

## WITH OUR CONTRIBUTORS

### John, the Son of Zebedee

*By Rev. Professor William Manson, M.A.*

It is more difficult to draw a portrait of John than it is to draw one of Peter. For one thing, less of John's natural self appears in the Gospel pages, and that which does appear is of a more elusive character. The personality of the son of Zebedee slips behind, and is merged in, that of "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The ablest students of the New Testament have not been able to settle all the questions relating to this disciple whom Jesus loved, but that he is John the son of Zebedee admits of no manner of doubt. His Christian humility found shelter, as time went on, in the beautiful anonymity of this phrase. But there is in the Gospels enough evidence, and in the church enough tradition, to show us the man concealed behind the phrase.

There must, in the first place, have been something very lovable about this man on whom Jesus bestowed so singular an affection. There was a sympathy, or understanding, which enabled Jesus to make him, along with Peter and James, a companion of his holiest hours. He witnessed the Transfiguration. He was taken into the Garden. That was because he had eyes to see, and a heart to feel. Jesus felt his sympathy. On the last night of his earthly life, Jesus conferred on him a supreme honor. Though unable to give him the right or left hand place in his kingdom, he placed him by his own side at the supper. Finally on the cross he committed to John's charge his mother. Qualities which drew such loving favor from the great lover of men must have been very rare qualities indeed.

John had probably from the start the spirit

of the mystic. He was not so much a man of action as a thinker and a dreamer. He saw visions of Patmos, but he saw them also in the early years in Galilee. Evidence of this is in the fact that John was a disciple of the Baptist before he became a disciple of Jesus.

His imagination had been fired, and his soul deeply stirred by the clarion call of the prophet. His spirit felt the glow which uncorrupted youth experiences when the vision of a holier world or nation is presented to it. His heart beat in unison with the Baptist's. Jesus honored him for this, as he honored all who honored the Baptist. He saw the fine spiritual promise of this young seer of visions and beckoned him from his boats and nets to follow him.

The title which Jesus gave him and his brother, the Boanerges, or "Sons of Thunder" is also indicative of his quality. It is usually thought that this title refers to the fiery, impetuous nature which underlay the quiet exterior. Certainly of such hidden fire there

is no lack in John. It flashes out at times, as when he wished to call down fire on the inhospitable Samaritans. But it may be that Jesus, when he gave the name, was thinking not of this, but of the flaming and impassioned eloquence which would one day leap from the lips of this apostle. Just as Peter, though by nature unstable as sand, would be a "rock," so John, silent and dreamy, would kindle men's hearts by the fire of his words. Later on, the Jewish authorities were to take note of "the boldness" of this preacher, and Origen speaks of the "thunder" of his words.

John was, on at least one occasion, uncharitable, and on another he appears selfishly ambitious of distinction. He wished to prohibit the work of a disciple who was doing good in Jesus' name, because he was not one

### OUR TEACHER

How wonderful a teacher we have! Sometimes we seek him in the house, but he is not there; we go forth seeking him and find him perhaps in the wilderness or on a mountain praying, or leading some poor blind man by the hand, or eating with publicans or sinners, or asleep in a storm, or conversing with a Samaritan woman, or surrounded by wrathful men, or bearing a cross. It is not merely his words that instruct. His place, his occupation, his companions, his environment, his garment, his silence, his submission—all teem with instruction. And they that learn of him are made like unto him.—George Bowen