

THE "WITNESS" MANUALS, No. 1.

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The . .  
New Birth  
and the  
Life Eternal.



By GEO. F. TRENCH, B.A.

ONE PENNY.

# The "Witness" Manuals.

Edited by C. F. HOGG and W. E. VINE, M.A.

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# THE NEW BIRTH

and

## THE LIFE ETERNAL.

BY  
GEO. F. TRENCH, B.A.,

Author of

'The Life that is Life indeed,' "After the Thousand Years," &c.



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## OUTLINE.

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THESE pages are intended to call attention to the great truth of Regeneration, as taught by the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles.

First, as the essential and necessary condition of the soul's salvation, and of the possession of life, the life that is divine and everlasting.

Then, as attainable by everyone, who hearing of Christ in the Gospel believes the message and receives Him.

This new birth of the Spirit is that which makes the believer a child of God, and links him, in fraternal love, with all who are in like manner begotten of God.

Furthermore, it is, when fully apprehended, the equipment of the saint for holy living, by which he conquers sin, escapes the Devil's assaults, and walks apart from the world and its attractions, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, it is the earnest of the glorious and heavenly inheritance, in the kingdom of God, which none, wanting this new birth, shall ever enter, or even see.

G. F. T.

# THE NEW BIRTH AND THE LIFE ETERNAL.



OF all the many truths, previously unknown, which were taught by our Lord Jesus Christ, surely none surpasses this in strangeness and surprise—the necessity for a second birth, declared to Nicodemus in the words, “Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3. 3).\*

“How can a man be born when he is old?” asks Nicodemus. “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”

And the Lord’s reply confirms His doctrine of the necessity of a second birth, a birth however, different in character from the first.

This was a precious seed or germ of truth sown by our Lord, almost secretly, in the heart of a single inquirer, in the dead of night, which the Holy Spirit when He comes, expounds by the pens of the Apostles.

To these later expositions of it we must refer; but, first, let us see how the Lord Himself explained the mystery to the incredulous ruler and teacher of Israel.

In three particulars, namely, with regard to

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\* The quotations are taken from the Revised Version.

the Origin, the Character, and the Means of this second birth, Nicodemus is briefly but explicitly informed.

### **The Teaching of our Lord.**

1. First, as to the origin of this new life. "The Spirit breatheth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3. 8, marg.). The life comes by the breath and the voice of the Holy Ghost.

As came the natural life to Adam, so comes the spiritual life to each of us.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and *breathed* into his nostrils the *breath of life*; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2. 7).

To this divine method of the old creation corresponds the divine method of the new. It comes by the breathing of the Spirit into the soul of man of the breath of life eternal. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

2. As to character. It is not of the flesh. That is, it is not natural, nor in the way of nature. A second birth, such as Nicodemus suggested, would bring man no good. He would be again as he was. Flesh can only reproduce flesh. Even as it was from the beginning, the power to reproduce, whether in the vegetable or the animal creations, was limited by the words

eight times repeated, "after its kind" (Gen. 1. 11, 12, 21, 24, 25). But this is not a reproduction. It is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1. 13). It is a new creation, and as it is of God, that is of the Holy Ghost, so it is, in character, spirit. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." "The Spirit breatheth . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit." "It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing." (John 6. 63).

Thus we perceive that this is an operation far apart from any educational or merely reformative process. The highest reach of education, culture, refinement, and even religion, leaves its pupil or subject outside the kingdom of God. He must be born again to enter there.

3. Then as to means. The second birth is wrought by the voice of the Spirit\*—that is, the Word of God. When the voice of the Spirit brings to our hearing the Word of God in the glad tidings of salvation, the breath of the Spirit brings life to the soul. The actions are simultaneous. What these glad tidings are, the following verses tell us. It is the special work and ministry of the Holy Ghost to glorify

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\*The Greek word, *pneuma*, translated "wind," is the ordinary word employed for *the Spirit*, and occurs 385 times in the New Testament. Only here and in Hebrews 1. 7 is it translated "wind" (see margin in each case).

Christ, and to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us (John 16. 14). So our Lord declares: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up:" [that is, be exalted, made conspicuous to the eye of faith], "that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life"—that is, be born again into eternal life. For "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God" (1 John 5. 1).

Then follow our Lord's ever memorable words: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3. 16).\*

And so we learn, in simplest and plainest language, how it is that the second birth to life everlasting is brought about. It is by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, the wonderful gift of God in His love to the world; or, in the words of John 1. 12, 13, by receiving Christ, for to "as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God."

Thus very briefly we have the steps of the Lord's instruction upon this, at first sight, mysterious and amazing doctrine, to which every soul of man must give earnest heed, as to that which is imperatively necessary for his salvation.

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\* The Greek word translated "everlasting" and "eternal" is the same, *aiōnios*, and there is no difference of meaning.



**Why is a New Birth Necessary?**

And yet one may fairly ask, Why is it that man, made in the image of God, needs to be remade in that image; that the creature must be recreated; that we, the born sons of men, must be reborn, born again?

That is a legitimate and even a reasonable inquiry, and Scripture is not silent of reply. It is because of the Fall, because of the radical and ineradicable sinfulness of the nature of man. The beautiful vessel of the Potter has become marred in His hands, and He must needs make it again another vessel (Jer. 18. 4).

In every race and age and nation, in the individual and the family, in all communities, societies, and churches, in schools, colleges, and universities, in commerce, diplomacy and war, in parliaments, councils, and courts of kings, sin mingles with all, corrupts and poisons all, vitiates and embitters life, and involves men in much misery and grievous pain, disease, and death. "There is none that doeth good; no, not so much as one" (Rom. 3. 12).

But complete and dreadful though the effects of the Fall obviously are, there are many who, believing in the essential goodness and worth of humanity, cling to the hope that by continued efforts in education, civilisation, and culture, the reign of sin may be gradually undermined, and

man be induced to live worthy of himself, or at least to strive after higher things, and, consistently with this hope, they deny the need of the new birth. Therefore we must search the Scriptures, not only as to the true character of human conduct, the evil of which universal experience confirms, but as to the true moral state of the human heart. What say they?

"Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6. 5).

"The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8. 21).

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa. 51. 5).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick: who can know it?" (Jer. 17. 9).

"For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts" (Matt. 15. 19).

The testimony of God in His Word is everywhere the same. Man's nature inherited from Adam is corrupt. He is not indeed "totally depraved" in degree of evil, but he is so in that no part of his being has wholly escaped the poisonous leaven of inherent sin. Mind, heart, conscience, imagination, emotion, will, and moral nature, all are, to some extent, depraved by indwelling sin. This is the answer to our question, "Why must man be reborn?" Christ will not put the new wine of His heavenly

life into the old bottles of a fallen nature, nor make a patch with His Spirit on the tattered garment of the "old man;" but where He grants His grace He creates a new nature to receive it—"which after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Eph. 4. 24). The doctrine of the new birth contains within it God's final verdict and condemnation of human nature as it is.

## Water and Spirit.

This brings us in our study of the subject to the meaning of our Lord when in John 3. 5 He said, "Except a man be born of *water* and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Water in Scripture has to do with defilement, and stands for cleansing. But this is no question of external washing, of reform of life and conduct, much less of any religious formality or rite, such as baptism, (which our Lord had not instituted when He spoke), but it is a question of nature; he must be *born of water* and the Spirit.

In our English phrase we employ the word "born" in a sense which may help to explain its use here. When any one manifests remarkable genius, lifting him above his fellows, he is frequently referred to as a "born" genius, a "born" musician or musical prodigy, a "born" diplomatist, statesman, general, engineer, and we all know what is meant, viz., that he possesses talents, ability, or so-called genius, such as can-

not be accounted for by education or experience; that in fact he owes his extraordinary endowments to birth. So our Lord speaks. The Jew was well versed in the typical use of water for external purification; (we had in the previous chapter, for example, "six waterpots . . . set there after the Jews' manner of purifying," John 2. 6), and Nicodemus is taught that under the new covenant the cleansing or purifying must be *born into him*, not externally applied, whether by typical washing or mere reformation of conduct.

David seems to have had an inkling of the truth of the second birth when he awoke to conviction of the sin of his nature, as "born in sin and conceived in iniquity," and broke out in his agony of distress with the prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51. 10).

To be a Christian a man must be "born" one; born again, born of water and the Spirit. And thus we understand why the words "born anew," "born of the Spirit," are repeated five times in this passage, while "born of water" occurs but once. It is because the Spirit birth is in itself a cleansing and purifying birth. Birth of water and birth of the Spirit are not different operations, they are one and the same. It is the sanctification of the Spirit wrought in and by the new birth—"the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3. 5).

### The Word of God.

We have already seen that the way of the Spirit's working this vast change in us is by His voice and breathing. His voice is the Word of God in the Gospel, "Thou hearest His voice" when thou hearest the message of God's great love, and of the atoning death of His Son; and this Word of God, spoken in the soul by the voice of the Spirit, is the water of cleansing, of sanctification, of regeneration. In Ephesians 5. 25, 26, we read, "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the *washing of water with the Word.*" The same truth is brought out by Peter in chapter 1. 22, 23 of his first Epistle: "Seeing ye have *purified* your souls in your obedience to the truth, . . . having been *begotten again*, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *through the Word of God*, which liveth and abideth."

To make the subject still clearer, I append the steps in a triplet of triplets:

1. Man is a sinner.

He is a sinner, because of his sinful nature.

Being in nature sinful, he must be born again.

2. This new birth is wrought by the Spirit of God.

## **The New Birth.**

The Spirit recreates by the Word of the Gospel.

The Word is, like water, of cleansing efficacy.

3. It cleanses the conscience of its guilt.  
It cleanses the heart of its evil tendency.  
It cleanses the life of its misdoing.

When we have fully appreciated these three operations of the Spirit by the Word, we shall see what depths of truth lie hid in the words of our Lord, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

## **The New Life is Eternal.**

Now a word as to the life that comes by birth of the Holy Ghost to him that by faith receives Christ.

As in nature so in supernature, birth brings life. The natural life is active only for the things of time. To the things of God it is as if they were not. God is not in all the thoughts of the unregenerate. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." He may be in many respects righteous, upright, and of good reputation; but unto God he lives not. Regeneration brings in life unto God. "He that hath the Son hath the life" (1 John 5. 12). "He liveth unto God," and all his powers are yielded unto God, as one alive from the dead. This, the spiritual life, has no end. It is eternal. It is

inalienable. The man who has it abideth for ever. He is born again. But he has not to be *born again and again*. That which is eternal needs no repetition. "They shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand" (John 10. 28). The reason of this eternity of life, this security of life, is evident; it is because the life is divine. Christ is our life. To deprive us of life requires first that the risen Christ be deprived of His. For we live in Him. And He has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." It has been well said, "Born once, die twice; born twice, die but once." And it must be so; for "He that hath the Son hath the life," "hath eternal life." Life is a present possession, and the life that I have is eternal. If I could lose it the word "eternal" would be untrue. For that which may be lost is called perishable, conditional, transitory, but not everlasting or eternal. As to future judgment the Word is equally explicit. "He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed *out of death into life*." The judgment of his sins fell upon his Saviour. He drank the dregs of that cup to the last, and now there is no judgment for the believer. It would lead us too far from our subject to examine fully the line of the Apostle's teaching in the passages quoted, but this much is necessary.

### The Teaching of the Apostle Paul.

For a fuller exposition of the seed-truth of John 3 let us now turn to the Epistles of the New Testament.

In those of the Apostle Paul, the new birth is taught under the figure of resurrection. The believer has died with Christ, been crucified with Christ, and lives again, new-born in a risen life—the life of Christ risen, of which he is made partaker by faith.

Thus we read in Romans 6, "That like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk *in newness of life*." In the Revised Version, the familiar words "born again" are translated "born *anew*," that is, "newness of life" in the Apostle's language. Again, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead [men] unto sin, but *alive unto God* in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6. 11). Again, "Present yourselves unto God, as *alive from the dead*" (verse 13), and, finally, "The free gift of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord" (verses 22, 23).

Then in Colossians 3. 9, 10 we read, "Ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the New Man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him." And in 2 Corinthians 5. 17, "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the



old things are passed away ; behold, they are become new." See also Galatians 6. 15.

How wonderful is the harmony of Scripture ! How perfect is its unity ! For here the Spirit, leading Paul by a wholly different road or line of revelation, conducts him to the same conclusions as were brought out by our Lord in the passage with which we began, which probably he had never seen or heard. There is in John, a "new birth ;" in Paul, "newness of life ;" in John, a man "born anew ;" in Paul, a "new man ;" in John, he is born of God, "born of the Spirit ;" in Paul, he is alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord ; in John, he gets life, even life everlasting ; in Paul, he is alive from the dead, possessing "the free gift of God, . . . eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Our Lord by His striking method of contrast presents the man in the flesh as missing, or falling short of, the kingdom of God, and the man in the spirit as gifted with life everlasting. Paul on the other hand, founding his instruction on the Lord's death and its blessed effects in the liberation of sin's victims, presents man in the flesh, the "old man," as crucified and slain with Christ, and the believer as thus set free from the reign of sin ; and the "new man" a new creation, or new creature, as that of one risen from the dead in Christ's resurrection, alive unto God, to whom all his powers

may now be gladly yielded. In fact death and resurrection intervene between the man born and the man reborn. The new birth is a birth out of death.

### **Man's Triple Nature.**

Another thing is thus developed—the reborn man is a three-fold structure. There is first the “human being,” as the words are generally understood, the man of such and such a colour, nationality, stature, visage, physique, disposition, mental capacity, energy, and occupation. Then there is his fallen, corrupt, and depraved moral nature, the flesh, or “old man.” And, thirdly, there is the “new creation,” the “new man,” the spirit, which is Spirit-born.

After regeneration, or new birth, the human being as we know, see, and hear him is indwelt by the two conflicting natures called flesh and spirit, influencing him ever in opposite directions ; and the consistent, godly, Christ-like character is ever he who habitually yields himself to the Spirit's leading, and mortifies the leading of the flesh (Rom. 8. 12).

Regeneration in fact sets up a warfare, where before there was a guilty and degrading peace. “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh,” that you, the man, the “third party,” so to speak, may never do the things that you would, be they good or evil.

And all the power of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—is on the side of the spirit, or new nature, to give the man perpetual victory and lasting peace within, “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4. 7), in the full enjoyment of which he can busy himself for the help and blessing of others less forward in the holy war.

### **The Hope of Eternal Life.**

Beyond all this, we have in the letters of the Apostle Paul a glorious forecast connecting the Spirit-birth with the ultimate destiny of the believer.

In Titus 3. 5-7 the “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He poured out on us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour,” is declared to have for its object: “that being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” It will be observed that here eternal life, which we have as a present possession, is viewed in the aspect of its future and full enjoyment as a subject of hope. Regeneration, or the new birth, by making us children, makes us heirs of glory, “sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20. 36).

In Colossians 3. 1-4 the new state of life into which we have come is described as being “risen together with Christ,” and we are charged to “seek the things which are above, where Christ

is, seated on the right hand of God ;” to set our mind or heart on things above, not on things on the earth, “for your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with Him be manifested in glory.” This beautiful passage shines forth radiant with the light of eternity. The earth is a foreign country, home is in things above, which, having not seen, we love ; and the new life, in which we already live, will soon be no longer *hid* with the unseen Christ, but be *manifested* in His coming glory. For Christ is that life, and it cannot be secret when He is seen. The pulse of the second birth beats strong in anticipation of that day.

This brings us to the passage which most fully reveals the future of the Spirit-born, Romans 8.9-17. Is it only here and now we know the power and blessing of the eternal life into which the new birth introduces us ? The Apostle quickly disposes of such a thought. “If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you.” The new birth involves the resurrection of the body.

### **The Teaching of the Apostle Peter.**

Turning now to the Apostle Peter we find another line of results from the second birth. In

his first Epistle (chap. i. 22 to 2. 2), the "new-born babes" are shown to have realised the meaning of "born of water," which so many fail to do, for they had *purified* their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, being born again of a seed that is incorruptible, and now are exhorted to "unfeigned love of the brethren . . . from the heart fervently." The most arresting feature of this new or second birth is its transforming effect *on the heart*. The natural man is a mass of desires, affections, loves, for all that is carnal and of this world, but within this vast insatiable circle there is absolutely no place found for love to God or to His people. But now what a change! He seeks to walk with God and loves His people whom once he despised. It is indeed a revolution, or, in the scriptural term, a conversion. The guile, the malice, the envy, the hatred, the self-seeking and self-pleasing of the past are renounced as detestable, and his grateful heart goes out in love to all men, even to those who hurt or injure him, and the very air he breathes is the company and fellowship of the lovers of God. The change is due to the new birth.

Another fruit follows. He is born again "unto a living hope (chap. i. 3) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who by the

## The New Birth.

power of God are guarded through faith unto salvation;" salvation, that is, in its future, fullest, and most perfect sense. Here, again, we perceive how the Spirit takes care to expound and enlarge our Lord's words, "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" That kingdom of God is this glorious inheritance of the believer. And after all the heaviness of life's manifold temptations he has this prospect, which is full of glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The spiritual effect of hope is little apprehended. It is this noble passion which gives his heavenly character to the new-born man. He feeds upon his prospect. The glory of his inheritance exceeds that of every earthly possession or hope, as sunlight hides the stars. They have no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth. And here again our Lord's words are expounded and expanded. He has spoken of everlasting life. The Spirit makes it clear that the security implied in these words has a double seal.

## The Living Hope.

The inheritance is kept for us, and we are kept for it (verses 4, 5), and amid all the unnumbered hosts of heaven's people it is "reserved" against all claimants (if such there could be) for us for an everlasting possession. And we, on the other hand, by virtue of our new birthright, are

secured in our inheritance, because guarded by the whole power of Almightyness, amid all Satan's assaults and opposings and our own heart's treachery, for due entrance upon and eternal enjoyment of that purchased possession. Children are pre-eminently creatures of hope, and the more the new-born children of God, being children of the resurrection, fix their hearts on the future, the less will trouble trouble them, or sin betray.

Again, the Apostle exhorts the new-born babes in Christ to "long for the spiritual milk [of the Word] that they may grow thereby unto salvation; if they have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (chap. 2. 2, 3). One of the greatest changes following the second infancy is the soul's attitude towards the Word of God. It becomes as necessary to him as his daily bread. Every page excites his interest, for it speaks to his heart. There he finds himself revealed, his deepest convictions set forth, and the remedy for every ill. In conflict it nerves him, in sorrow it comforts him, in sin it restores him. Best of all, by its means he can learn to know his Lord. Each precious scene in the gospels lives again, and little by little the marvels of Christ awaken his surprise and fill up the revelation, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. The more he studies the good Word of God, the more precious it becomes, for its light shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

**The Teaching of the Apostle John.**

In the principal Epistle of John the new birth naturally occupies a prominent place. Ten times therein it is said to fix the character of the believer. The birth of the Spirit is shown, moreover, to enable its subject to conquer sin. "Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because His seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God" (chap. 3. 9). "We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not" (chap. 5. 18).

The teaching here has two bearings, and neither of them points to a claim of "sinless perfection," against which doctrine the Apostle erects a warning notice in one of his opening paragraphs: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar" (chap. 1. 8, 10). That is, neither as to heart nor as to practice is the new-born soul justified in a profession of sinlessness. What, then, is the teaching? First, it is the sinlessness of the seed that is set forth. "His seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin." The new man that springs and grows from the new birth is a new creation "after God in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Eph. 4. 24). The seed is incorruptible (1 Peter 1. 23); not merely uncorrupt, but incorruptible. Unlike the first Adam's innocence, this seed



partakes of the divine nature, and is not subject to the reign of sin. It is the very shrine and temple of the Holy Ghost in the soul.

### **Sin Conquered.**

So long, therefore, as the "begotten of God" puts on the new man, that is, walks in the power of the Spirit after the nature of the Spirit-birth, he doeth no sin. Secondly, "he cannot sin" in another sense, of which I take the case of Joseph for illustration. Sorely and frequently tempted by one whom his situation as a subordinate would naturally incline him to obey, he steadfastly refuses the temptress. And how does he explain his contumacy? "Behold, my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath put all that he hath into my hand; . . . neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then *can* I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39. 8, 9). He cannot so sin against his master, who has honoured, favoured, and enriched him. The obligation of a great indebtedness so controls his evil nature as to make it *impossible* to sin thus against his benefactor. We are not less indebted than Joseph was. And when sin in its grosser forms is presented or solicited, in our case also it is true that we are repelled, outraged, disgusted at the

attempt ; we *cannot* so sin against Christ, or do such violence to our new birth.

### **Habits of Holiness.**

There is another thought also conveyed in the word "abideth ;" "his seed abideth in him," namely, that while it is impossible to set up a claim to sinlessness, it is not impossible to walk, as a matter of habit, soberly, righteously, and godly. The *abiding* of the seed forms *habits* of holiness. A man of the world may be, and very often is, almost blameless in conduct before the world, but the man of God is holy *from within*. "The water that I shall give him shall become *in him* a well of water springing up unto eternal life" (John 4. 14). It is this constancy of operation that forms character. The "seed abideth," the "well springeth," and both are constant in operation, and confirm the Apostle's words, "He doeth no sin." As a matter of habit he eschews all evil ; that is his character, not for his reputation's sake, as men of the world do good, but for the love of it ; it is "second nature" to him to be clean.

### **Satan's Defeat.**

Connected with these three passages, but going further, is this one, "He that was begotten of God . . . the Evil One toucheth him not" (1 John 5. 18). The fiery darts of

Satan will never in this life cease to fly around his head, but, like Daniel in the den of lions, or the three children in the furnace, he stands unharmed, immune from injury, invulnerable indeed, if he abides beneath the sheltering wings, to all the power of the enemy, and that though the whole world around him lieth in the Evil One (verse 19). The second birth carries wonderful privileges with it, not least of which is that from him who resists the Devil flees. He touches him not. The wall of fire burns bright around him on every side, and within that circle he is safe.

### **The World Overcome.**

And this victory of the new-born is not only over Satan, for "whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh *the world*": and this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (chap. 5. 4). The faith that first brought us to flee from the wrath to come, for refuge at the Cross, and for life everlasting in Christ, is now in constant exercise against the allurements of the world. And when the Evil One has failed to wound with his weapons, he often finds means, as the serpent, to win by worldly attractions the good soldier who had manfully fought against his power. Here it is that faith in the power of Him who said, "I have overcome the world," gives no meaner victory to His servant (John 16. 33).

**Born of God.**

The rest of the passages in John have to do with our sonship and the relation it creates with the other sons of God. They are these:—

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God: and such we are” (chap. 3. 1). “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God” (chap. 4. 7). “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is begotten of God: and whosoever loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (chap. 5. 1).

Note here that this effect of the new birth is that stated in the first passage in the Gospel of this Apostle in which he sets forth the new birth (see John 1. 12, 13). It means sonship.

We have seen above several aspects of regeneration, but this is the first, the chiefest, and the highest of them all. The new birth is wrought by the breath of the Holy Ghost. It reaches our souls by our hearing His voice, as He presents and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ. It brings life, even life everlasting, to him that believeth when he heareth. It washes, like water, from the defilements of nature. It withdraws the soul from the love and service of sin, and gives victory over the world, the flesh, and the Devil. These, the glorious results of that change, are the things

that prove the necessity of the new birth. But the greatest of all remains to be stated.

The new birth makes us children of God. In the Old Testament this aspect of truth was not revealed. That all men are "the offspring of God" as Creator, was, even by the heathen, recognised. That Israel *as a nation* was in the relation of a son to a father is frequently set forth. But the phenomenon of a second birth in each individual soul, introducing him or her, as a son or daughter in life eternal to the family of the Father, this glory of revelation and privilege was reserved for the lips of the Lord Himself to disclose. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew." In the passage already quoted the result of this second birth is given. "As many as received Him [the Lord Jesus], to them gave He the right to become *children of God* even to them that believe on His name: which were born . . . of God" (John i. 12, 13). And the Lord Himself had prepared the way for this statement by His words, "They that are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead . . . are *sons of God*, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20. 36).

This wonderful relationship of life in God is amply developed in the Epistles of Paul and John. Romans 8. 14-17: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God [having first been *born*

of Him], these are sons of God [not *the* sons, as if the relation were already known ; there is no article]. . . . Ye received the Spirit of adoption [at your second birth], whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself [to whom we owe the new life in Christ] beareth witness with our spirit that we are children [not mere creatures, nor even servants, but children] of God : and if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

### **The Fatherhood of God.**

It is fashionable to refer to God as the common Father of the human race, and the universal Fatherhood is a flattering unction for the children of this world ; but if one of them be questioned, "Have you been born again?" how quickly comes the denial, the thought of a re-generation is repugnant to them. The Lord explains the apparent anomaly : "If God were your Father, ye would love Me." "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do" (John 8. 42, 44). The first Epistle of John enlarges upon this contrast. "He that doeth sin is of the Devil; for the Devil sinneth from the beginning." "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil." "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be" (chap. 3. 8, 10, 2).

**The Brotherhood of Love.**

But it is not enough that we should become aware of, and familiar with, our privilege and place as sons of God by birth of the Holy Ghost. The relation thus made known carries with it great and varied responsibilities, which it would lead us too far from our theme to discuss in any adequate degree; they must be dealt with on another occasion. Enough just here to refer to that aspect of it which the Apostle John specially connects with the new birth; I mean the family bond. If we have been begotten of God it follows that we have a new relationship, not only to Him as His children, but to all the other children as their brethren. Sonhood involves brotherhood. The life of the new-born is a life of love. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3. 14), and "whosoever loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (chap. 5. 1). The "lovers of God" are lovers also of those that are God's. It is the natural, that is the reasonable, spontaneous fruit of life. Love to the Father; love to the brother. If evidence of life therefore is demanded, let it be found in love. Human family love may fail, and often brothers are far from brotherly; but is there any case of brothers and sisters tenderly devoted

to their father or mother, and yet hating each other? The reason of strife among the children of God is the feebleness of the fire of love to God. Where "lukewarmness" towards Him exists, there cannot be hot love to men. The new birth unites all that are begotten of one Father. This thought seems to be at the root of Paul's constraining appeal in Ephesians 4. 1-6: "I . . . beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love ; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. One body, and one Spirit, . . . one hope, . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all."

The new birth is thus seen to be vital ; to be also pre-eminently practical ; essential, that is, to salvation and sanctification ; but, above all, it touches and kindles to glowing fervour that which is the true motive power of all spirit-energy—the heart's love to the Father and to all that are His.

### **The Mystery of the Spirit-born.**

I cannot conclude without a brief reference to our Lord's description of the mystery of the Holy Spirit's working conveyed by the words of John 3. 8, where the margin is clearly better than the text. There cannot be any reference here to the wind's "point" and direction ;



these are evident always. Nor can the wind be intended in the words, "where (it) listeth," for the wind has no will of its own, it blows in obedience to natural law. But both expressions become clear when applied to the Spirit, for there is no passage in Scripture which so forcibly reveals the divine sovereignty of the Spirit as the words, "The Spirit breatheth where He listeth." The same truth is taught in its corporate application in 1 Corinthians 12. 11, "All these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even *as He will*." And, again, in James 1. 18, "*Of His own will* He brought us forth . . . that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures." The Spirit is sovereign in His operations. "He giveth not account of any of His matters" (Job 33. 13). "Thou canst not tell whence He cometh, or whither He goeth" (see also John 8. 14).

Men labour in vain to produce a revival of religion. Now it comes in Wales, and now in India, Corea, China, or Japan. Blessing comes to tens of thousands in Ulster, and fifty years or more elapse before the wave returns. His movements are inscrutable and incomprehensible. The like qualities attach, as our Lord affirms, to him that is born of the Spirit. See 1 Corinthians 2. 11: "Who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of

God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God." "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man" (verse 15). The Christian, like his Master, is ever incomprehensible to man. His motives are unknown. His aims and objects are misunderstood. However much, like his Lord, he mixes with men, he lives a life apart—among them, but not of them, a heavenly stranger passing pilgrim-like through the crowd, with a far-off look in his eyes, for he seeks a country. "For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not," "because as He is, even so are we in this world" (1 John 3. 1 ; 4. 17).

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