to the divine inbreathing of the Spirit of God. But no "authority" among those who belong to this school admits one or other. One and all, they drive the Deity back into the infinite past, when and where only they reluctantly allow Him to have given birth to one or two (or is it one only?) primordial germs. One and all, I mean, of those who do admit a God. Others, like the late Prof. W. K. Clifford, who said (one wonders how he dared) that "the great companion was dead," would affirm, that every subsequent phenomenon was latent in the original star-dust.

Yet there are other scientific men, such as Wallace, and, I doubt not, Dawson, who contend that man's body cannot be the product of evolution. You, I understand, think that God may have breathed His spirit into some anthropoid ape! On an unproven hypothesis; on the soundness of a theory that has missing links, (and remember that while no chain is stronger than its weakest link, in this case some of the links are actually non-existent!), a theory concocted by men, who reject as antiquated myths those high verities of the incarnation and the atonement, which presuppose the

fall and which alone make for our peace, and without the consolation of which you confess the fairest lot here were but chaos. Nay, nay, Christ is the Truth, and all else is vain dreaming.

I contend then that these scientific men, while to be listened to with due respect when engaged in investigating facts, are "blind guides" when they enter the realm of speculation, as indeed every one must be. I admit freely their erudition, their patient industry, their keen acumen, as well as the humane debt men owe them with regard to the amenities of life. But here praise must stop. For to pass off defective theories as established science — at least to act as if it was established — seems fitter for monastic dreamers than for men of science, who vaunt their "weapons of precision." Is it not flying without wings! Of such Coleridge says excellently well, "He that would fly without wings must perforce fly in his dreams: and till he awake, he will not know that to fly in one's dreams is but to dream of flying." R. B. Junr.

## S. Thoughts Suggested by Joh\_1:14.

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Thoughts Suggested by John 1:14.

It is well to be jealous of any mere intellectual appreciation of the word of God. For undoubtedly, even in the case of those who are truly converted, there is a danger of mind and fancy being gratified at the expense of heart and conscience. It is admitted of course that the intelligence must play a necessary part in the apprehension of any statement, secular or sacred, as it is also true that the poetic temperament will not blind the soul to heavenly glories, where sin is judged and Christ is paramount. Only let us realise that the Bible is God's voice to us, "quick and powerful," and "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Then indeed shall we be slow to indulge an uncontrolled fancy; and, on the other hand, distrusting self, we shall not miss the needed blessing and refreshment.

Now it is hardly necessary to say we are not concerned with those who take merely a literary interest in the Bible. There are those we know, who do indeed discover a moving and pathetic story in such a history as that of Joseph, but nothing beyond; as they see merely a tale of sweet and inimitable naturalness in that of Ruth. Clearly no spirituality is necessary for this, as in fact those who see no more in these histories are in general infidel. This is not the danger to which believers, as a rule, are exposed. The latter are well aware that these Old Testament narratives are not of any "private interpretation," any more than prophecy is, but that they point with undeviating constancy to our Lord Jesus Christ. Our danger, on the contrary, is to rest too much in our apprehension of the admirable variety and fulness of these precious types, and in our possibly keen appreciation of them, without much practical result as to our ways. It is the same with the material symbols of the Levitical economy as with those of a personal character. It is one thing, for instance, to note with what exquisite precision the Holy Spirit enjoins the blue, and the scarlet, and the purple, according as heavenly character, earthly grandeur, or royal dignity were to be symbolised by the coverings of the mystic furniture of the Tabernacle; it is quite another to be formed and moulded by the varied teaching of these different scriptures. But the dangers attending the study of the New Testament are somewhat different. As the "very image of the things" is there unfolded with divine clearness and exactitude, there is a directness of statement which leaves less room for ingenious and far-fetched interpretations, and there is less risk perhaps of the imagination running wild. Doubtless there are snares of another kind, more purely intellectual as with the Gnostics of old, and more subtle. Witness too some recent vagaries, not confined to one quarter, with regard to our Lord's Person. The fact is that there are snares for imaginative and intellectual alike, and both can find material in either division of the Book of God. Yet, while we should judge self unsparingly, it is becoming to cherish simplicity, equally free from legal bondage and from self-confidence. Indeed they are not wise who are always analysing their feelings — an occupation as unhealthy in spiritual as in physical matters. Hence it is enough to have pointed out a danger before turning to a verse than which there is none sublimer or more majestic even in the fourth Gospel — so simple in its language, so profound in its significance.

Simple language, profound meaning — do not these words sum up the characteristic features of St. John's Gospel, as of his Epistles? Whether his aim were to enforce the great truth that Jesus is the Christ, as in the Gospel, or that the Christ is Jesus, (Whom they had seen and handled) as in the first Epistle, clearly no complicated arguments were necessary in order to "declare what he had seen and heard." We know that there are arguments, and indignant ones, though most suitable in their season, in the writings of the apostle Paul. Burning words and sharp remonstrance were necessary at times from one who had the "care of all the churches," and who was jealous with a godly jealousy for the honour of Christ. But in the Gospel of John how different it all is. And yet he was a "son of thunder;" nor is the remark of Augustine inapt that St. John begins his Gospel with a peal of spiritual thunder. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." But all is calm and reposeful in the manner; the thunder is not in the collision of earth-born clouds, but in the majesty of the revelation. He who declared the eternal life that was with the Father, speaks in accents that breathe the calmness of the Son's own divine dignity and glory. The Word was (en) God; but we read further that the Word was made (egeneto) flesh. Already a touch of pathos in the announcement of His Incarnation; no exemption from human vicissitudes, though wholly apart from sin. And so He "tabernacled" here for some three and thirty years, most of which, as we know, were spent in holy seclusion, whence God has not thought fit to withdraw the veil, but of which more may be known (who can tell?) in the coming day. We are permitted one or two glimpses of exquisite loveliness (Luke ii); and then the silence of almost twenty unrecorded years. But even of the three years of that wonderful ministry, only some of the miracles and some of the sayings are told us; there are the "many other signs," and the "many other things" that "are not written in this book." So He displayed His glory, not only those moral perfections that could not be hidden, but each miracle, as the one in Cana of Galilee, manifested the majesty of His Person to such as had eyes to see. But there is more. It is glory as of an Only-begotten with a Father. And indeed, though doubtless the apostles raised the dead, and did other miracles — not to speak of the greater (spiritual) miracles they wrought after Christ had gone to the Father — yet in truth there was a stamp of peculiar dignity in our Lord's own works and words. For He alone could and did touch the leper without being defiled, as on the same occasion, with full consciousness of His divinity, He said, "I will" — fitting words for One, Who could say "I am." He answered the governor nothing, so that Pilate marvelled. The people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, saluted Him, when He had just come down from the Holy Mount; the glory still lingered that had been so dazzling at the transfiguration. And so we might recall many an incident situation described in the Gospels, where the splendour of His divine Sonship seemed to pierce the veil.

Yet surely are we, who by grace rest in Him, not less, but more, favoured than those who had His bodily presence. R. B. Junr.

## S. Thoughts on Joh\_16:27.

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Thoughts on John 16:27.

"The Father himself loveth you." There is no thought in this little paper of dwelling upon the important announcement with regard to Christian prayer, marking a great dispensational change, which was the occasion of our Lord's uttering the words just quoted. And there is the less need for attempting it, that it has been abundantly unfolded by abler pens. Nevertheless it may be doubted whether believers are as a rule sufficiently alive both to the intrinsic greatness of this favour on the part of God the Father, and also to its far-reaching consequences. And first, if the conjecture be just a word or two as to the cause of this failure which perhaps is not far to seek. Is it not connected with the fact that the children of God are but human, and consequently feeble oftentimes in appropriating their vast inheritance? "There remaineth much land to be possessed" is as necessary a reminder as ever it was in Joshua's days. But this lack of apprehension may even be due to pre-occupation with other truths, with that perhaps which is not only good but paramount, as the love of Christ Himself, which clearly no Christian can estimate too highly. Yet surely to forget the love of the Father is no necessary consequence of occupation with that of the Son. Rather is it that we are one-sided, and that nothing is rarer than perfect equipoise in appreciation of truth. But in fact no truths of Holy Scripture are antagonistic; for all are centred in Christ, Who is the Truth. Accordingly, as we apprehend Him in His person and in His work, so shall we in like measure realise every resultant blessing, not the least being the love of the Father. And thus intelligent appreciation of our Lord Jesus will, ipso facto, quicken our spiritual sensibility to all He has accomplished, even in gaining for us His Father's love and complacency. For while it must not be forgotten (and this is another aspect of the truth) that love to the world was in God Himself as such (John 3:16), and needed no prompting, yet this love of the Father is consequent upon the affection produced in the believers heart to Christ, because of what the Lord Jesus is and what He has done. And so further we learn, as the Lord goes on to tell the disciples, that it is because they had loved Him that the Father's love had been thus drawn out. On the other hand when it is a question of the church, we read that Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). Such are the varied aspects of the divine love, distinct, but, it is needless to say, exquisitely consistent, as indeed is the whole body of revealed truth.

Now in a manner it is intelligible that Christians should be specially impressed by the love of the Lord Jesus, when they meditate, or praise, or pray. For though we have not with us that corporeal presence, having neither heard, nor seen with our eyes (save by those of faith) nor contemplated, nor our hands handled, "that which was from the beginning," as did the first disciples, yet we have the priceless record; and He, the Son of Man, has drawn us with the cords of a man." We can picture Him in the Temple, on the Mount of Transfiguration, in Gethsemane; we hear His words (such as man never spake before) of encouragement, of benediction, of rebuke of all that was opposed to His own stainless holiness; for us too He is no impalpable abstraction, but "the Man Christ Jesus." Our salvation, again, is secured by no fulfilment of philosophic precepts (although the only true philosophy he wrapt up in Christianity, that wisdom to be spoken among them that

were perfect, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:6), but by faith of Christ, faith in His atoning blood, in His glorious resurrection, even as His person is to be worshipped and adored; for, stupendous as are His works, He Himself is greater than all He has wrought: in other words, all is inestimable because of His being "God manifest in the flesh." But God the Father! Unto what heights of majesty do we here ascend! We think of the High and Holy One, Who inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy, and of the inaccessible light. Nor is it unwholesome to remind ourselves again and again that God is infinite in holiness as in power. For such reflection need in no wise dim our perception of the characteristic relationships into which grace has introduced us in Christ, one of which, viz., the love of the Father, it is the aim of this paper to enforce. And that this is nothing recondite, no exclusive appanage of the mature believer, is plain; for the beloved apostle says, "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." Also the peculiar beauty of this passage is well-known. For, if the little children were entitled to know the Father; and that the Father loved them, the fathers could know nothing higher than Him "Who was from the beginning." So that it is precisely the young believer who is characterised as entering into that aspect of the divine love which might have seemed the special portion of the most advanced. For God delights to show the power of His grace just where the objects are weakest. And so it ever is under the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). The "ministration of the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:8) exceeds in grace as in glory.

And, if one of the consequences of thus entering into "the love the Father hath bestowed on us" (1 John 3:1), be to quicken the spiritual energies to more earnest adoration of Him Who seeketh worshippers (John 4:23), surely it will in no wise detract from the glory due to our blessed Lord, Who equally with the Father and the Holy Ghost is worthy of supreme homage. But, seeing that our Lord deemed it not unnecessary to remind His disciples of the Father's love, we may well seek to encourage our own hearts in the enjoyment of it in however inadequate a manner. R. B. Junr.

## S. Thoughts on Joh\_16:9.

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### Thoughts on John 16:9.

It is not the part of wisdom to deny, but rather freely to acknowledge, that fragments of truth, more or less numerous, are to be found in the ancient philosophies and religious systems. Undoubtedly such are often accompanied by much folly, and perhaps seem all the brighter because of the surrounding darkness. Still they bear eloquent testimony to the fact that God created man upright, whatever his subsequent degeneracy through the fall. But when these philosophers stepped beyond the praise and vindication of morality, it is clear they encountered a serious difficulty, inasmuch as everything of what may be called a constructive character must obviously have been only so much speculation. In other words they could claim no authority, no "Thus saith the Lord," even if reason (which for the most part it did not) led them up to the conviction of a Supreme Being. Hence one great and broad line of demarcation between the heathen systems and Judaism, which was a revelation of God. The former, even where most incrustated with sound moral notions, when consequently they were at their best, offered, it is needless to say, no anchorage for the soul, being in truth but the surmises of men. Such were the doctrines of Stoics and Epicureans, of Socrates and Plato, and, in more remote antiquity, of Confucius. At their worst these systems were a conglomerate of poetical romancing, e.g. the mythologies of Greece, or they were the monstrous dreams of orientalism: the former beautiful, the latter grotesque, but both corrupt. But when we come to the New Testament, we have a line still broader and more striking, in that Christianity is not merely a divinely-given unfolding of truths that deeply concerned mankind, as was the Hebrew dispensation, but God revealed in full personality, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In short, as has been often remarked, the religion of Christ is Himself. It is not merely that He speaks with authority, as Moses did, and as heathen teachers could not; but, though the humblest of men and the meekest, He ever enforces His own claims as absolute and unquestionable. He is not merely the prophet like unto Moses, though far greater, come down to inaugurate a loftier system, to exhibit a more sublime abnegation, but He was — is — Himself the centre and circumference, the Alpha and Omega, of all that He did and taught. We hear from His own lips that it is in vain to pretend to honour the Father without honouring the Son. Such is our Lord Jesus Christ; and as the Father attested, so the Holy Spirit sealed. Nor in any portion of Holy Scripture does our Lord more emphatically enforce His claims than in the verse under consideration. The Holy Ghost, we read, would reprove or convict (or haply afford demonstrative proof to) the world "of sin, because they believe not on Me." It is not because men are base, or deceitful, or immoral, not because of any specially heinous form of violence or corruption, not for one sin, as men count it, singled out of the, dark catalogue of human misdeeds; but "of sin, because they believe not on Me." Nor is it hard to understand the reason of our Lord's solemn statement. Clearly unbelief as to Himself, and the refusal of His claims, whether openly aggressive, or coolly indifferent, is the crowning sin of which the human heart can be guilty. Not that in these words of Christ there is any palliation of human evil. If by the law was the knowledge of sin, and by the commandment sin became exceedingly sinful, how much more so when He

came, Who was "full of grace and truth," Who is the truth! What would not the truth and the light make manifest? But when the truth was manifested in its most winning form, that of grace, only to be rejected, evidently sin is not only seen at its blackest because confronted with perfect holiness, but the unbelief that will have none of God's remedy becomes necessarily the sign of utter sinfulness and blindness. We have, as it were, a climax of wickedness in the rejection first of righteousness as under the law, then of the fulness of truth in Christ, nay, of "grace and truth," grace pre-eminently, but grace made living and energetic by its intimate union with truth. No wonder then if it is written, "Of sin because they believe not on Me."

How belief in the Son becomes effectual to the salvation of the soul is not the point in this verse. We know it is by His death, and that our Lord is not more surely the Way, the Truth, and the Life, than the propitiation, even as He came "by water and by blood." But His person is the theme here as the supreme object presented to mankind, and in Whom the Father was to be seen. How admirably in keeping is this verse of St. John, the latest, with the "Come unto Me" of the earliest Evangelist! one mark out of a myriad of the deep harmonies of the word of God. While critics are occupied in discovering (sometimes, it is to be feared, trying to discover) difficulties and discrepancies in the letter, the humble child of God, better so engaged, will find beauty upon beauty, token upon token, of its incomparable accuracy, in proportion to the diligence of his search, and the reality of his self-distrust.

Finally, we may note that our Lord uttered these words after having declared His manifold offices of mercy and benefaction. He had already said, in words of living power, "I am the Living Bread," "the Light of the world," "the Resurrection and the Life," "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," "the Good Shepherd," "the True Vine." May we not liken these glories to so many glowing colours into which the white light of His Deity is refracted in the prism of the Gospels? At any rate in the majestic words, "I am," which occur so often in St. John, His Godhead is implicitly conveyed. How great then, unless they repent, the loss of those, whom the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, because they believe not on the Son of God! R. B. Junr.

## S. Thoughts on Joh\_6:68.

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### Thoughts on John 6:68.

It is interesting to note how, on more than one important occasion, both before and after the resurrection, Peter was privileged to give definite expression to some cardinal and pre-eminent truth. Incidentally we are reminded, if need be, that no slight honour was reserved in the counsels of God for the apostle of the circumcision. As at Pentecost he was the spokesman of the eleven, and proclaimed to the house of Israel that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36); so it was his, before our Lord suffered, to make the great confession (Matthew 16:16), that He, Who loved to speak of Himself as the Son of Man, was the Christ, the Son of the living God — a doctrine than which none is more central in the whole range of Christianity. Our Lord, as we know, at once declared that this great truth was the rock on which He would build His church. Nor was this the sole occasion on which Peter thus emphasised both the Messiahship and the divinity of the Lord Jesus. He makes the same confession in John 6:1-71 :, after having uttered the words more immediately the subject of the present paper. It would seem that, on this subsequent occasion, it was rather in connection with individual need ("Lord, to whom shall we go?"), whereas in Matthew the words had a corporate significance. With these prefatory remarks (not superfluous perhaps, inasmuch as a lurking and half-unconscious disparagement of the apostle Peter is not uncommon), I pass to our verse. The time was critical. It was one of those occasions, not rare in the fourth Gospel, when our blessed Lord's deity and manhood seem equally in evidence. At others, one or other may seem uppermost, though these twin threads of gold and silver are indissolubly intertwined. Nor can any essay to gauge that mystery without being baffled and confounded. "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken." Our Lord, accordingly, had just uttered the profound words as to the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood — clearly communion with His death (John 6:51-56), as before with His incarnation (John 6:32-50) — and had thereby estranged many who had seemed to follow Him, but who were stumbled by this "hard saying." To us, who are familiar with and rejoice in this most precious truth, it is not easy to enter into the feelings of Jews, who had been forbidden by God Himself to eat blood, and to whom therefore of all men this doctrine was most startling. Yet did the Lord most emphatically declare that otherwise they had no life in them. This was the stumbling-block. In fact these words, when not spiritually understood by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, have ever been either abused by superstition or caviled at by unbelief. Here indeed "in the days of His flesh" unbelief prevailed, and so the Lord asks of the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Weighty words in truth, for did they not suggest the infinite loss in which such abandonment would involve them, as, on the other hand, it is clear that our Saviour's human spirit valued their ministrations? Did He not subsequently say, "Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptations"? (Luke 22:28.) Thus in another aspect we see the mingling of the divine and the human in that inscrutable Presence. And so, in words of earnest deprecation, Simon Peter replies, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of eternal life." Surely this too had been revealed to the apostle by the Father in heaven, and was doubtless remembered by him long afterwards, when he declared, with pathetic emphasis, that

they had followed no "cunningly devised fables," but were eye-witnesses of Christ's majesty.

Science is well in its own sphere; nor is it wise, because of some fancied opposition to the word of God, to challenge, with inadequate mental equipment, fact if indubitable. Time was when pious men would have staked the credit of the Bible on the supposed flatness of the earth! On the other hand, we may rest assured that any conclusion of science, that traverses the explicit language of scripture, is and must be erroneous. For as has often been remarked, scientific facts are one thing, inferences are quite another. Another thing to be borne in mind, and recently pointed out by a writer (who, always eloquent, is not always equally sound), is, that engrossment with some special study is not the way to have correct views on men and things in general, least of all on what concerns the life to come. Persons so absorbed, he says, are apt to see nothing but their peculiar hobby, and seem to be afflicted with a kind of atrophy as to what is outside their individual line. This witness is true. Shall we therefore depend upon such for a decision affecting our eternal welfare — upon men who, after all, discern but fragments of truth, and whose minds may "degenerate into mere machines for grinding out general laws"? Such, at any rate, was the remarkable confession of one\* of them.

(\* Darwin.) And this leads to the question, Is the intellect the highest part of man? Are not moral elements, on the contrary, above what is merely intellectual? It is not necessary to be a theologian to see this. How says the most eminent of recent poets, "I trust we are not wholly brain, magnetic mockeries." How vain then to anchor one's soul on what at best is but fragmentary, where not positively misleading. I say not that such leaders may not be judicially blinded. The safe and excellent way is to believe God's word because it is His, knowing that difficulties, and mystery here and there, are rather proofs of its divine origin. At any rate to reject revelation on the ground of mystery is surely illogical. I suppose we ourselves, spirit, soul, and body — are a mystery in one sense: is it not "nearer to us than hands and feet?"

Science therefore can have no direct word on what concerns man's eternal interests. Of course she may speak as handmaid, and sometimes with some effect, as when, for instance, it is shown that the darkness at the crucifixion can have been occasioned by no eclipse, which a mere tyro in astronomy knows can only happen when the moon is full. Or, again, by specific knowledge some ancient manuscript is deciphered, which may shed important light perhaps on a disputed passage of the New Testament. But yet science is un-moral, so to speak. It has no direct connection with what concerns the soul. Moreover, is it not often tentative only? How fatuous then and worse to depend upon so shifty a guide in relation to the life to come! Shall we then have recourse to art and culture? Shall we emulate the Greek spirit? Alas! is it not abroad all around us? Not that it is wrong to love beautiful colour, or musical notes; it is fatal to deify beauty. This was what the Greeks did, and moderns imitate with infinitely less excuse. On the other hand, bare Puritanism is not Christianity. For it is significant that when the Holy Spirit would portray that which is brightest and holiest in heaven, He employs as symbols that which is accounted most lovely on earth, it matters not whether it be the breast-plate of Aaron, or the foundations of the Holy City. Clearly then the evil does not consist in appreciating what is lovely in its proper sphere, but in making it an end. A vain dream! But what of philosophy, said to be "divine" by its votaries, and "full of nectared sweets" but coupled with "vain deceit" by the Spirit of God? Will this give us peace? Truly the scripture adds "falsely so-called," but even when legitimate, philosophy, and science, and art, are impotent in man's extremity. And is it not notorious that some of those who have discoursed most

eloquently on morality, etc., have been most unhappy, where indeed they have not sunk below ordinary decency? Let us not be too hard upon the Socrates and Platos. They groped in the dark, and often with noble aspirations; the True Light had not yet shone. But no such apology can be extended to those who reject God's living oracles, and prefer the first man to the second. Surely it is not surprising that modern systems should reach lower depths than ancient ones (witness spiritualism, theosophy, and similar enormities), inasmuch as they have given up the true God. Alas! such will increase to more ungodliness. But at least such doctrines as these testify that no mere materialism will satisfy the human heart.

Hence the believer may well reply, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Whether it be things excellent in their own place, or things essentially evil, all leave an aching void. Science is cold, and "Art is long," and the end draweth near. What matters it if we have truly heard those words of eternal life? Do they not point out "an anchor for the soul both sure and steadfast"? "The words that I speak unto you," said the Saviour, "they are spirit and they are life." All other voices are like the idle wind.  
R. B. Jnr.

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