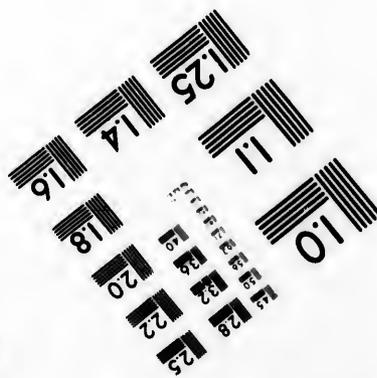
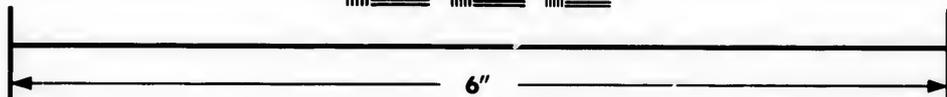
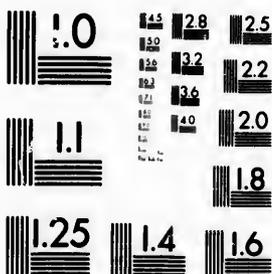


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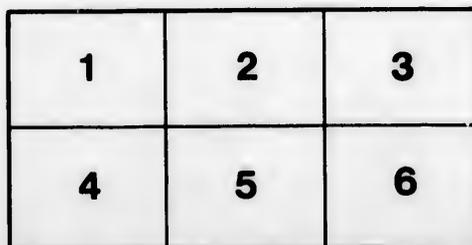
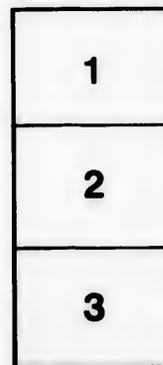
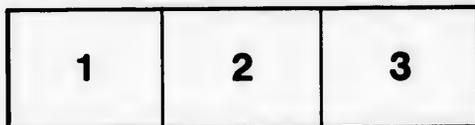
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# THE TRUE GNOSTICS.

## A SERMON

PREACHED IN

CRESCENT STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MONTREAL.



By the REV. A. B. MACKAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE GLORY OF THE CROSS," ETC.

(PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.)

Montreal:

WM. DRYSDALE & CO.

1880.



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*"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in  
wickedness."—1. John v. : 19.*

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## THE TRUE GnostICS.

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THRICE in three verses the apostle John utters the emphatic words "we know." Of these three utterances that at the beginning of this verse is the central and most comprehensive. A class of men rose in the early days of Christianity calling themselves and delighting in being called Gnostics, that is "knowing ones." They professed to have a deeper insight into the mysteries of being, into the nature and origin of good and evil, than ordinary men. They considered themselves the *elite* of the intellect of their age, the aristocrats of thought. But notwithstanding all their pride and boastfulness, their assumptions were essentially false and inconsistent; their wisdom an elaborated folly; their endless processions a cloak, often ludicrous, of ignorance, and their morality a volatile and variable phantasm. The gospel of St. John, as well as this epistle, has a reference to these vain dreamers, and both unfold truths which were fitted to destroy that strange amalgam of Polytheism, Pantheism, Monotheism, Mysticism, and Demonology, which the philosophers of apostolic and post apostolic days called by the name of gnosticism. The apostle here winds up his instructions by saying, as it were, "We are the true gnostics, we who believe in the Father, Son and

Holy Ghost, we who trust in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do know, and that of a truth; we do not guess, or speculate, or imagine. We know the grand secrets of the spirit world, whether in reference to light or darkness, whether in regard to good or evil, so far as men can know them. The essences of these things are made clear to our understanding and laid open to our eyes. And we know these things in their relations to ourselves. 'We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one.'

Thus the most rudimentary declarations of Christianity, its barest assumptions, are very great, and they are by no means to be toned down. They are not to be modified to suit the prejudices of an ignorant world, which in spiritual self-conceit thinks itself wise. Christianity in its simplest assertions sets itself on a platform as highly exalted above the most sublime systems of human speculation, as the Heavens are exalted above the mountain tops. And so the humblest believer who has drunk into the true spirit of Christianity has, of necessity, a sublime and heavenly self-assertion from which the wisest followers of earth's philosophies must shrink. Hence the antagonism and hatred of that slavish thing called "liberal thought" against the enunciation of the simplest Christian verities; hence also its senseless cuckoo-cries against "dogma"; its puerile deification of 'honest doubts,' as if, forsooth, 'honest faith' had become a fossil. The very highest of such philosophers have characterized their most laborious speculations as nothing more than "the *pursuit* of know-

ledge;" but the apostle speaking here, as the mouth-piece of all God's children, says: "we *know* that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." How gloriously does this divine "we know" ring out among the crudities, and probabilities, and guesses, and doubts, and difficulties, and theories, and disputes of befogged philosophers; here at least there is certainty.

Surely, therefore, these words teach that knowledge, true, abiding, spiritual, is the characteristic of God's people; that knowledge, not ignorance, is the mother of devotion. John does not say, we think, we hope, we suppose, we guess, we expect, we trust, but WE KNOW. Therefore, it is not surprising that some have exalted knowledge too highly and made it of the essence of faith and salvation. And there is a sense in which this is true, for if we know not the Father and the Son spiritually, we have no life in us. "This is life eternal that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Still it does not follow that we are always and invariably conscious of this inner spirit wrought knowledge. Some philosophers have discoursed learnedly of unconscious mental modifications, and whether or not they have proved their existence satisfactorily, certain we are in regard to this spiritual knowledge that it is possible not to know that we know; therefore it is possible to have spiritual life without assurance.

"'Tis a point I long to know,  
Oft it gives me anxious thought,  
Do I love the Lord or no,  
Am I His or am I not."

These lines were written by a holy man of God, and the state of mind they reveal is often a manifestation of conscientious earnestness and of a strong determination to have only truth in the inner man. Indeed it would be a hopeful sign if some self-satisfied sinners who pose themselves as very perfect saints, had a great deal more of such experience. But while this is freely acknowledged, still, wherever there is spiritual life, (and we cannot say this too strongly or emphatically) there ought to be assurance; and we will be poor, weak-kneed, inefficient christians until we have it. To know the truth of our relation to God and the world, is the characteristic experience of all God's children. A state of chronic doubt and uncertainty is not the normal, the proper, the apostolic state.

Perhaps the outward circumstances of the early church made this knowledge so clear. Men would never have cast in their lot with the Christians if they had not been possessed of this assurance. In those days the struggle was outward, now it is inward, and often the greatest difficulty is just to get a soul to be able to say with a clear conscience and true humility in the sight of God and man: "We know that we are of God."

Another reason why it is difficult to attain to this assurance is because some assert its possession so flippantly. We listen to them, nothing could be better than the words of their mouth, but have we not watched their lives, do we not know their deeds, therefore we have a shrewd suspicion that they have no right thus to speak—that their assurance is mere

presumption. Have we not known a man who by his loud protestations of assurance, his unctuous declarations as to the peace and happiness of his soul, did more to keep honest men from the attainment of these blessings than anything else. They knew him and his modes of conducting business. His name was notorious for all that they despised, and therefore his holiest words were to them the rankest hypocrisy. Yet the importance of assurance cannot be over estimated. Nothing is so fitted to impart strength, comfort and joy to the heart. Accordingly in our Shorter Catechism it leads the van in that glorious list of benefits which flow from justification, adoption and sanctification. In this golden series comes first of all "Assurance of God's love," and no one should rest content until it is his portion, until the words of John are the expression of his own soul, "we know that we are of God." And let us remember that until we can do so, whatever our experiences and attainments, we have not yet arrived at the true and normal Christian position.

Assured conviction then, is to be our leading characteristic ; but conviction as to what ? The text unfolds the answer. It is two-fold. We know that we are of God. We know that the whole world lieth in the wicked one. That is to say, we have attained to the knowledge of the truth in reference to ourselves and also in reference to the world.

#### I.—WHAT WE KNOW AS TO OURSELVES.

"We are of God." There is a wide sense in which all things are of God, for "in Him we live and

move and have our being." "Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things." But here we have something much more definite and blessed than the general procession of all things from the Deity. The context unfolds the fact that we are 'of Him' in the sense of being *enlightened* by Him. By nature we are in darkness; yea, spiritually we are born blind.—Every soul can say "I once was a stranger to grace and to God." God in His great mercy has removed both the darkness without and the blindness within. By His Son He has revealed Himself and dissipated the gross darkness which enveloped the world. By His Spirit He has given us the faculty to behold Him. The next verse tells us that "the Son of God is come," the true light, the true God; therefore, the darkness of the long dreary night is gone, the Sun of Righteousness has risen on our world. But not only has He come, He has also touched our hearts by His Holy Spirit. "He has given us an understanding." And for what purpose has this understanding been imparted? "that we may know Him that is true." This particular gift is as much needed as the other. Even when the sun streams downward and bathes the whole world in a flood of light, the faculty to perceive it is needed—the eye that can take all in. Jesus gives the one and the other, the light and the eye. "The Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true." We are enlightened by Him.

Again, we are 'of God' in the sense of being *quicken*ed by Him. By nature we are not only spiritually dark and blind; we are also dead—dead

in trespasses and sins. Our darkness is that of the grave, far more terrible and invincible than that of the blind. And the light which the Son of God imparts is correspondingly glorious. It is the light of life. "We are in Him that is true"—that is to say, we are in God and in eternal life. To use the Pauline expression, "our life is hid with Christ in God." We are at the very centre and source of all life and light; therefore life and light are ours. "We are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." "With thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light shall we see light." We are in Him that is true, by being in His love and favour; by having a place in His covenant, and being federally related to Him; and also in virtue of a spiritual assimilation, by being made "partakers of the divine nature." Thus we are in Him by the threefold bond of an undying affection, a righteous principle, and an endless life. And we are in Him that is true, in virtue of our being in the Son. The place of blessing and all the blessings of our place we receive, not directly but indirectly, through God's Son. Apart from our relation to Him we have nothing. It is by His Birth and Life and Work and Death and Resurrection and Intercession that each and all of these blessings become our portion. We are blessed only "with Him."

Furthermore, we are 'of God' in the sense of being *possessed* by Him. He takes us as His portion, and delights in us. He has a great kingdom, and He delights in us as citizens of the New Jerusalem—that pearly-gated metropolis of His large and great dominion. He is erecting a glorious spiritual

temple, which shall display most wonderfully His resources of Love and Power and Wisdom and Justice and Mercy, and He delights in us as living stones in that temple, of which His own Son is foundation and corner-stone. There is a vine which His own right hand has planted, which brings forth fruit abundantly for His glory and refreshment, and He delights in us as the fruitful branches of that vine. He has an army engaged in conflict against all the powers of darkness, determined to give no quarter to aught that is inconsistent with His glory, and He delights in us as His soldiers, fighting for Him in this great war. He has a holy family, unspeakably precious to His heart, to gather whom to His heavenly home He did not spare His only begotten Son, and He delights in us as the children of this family. He has a Son—the express image of His person—eternally His delight, who has glorified Him above all that heart can conceive or seraph's tongue declare; and He delights in us as the Bride of that Son, the crowning manifestation of the great love wherewith He loveth Him. We are delighted in as the highest love-gift of the Father to the Son, His glorious Consort for ever and ever—a Bride without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

Thus are we 'of God,' being enlightened, quickened, and possessed by Him. Oh, to walk continually in the consciousness of this great truth!

#### II.—WHAT WE KNOW AS TO THE WORLD.

“The whole world lieth in the wicked one.”  
The two great truths contained in the verse are co-

relative, and he who knows the one knows the other. We generally find that those who are not sure of their own relationship to God are very easy in regard to the condition of the world. They think the language of the text unwarrantably strong, and therefore, so far from grappling with the great evils which are doing their deadly work all around, they are very idle and indifferent, lukewarm and selfish. They assure themselves and others that all will come right in the long run. On the contrary, they who have the clearest consciousness of their relationship to God have the deepest solicitude for the spiritual and eternal welfare of others. Being "of God," they do not shut their eyes to the terrible state of the world at large, but do all that in them lies to bring to nought the power of the wicked one.

Here we are told that the world lieth in the wicked one. Our English version reads "lieth in wickedness," and this is true, but the force of the original is more definite and terrible: the world lies in the originator of all evil. As there is a special possession by God, exalting, blessed, purifying, so there is a special possession of Satan, degrading, miserable, defiling. As the saints of God walk in the light of eternal life, so sinners are wrapped in darkness and lie in death. As underneath the children of God there are the everlasting arms, so around the world are the coils of the old serpent. He is the prince, the ruler, the god of this present period, and all over the wide world spreads his dominion. The spirit of the age is inspired by him. He is at the helm and guides the course of every soul who does not own the Lord's Anointed.

And the world *lieth* in him ; lieth in him, helpless to move but as he allows—a miserable victim. It lieth in him, indifferent as to its condition, rendered senseless by the spiritual torpor that has seized upon it through the deceitfulness of sin. It lieth in him willingly, yielding itself up to his service with all its heart, fascinated by his lies, delighting in the pleasures of sin. Thus the world lies clasped by the strong coils of his subtle might. Witness the idolatry that reigns around—not in distant heathen lands alone, but equally at the great centres of civilization. Do we not see idolatry of Nature, of Humanity, of Mammon, of Self, of Pleasure? Witness also the ignorance, the deceit, the violence, the impiety, the lust, the unbelief, that characterize the vast majority. How obtrusive is the sad fact that the world lieth in the wicked one! History is the best commentary on the text.

Yes, and the whole world is thus embraced. This is not true of the heathen alone. It is "the whole world" that lieth in the wicked one. The whole world, however civilized, refined, educated, attractive, learned, respectable. Some of the old serpent's coils are coarse and slimy, some are soft and silken, but all are strong, and his influence and sway are world-wide.

The picture is appalling, and the doom inevitable, if there is no means of escape. But, thank God, there is. The Son of God has come. He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. In our own strength and wisdom and knowledge we can never extricate ourselves from his power ; but Jesus

has come to give deliverance to the captive, and, trusting in Him—not in something about Him, but in Himself, the Strong Son of God, the Saviour of the world—casting ourselves on His clemency and His might, we can rest assured of perfect deliverance from the power of Satan, and of that judgment that must overtake him. Thus, however degraded, believing in Him, we also can say, "We know that we are of God."

But to close, where we began : Some say, would it not be presumption in me to express such confidence—to lay claim to such a salvation. Nay, friend, if you cast yourself on God's mercy through Christ, the presumption rather is in *not* having this assurance ; for it is written, "He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, THAT GOD HATH GIVEN TO US ETERNAL LIFE, AND THIS LIFE IS IN HIS SON." Is this true ? then where is the presumption ? In taking God at His word, and humbly, reverently, yet confidently, testifying "we are of God" ? or in making Him a liar, by rejecting His testimony ? What more perfect and touching proofs could God have given us of His love or His willingness to save ? What more clear and firm foundation on which to build a holy and God-glorifying assurance ? May it be your portion all through time, and your comfort in the hour of death. Amen.

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