

# THE APOCALYPSE

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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**THE APOCALYPSE**  
**EXPOUNDED BY SCRIPTURE**

BY  
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(Abridged from the Four Volume Edition, 1854)

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## PREFATORY NOTE

**M**R. GOVETT'S four volumes on the Revelation, in a complete set, have long been unobtainable. It is inevitable that in this abridged edition, containing less than a fourth of the original, much critical and even essential matter has had to be omitted, together with proofs decisive on many disputed points. So also the cost of printing has made it necessary to omit his penetrating and pulverizing criticisms of all interpretations of the Apocalypse which, by taking it as a huge symbol, reduce it to the unintelligible. Scripture quotations also, most regrettably, have had to be given as references only. Nevertheless, to quote Mr. Spurgeon, "Mr. Govett wrote a hundred years before his time, and the day will come when his works will be treasured as sifted gold"; and this exposition of the Revelation without a peer was never more vital or more urgent than in the moment when we are manifestly entering the penumbra of the last judgments.

# THE APOCALYPSE EXPOUNDED

## CHAPTER I

1. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show unto his servants what must come to pass shortly; and (*which*) he sent by his angel and represented to his servant John; who testified (with regard to) the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, whatever things he saw."

By a "revelation" is meant the taking off a veil. In Scripture it intends the disclosure of secrets of God incapable of being divined by man. It is also called a "prophecy:" "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this *prophecy*."

Jesus, when Israel blasphemed the Holy Spirit, clothed himself with a seven-fold *veil of parable*. Matt. xiii. But the Revelation is *the taking off of that veil*.

But if it be the *taking off a veil* from the future, then it must be written in a way capable of being understood before the things predicted occur. And it is thus probable that it would in the main consist of representations to be taken literally. For these are most easily understood. It is when Jesus would *hide* himself from the comprehension of unbelieving Israel, that He uses parables of emblems. Mark iv. 11, 12.

As one well says, "These words—'which *God* gave unto him'—show how peculiarly this book is to be regarded as coming from God *as God*. It is not the instruction of the *Father* to children in the bosom of the

family: but it is God on the throne of government, instructing the servants of Jesus.

From the disclosure being *given by God* it is rendered certain, that *some part* of the book *contains new truth*: though it appears also (as the sequel will show) that a considerable portion of it had more or less been discovered to the prophets and apostles. But even where they were permitted to declare something of the same times, *this prophecy is far more complete*. This is the golden thread, on which may be strung all the pearls of former prophecy.

They are things which must take place "*shortly*." From this word some have argued that the book must have begun to be accomplished soon after it was written: and hence that it contains a *continuous history of the Christian Church*. But the very same expression is used of an event, which, as all acknowledge, has yet to be accomplished. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet *shortly*" (Rom. xvi. 20). But this promise is in the very manner of prophecy; the style of Him with whom a thousand years are as one day.

A point of deep importance lies couched in the next words. "Unto His *servants*." First, this warns us that we are *not* on the ground taken by the Epistles of Paul, where the writer addresses *the saints as the sons of God*: and the Most High is discovered to them as their *Father*.

The angel was sent to "*show*" unto the servants of God the future. The word employed denotes generally the manifesting a thing to the senses. And hence, after the admonitory addresses to the churches are finished, and the future begins to be treated of, the style changes. *Events* are seen to transpire.

I have chosen the word "represented," in preference to "signified." The Greek expression intends that the Revelation is peculiar in its mode of making known the

future to us. It was not given in words at first, as in the case of prophecies in general. It was presented before John as a series of moving visions, which he described, pen in hand, as they appeared before him. And we are left from those representations to gather the meaning of God, and the character of the events about to come to pass. The problem of the Revelation then is: Given certain persons, things, and actions, to penetrate from thence into the meaning and plans of men and of God.

From this word many have come to the conclusion that the Apocalypse is a "*book of symbols.*" But this is a hasty inference. Its prophetic part is a series of representations. But representations are of two kinds, direct and indirect.

In the Apocalypse *both styles of representation occur*: and it is from supposing that it contains *only* symbols, that much of the obscurity of the book is owing. *Symbols there are in it*; but *not a few of them are explained*; and they are *far fewer* than the *direct representations of the future*. There are twice seven symbols which are explained; and *perhaps as many more that are not explained*. The explained are as follows:—

1. Lamp-stands = Churches.
2. Stars = Angels of Churches.
3. Torches = Spirits of God.
4. Horns and Eyes = Spirits of God.
5. Odours = Prayers of Saints.
6. Dragon = Satan.
7. Frogs = Spirits.
8. Wild Beast = a King, xvii.
9. Heads of Wild Beast = Mountains.
10. Horns = Subordinate Kings.
11. Waters = Peoples.
12. Woman = A City.
13. Fine Linen = Righteousness.

14. The Bride Wife of the Lamb = City of God, xxi. 9, 10.

The past tense is used,—he “testified,”—because the *first ten verses* of this chapter are a *preface*, added after the writing of the rest.

“The Word of God” in the division of the book stands first; because that is by pre-eminence “the Revelation,” or the part *which God gave to Christ*, and which was chiefly a *series of visible signs*.

“The *testimony* of Jesus” *relates to things then present, and is His decision as to the state of the Churches.*

3. “Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written in it; for the season is nigh.”

The *blessing is attached specially* to the reader of “the words of the *prophecy.*” Many will admit the usefulness of the addresses to the Churches, who treat very lightly the prophetic part: yet the prophetic portion is that specially blessed.

*The intention of the book extends much beyond the Church, & Christ.* The whole is profitable to the Churches; even the prophetic part, in which the Church is not directly addressed. The *Seven Epistles* will be *useful to Israel also.*

With such a blessing attached to the study of this portion of God’s word, how sad it is to find this book so generally proscribed or neglected! But the Holy Spirit foresaw the undue neglect of it, and therefore determined to compensate for it by the peculiar blessedness attached to it.

It has been well observed by one, that this book is manifestly by these words designed to open our understandings and to act upon our affections, *whilst it still remains prophecy.* It is while the season is yet “near,” and not actually arrived, that the book is to be read and

pondered. Hereby then is *destroyed the unscriptural idea*, that *prophecy is only intended to benefit us*, by the perception of its fulfilment, *after its prophetic aspect is past.*

*What season and time is at hand? That of "temptation,"* against which we shall do well to watch and pray; *that of "harvest,"* in which *the ripe shall be taken*, and the *unripe left*; *that of "refreshing,"* in which the long-stored *promises of the prophets* shall be fulfilled; *that of "judgment,"* when every work shall come into notice, whether it be good or evil; and *the time of "reward"* to the saints.

The prophecy is not to be put off, as something not demanding our present study, because relating to things immeasurably remote. "The season is *near.*" Long as the time is which has elapsed since that was written, there was then, and is now, *no necessary interval* to arise ere the prophetic part begins to be fulfilled. In this it is *contrasted with Daniel*, who is dismissed from study of his prophecies, because *the book is sealed up*, and a long time must pass ere it be fulfilled.

It is *practical*. Hear that, all you who think that nothing is worthy of study which is not so! Yes; the *prophecy is practical!* "Blessed . . . they who keep the things written in it." In order *rightly to understand it*, we must be *right in our spiritual position* before God; and of a *single eye*, willing to *follow the truth* wherever it may lead us.

Reader, do you love to set yourself where the God of all pronounces you "blessed"? Is that a sunshine wherein to bask? Then are you in it while reading and hearing "the prophecy of this book."

4. "John to the seven churches which are in Asia; Grace be unto you and peace, from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits that are before His throne;

5. and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the First-born of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."

At this point begins a special message to *a certain class of God's servants*, then recognized on earth during the dispensation of mercy, under which the Revelation was given. But we soon learn that the distinction of the Church as God's sole *witness is about to cease*, owing to its *unfaithfulness*, when tried by God's just demands upon those so privileged. Hence the Apocalypse does *not* anywhere give the *distinctive glory of the Church*, as the Epistles of Paul do. *The glory of the New Jerusalem is one enjoyed in common by all the servants of God.* Nor was it fitting, that the peculiar glory as a body, of that which fails in its collective capacity, should be presented in this book.

We are apt to speak of the "Church of England," "of Greece," "of Rome." The Scripture, however, uses a different expression. It speaks of "the seven churches in Asia." It does not suppose the whole country to constitute one Church. But it recognizes churches subsisting as *assemblies of the saints*, in the midst of the ungodly world around. Each church was an assembly *independent* of the other, having its own angel, and elders, and deacons, and *looking up to no higher corporation than itself.*

But why were the churches of *Asia* addressed? Probably those of Judæa were broken up by the destruction which had now (A.D. 95 or 96) fallen on Judæa and Jerusalem.

But why were only *seven* churches in Asia addressed? There were other churches doubtless then in being, as those of Hierapolis, Colossæ, and Tralles. The reason is in keeping with the book. In it numbers are significant. *Seven* is the number of *dispensational fullness*, or *perfection as instituted by God.* *Three* represents the

*Divine nature*, as Father, Son, and Spirit. *Four* represents the material world, or *the creature*.

*Seven*, then, or the *addition of four and three*, signifies the *Divine and human brought into contact*; such a contact as obtains in *dispensations*. But as dispensations are only trials of man under various conditions appointed of God, so the *series of sevens do not abide*.

*Twelve*, on the other hand, is the number of *eternal perfection*. It is composed (as well as seven) of three and four, only in a far more intimate state of union. Twelve is *three multiplied into four*. Thus it represents *the creature by grace taken into close and intimate connexion with the Deity*. Hence, as we shall afterwards see, *seven does not once occur* in the eternal city of the just; but *only twelves*.

Only *seven churches* then are taken, because the *Church was set on its trial, and could not abide*. So it was with Judaism. The many sevens that appeared in it noted it as a dispensation that was not to continue for ever. Similarly, the *sevens* which prefigure *the millennium*, exhibit *that* as another arrangement of God *which is to be but temporary*.

Another point also is worthy of notice: the manner in which the seven is divided. *Seven is usually divided into four and three, the four preceding*. But in the Epistles to the seven churches, *three precedes the four*. The first three Epistles are separated from the four last by the place given to that exhortation which runs through them all—the call on every hearer to listen. In the three first epistles this *precedes* the promise to the conqueror. In the four last it comes *after*.

Now the meaning of this arrangement I take to be, that the *Church was about to fall from its standing*. The divine glory and grace were to be visible in the *early stages* of the Church, the human and earthly

elements, which would cause its rejection, *at the close.*

The *contrary order* to this is observed, where the *transition is from evil to good*: as in the seven parables of Matt. xiii.

There the *four parables which precede* speak of the hand of man and *Satan for evil*: the *three which follow* exhibit the *hand of God outstretched for good.*

Where *unmixed evil* is found in the seven, the arrangement is different: as in the *seven heads of Antichrist*, where the division is into *five, one, one* (ch. xvii.).

To these seven churches John sends "*Grace and peace.*" This is characteristic of the present dispensation. "Grace" stands opposed to law; "peace" to war. When this dispensation ends, *justice* and *war* are sent on the Gentiles, and on Israel.

But why is the Holy Spirit called "the Seven Spirits"? It seems probable that he is so called, from *his relation* to "the seven churches;" as indicating the fullness of grace and power for all their need. How great *the importance of the throne* in this book is seen herein, that *even the Holy Spirit takes his name from his relation to it.* The Holy Spirit is described as God's *agent for rule*, as executing the counsels of the enthroned One. In the *Acts and Epistles* the Holy Spirit is viewed, not as in heaven, but as *present on earth.*

"The seven Spirits that *are before the throne.*" No wonder, then, that the Churches themselves are referred to it, and that demands of equity from the throne are laid before them.

*Here* grace and peace flow from the seven Spirits to "*the seven churches of Asia.*" But in the *next dispensation* it is "the seven Spirits of God *sent forth into all the earth.*"

*These three titles of Jesus are not His personal position*

as the Son; but His relation to the throne and to the churches.<sup>1</sup>

1. He is "the Faithful Witness." He was faithful unto death in bearing witness for God while on earth. He is therefore fully to be credited, now that, having risen, He proclaims to the churches *their state*, and their consequent recompenses.

2. He is also "the First-born of the dead." This relates to Jesus' *present standing*, as *Priest in the temple of God*.

3. He is also "the Prince of the kings of the earth." This refers to Jesus' manifested position, when He comes forth from heaven, to rule over the earth.

These three titles of honour assumed by the Saviour are predicated as given to David's son. Ps. lxxxix. 27, 37. "I will make him my *firstborn*, *higher than the kings of the earth*." His throne should be "as a *faithful witness in heaven*."

Thus Jesus' three titles answer nearly to His position as Prophet, Priest, and King.

5. "Unto him that loveth us,<sup>2</sup> and washed<sup>3</sup> us from our sins in his own blood, and made us<sup>4</sup> a kingdom (and) priests unto his God and Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Jesus loves us. 'Tis a *present* love. He washed us. 'Tis a *past* washing. Blessed be God for a *past washing*, and a *present*, ever-during love!

After the titles of Jesus presented to the churches, their love appears to break forth in a doxology. This doxology takes its form and burthen from the body of

<sup>1</sup> Hence the church is not the Bride, as Jesus is not the Son, in this book.

<sup>2</sup> Ἀγαπῶντι.

<sup>3</sup> Some very good MSS. have λύσαντι ['redeemed'], which Tregelles reads in his Translation. [And so R.V.]

<sup>4</sup> Ἐμῶν βασιλείαν ἱερεῖς is T.'s second reading.

the book. It is an echo of the elders' words—"Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for thou *wast slain*, and *redeemed unto God by thy blood* (some) out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and *madest them unto our God kings and priests, and they shall reign over the earth*" (v. 9, 10).

He "washed us in his blood."

*Whom* do we wash, but the unclean? And sin is our uncleanness. It is universal, so that the bathing must be universal. "*Our sins.*" Sin is almost all that we can call our own. It must be *blotted out, as it is in God's book; washed out, as it is a stain on us.*

Jesus' love unto death is here recorded; but it abides still.

The *washing in his blood* appears to refer to the rites appointed by God for making Aaron and his sons priests. "Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt *wash them in water*" (Exod. xxix. 4).

*Their* bathing was in *water*, to fit them for the earthly tabernacle, and they were touched with the blood of a ram on the right ear, the right thumb, the great toe of the right foot, in order to consecrate them (ver. 20). But *our bathing is in blood, to consecrate us for the heavenly temple.* There the ransomed are shown to us, after the prophetic action is begun (ch. vii.). The blood fits us also *for the heavenly city*, which is our great temple (ch. xxi.). These words then give token of the better covenant, by the blood of which better priests than those of Aaron's line are prepared; while as yet, Israel (the people with whom the better covenant is one day to be formally ratified) stands aloof in unbelief.

It was promised too to Israel, as the very condition of the old covenant, "*If ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant . . . Ye shall be unto me a king-*

*dom of priests*” (Exod. xix. 5, 6). But the people broke the covenant in forty days; and their whole after history showed, that no such dignity could ever be attained by man on the *ground of his obedience*. Hence the better covenant bestows *as a gift*, what was in vain offered as a *condition of service*. We are *made kings and priests by Christ*.

We are made kings and priests “to *his God and Father*.” Not to “*our God and Father*,” as in the Epistles of Paul. 1 Thess. i. 3; iii. 11, etc. God is not presented to us in this book as *the Father of all who believe*; but only as the *Father of Jesus*, the ruler of all others.

To whom could such a doxology, sanctioned by a solemn “Amen,” be given, but to one who is Divine? When John worships the angel, he is twice corrected and reproved. Here he bestows divine honour, and it is ratified by inspiration. The Spirit of God has set His seal to its lawfulness and propriety.

7. “Behold, He cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and whosoever pierced Him to death: and all the tribes of the land shall beat (their breasts) at Him. Yea, Amen.”

In the 7th verse we have reached a much lower level. *The Jew and the Gentile on earth* are addressed. The risen saints are on high, with Christ in the glory. To us it is given to “walk by faith, not by sight.” But *in this verse our dispensation is manifestly ended*: for “every eye shall see Him.” Those who behold Him “coming in the clouds” are the Jew and the Gentile, who belong not to the assembly of the risen. The apostle refers to our Lord’s own words directed to His disciples as the Jewish remnant—“Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall *all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*” (Matt. xxiv. 30).

“Yea, Amen,” is a *combination* of a Greek and of a Hebrew word, both expressive of the same thing. Similar conjunctions occur more than once in the book. It is *addressed to Jew and Gentile*; and is certified to each in their own tongues.

8. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Lord of hosts.”

*It is Jesus who calls Himself by this name*, as the close of Revelation shows. “Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work is. *I am the Alpha and Omega, First and Last, the Beginning and the End*” (xxii. 12, 13).

The title which Jesus next assumes is—“*the Lord God.*”<sup>1</sup> This is that name which God receives in the account of the creation of man in Eden. Gen. ii., iii. And the book before us describes the accomplishment of the plans of the Most High, at the conclusion of all things; by the institution of a new Eden, whence man is never to fall. “*Lord God*” is *His name in connexion with the new Eden.* xxii. 5, 6. It combines two names of God; “Jehovah,” which was God’s title as the God of the Jew; and “Elohim,” which is His general name, designating His supremacy over all men. This title is very appropriate, as uniting all previous dispensations: the same God is the God of each.

The name denoting His eternity, “Who is, and was, and is to come,” is next added. It seems nearly equivalent to Jehovah. The last dignity mentioned is that which I translate by “the Lord of Hosts.”<sup>2</sup>

The *three successive views* of Jesus given in the three consecutive verses 6, 7, 8, belong, if I mistake not, to the *three great divisions of mankind*, which God recognizes. Ver. 6 rehearses what *Jesus has done for “us.”* Ver. 7 describes the *result of His advent*

<sup>1</sup> יהוה אלהים

<sup>2</sup> Ὁ Παντοκράτωρ.

to the twelve *tribes* of those who pierced Him. Ver. 8 gives His titles as the *God of the nations*.

9. “**3**, John, your brother and co-partner in the tribulation and kingdom, and patient waiting in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, because of the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus.”

This brotherhood and fellowship were “*in Jesus*.” *It is addressed to believers, members of Christ*. As this word of the Apostle is directed to all the churches, it is a proof that the kingdom of which we are more particularly informed in the twentieth chapter, is the *common hope and prize set before Christians*.

He was “in the isle called Patmos.” From which we learn, that places are to be taken *literally* in this book, unless there be sufficient reason to the contrary.

“The testimony of Jesus,” however, refers to the *doctrine peculiar to the New Testament*. John, as a believer in both covenants, testified to them both. And both gave umbrage to the Roman ruler. John believed in “another King, one Jesus :” and looked for an empire greater than the Roman, in which he was himself to rule.

10. “I became in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet, saying”—

The apostle on the first day of the week was rapt in inspiration, and fitted thereby to be the vehicle of the disclosures of God. *The Lord’s day*, it is thus shown, was signalized above the other days of the week by the early Christians. On that day the Lord Jesus rose : and it was suited to be the day of communication from Him, one of whose titles, as we have seen, is “the First-born of the dead.” *It has taken the place of the Jewish sabbath, or seventh day*. The Jew was to celebrate *creation completed, and God’s rest in it*. But that *rest is broken* ; and Christians ought to

celebrate *God's rest in the work of Christ completed in resurrection*. The Lord's supper is fitly associated with the Lord's day.

Some have supposed the meaning of the passage before us to be, that John was in spirit transferred into "the great and terrible Day of the Lord." In that case a different expression in the Greek would have been used for "the Lord's Day." And the *churches* are *no longer recognized*, when that *day of justice is begun*. They are *witnesses of the mercy of God*. Besides, the nineteenth verse of this chapter proves that the churches are spoken of as the things then existing.

11. "What thou seest, write in a book, and send to the seven churches : unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea."

John was to *write what he saw*. It appears, from hints dropped in the course of the prophecy, that John wrote at once, while the *objects were before him*, and while the words were sounding in his ears. "Out of the throne *are proceeding* lightnings" (iv. 5). "A great hail *is descending* out of heaven on men" (xvi. 21).

*God Himself charged that these sights should be described*. How important then! *How merciful the transmission by writing!* Had they been handed down by memory how much would have remained now? What God thinks worthy of being written, may we account worthy of all diligent study!

The first chapter (*or at least the first ten verses*) are a sort of introduction and preface, *written after the rest of the book*; and of great importance to all who would understand its bearing.

These *seven churches were not*, I believe, *prophetic of seven successive states of the Church*. They were *specimens* of "*the things that ARE*," *not prophetic of what was to be*. They gave a fair average of the

standing of the churches of Christ before the last of the apostles died ; and we see from the Saviour's words, how likely they were to have their candlesticks removed. *Abounding grace still spares the churches*, but they have not continued in God's goodness, and *are soon to be cut off*. Rom. xi.

12. " And I turned to see the voice which was speaking with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden lamp-stands."

He beheld then *seven golden lamps upon their stands*. On this point I must differ from most or all who have preceded me. They speak of the lamps, altars, censers, etc., beheld by John, as mere *images* and allusions to the utensils of the tabernacle. But such a conclusion is not derived from Scripture. Scripture would assure us, that the things which John *beheld were the REALITIES*, of which the Mosaic tabernacle contained only the *copies*. It were strange indeed, if, while the law of Moses gave only the *copies* of the things in heaven, John saw only the *shadowy appearance* of those *shadows* ! If Paul may be trusted, *there is really a tabernacle in heaven, in which are the originals* which Moses, and John, were permitted to see. What other conclusion should we gather from such passages as these ?—" A minister of the Holiest, and of the TRUE TABERNACLE, which *the Lord pitched and not man*." The priests of Aaron's line " *serve the example and shadow of the heavenly things* ; as Moses was admonished when he was about to make the tabernacle." For " see (saith He) that thou make all things according to the *pattern showed thee in the mount* " (Heb. viii. 2, 5). If the person of Jesus be a reality, why not the lamps amidst which He moves ?

*There are then real vessels in heaven*, about which the ministry of Jesus as high priest is at present engaged ; things which were purged with His blood. Heb. ix. 23. Besides their *reality*, they are *significant* of

*things below*, and generally of spiritual things, as the lamps in the present instance.

*This temple is the temple of the new covenant*, as the earthly one was of the old covenant. *The Jew then is as much interested in it as the Christian*. This is the Priest, by whose blood the new covenant was ratified: the Mediator, on whose suretyship it is to stand.

*Jesus is the priest tending the lamps: it is night then*. The lamps were to burn from evening to morning before the Lord. Exod. xxvii. 21. Aaron was to light the lamps at even. Exod. xxx. 8. 'Tis remarkable, that the lamps are not said by John to be lighted. Nor does he speak of their wanting oil.

13. "And in the midst of the lamp-stands one like a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girded around at the breasts with a golden girdle."

Jesus walking in the midst of the lamps is the priest in charge of them. *The throne is not seen*. 'Tis *Jesus and the churches alone with each other*. The priest of old was responsible for the state of the lamps. Here the lamps are moral beings, and *they are responsible to the priest*; while *the priest is responsible to God* for his tending the lamps. Their design is to light the darkness: *they are responsible so to do*. Jesus is turned, *not towards God in intercession*, but towards the churches, as *the priest judging of leprosy in the camp*. He is demanding of the churches His rights.

Our Lord is habited in the *priest's ordinary garment of service*; not in the High Priest's robes of glory and beauty, with the breast-plate. Lev. vi. 10; xvi. 4.

The resemblance of the personage seen here with the Great Agent of Dan vii. and x., and with Ezek. i., seems designed to teach us, that *the same Mighty One* both presides over the churches, and is concerned in the redemption of Israel.

14. "Now his head and his hair were white as white wool, as snow; and his eyes as a flame of fire."

These piercing eyes discover to us Jesus' power to read the secrets of the heart; as the sword out of His mouth shows His power to destroy those whom His eyes convict. On the human eye shines a point of light, which shifts as the rays fall on it. Here there is light in a stream darted forth from within. Naught shall be concealed at last. Believe it, Christians!

*But the priest has no censor*: for he is only walking amidst the lamps, not trimming them. The book before us exhibits the *lamps' responsibility to burn*, not Christ's to tend them.

15. "And his feet (were) like fine brass, glowing with fire, as in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters."

The further description contained in this verse corresponds with that of the angel who appeared to Daniel.

This seems, I think, designed to teach us, that there is a great resemblance also in the *subjects* of Daniel and of Revelation.

16. "And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance (was) as the sun shineth in his strength."

This seems quite destructive of the democratic idea of church government: as if all power proceeded from the members of the Church, who are supposed to possess authority to constitute their presiding minister, and to cashier him when they please. The angels are held by Christ, as appointed and sustained by Him. They are dependent on Him, and accountable to Him. The charge concerning the state of each Church is given to them, as though He held them responsible. But His power over them is supreme. He holds them in His hand. As one has well said—"If they be faithful, none can *pluck* them out of His hand: if unfaithful, none can *deliver* them out of it."

They are stars in His *hand* ; they are not on His *head* as His crown, for they are as yet on trial. Only those who are permanently found faithful, shine as the *stars for ever*. Unfaithful teachers are compared to “ *wandering stars*, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.”

The sharp sword out of His mouth is a singular, but most significant feature. The sword marks Him out the Avenger appointed by God. The sword is the notification of His readiness to execute judgment on offenders, whether of the churches, or of the world. For *judgment must begin at the house of God* ; and the *first three chapters of the Apocalypse are the proof of it*. Be it observed, too, that this appearance of the sword comes immediately after the stars ; as if to teach us that, on those set in so high a station, the demands of justice will be more severe. Nay, and we have the sword taking effect in its full sweep on one of the offending angels of the churches. What says Jesus of the steward who shall beat the man-servants and maidens, and associate with the worldly and the drunken ? “ The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him . . . . . and shall cut him asunder ” (Matt. .xxiv. 50, 51 ; Luke xii. 46). Paul warns offenders of lower degree in like manner. To the Christian guilty of uncleanness he says, “ The Lord is the *avenger of all such* ; as we also forewarned you and testified ” (1 Thess. iv. 6).

The sword is not to be taken as a symbol of the sharpness of His words, or as equivalent to the Word of God. The Word of God is the *Sword of the Spirit, not of the Son*. The voice of Jesus is described no less than the sword.

The sword is to fight with, and to slay. It has two great relations : as used against offending *subjects*, and as drawn against armed *foes*. In the first of these aspects, it is threatened to some amidst the churches.

ii. 12, 16. In the last, it is employed by Jesus as *King*, when, His priestly duties being ended, He comes forth to war and slay. xix. 15, 21; Luke xix. 27.

But Jesus' direct and most grateful work is upholding the ministers of the churches: the use of the sword is His strange act. The stars are "in His *right hand*:" the sword is only "out of His *mouth*." They are in the place of honour, "His right hand."

17. "And when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not, **I** am the First and the Last."

John's fall was partly *involuntary*, as we may believe. So great was the glory, that mortal eye and mortal frame could not endure it. If now the mere beholding this Majestic One were so mighty in its effects, on one who had no cause to fear Him, what shall be the result of beholding Him, in the case of those to whom He comes as Avenger?

His word of compassion—"Fear not!"

'Tis one of vast moment, in consideration of the awful subjects of which this book treats. It is full of "the great and *terrible* day of the Lord:" that day which is to render to each according to his works: which is "to destroy sinners out of the earth." Yet there are some among men, who need not fear any disclosures concerning that day. Who may thus be at rest in soul, according to our Lord's own words of comfort? Those who occupy the spiritual position of John. Those who know Jesus as One who loves them, who washed them, and made them priests and kings. Those who now, professing Christ in His Church, are brethren and companions in the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience *in Jesus*.

18. And "I am he that liveth, and I became dead, and behold I am living for ever and ever, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades."

*Both are names of places.* "Hades" is the general name for the abode of souls departed, awaiting the day of resurrection and of judgment. The spirit does not at once go to heaven or to hell. The word "Hades" is wrongly translated "Hell." *It never signifies the final abode of the lost.* That is described by quite another word—"Gehenna."

"Hades," in this book, is used in a stricter sense than ordinary, to define *that portion of the underground world, where the souls of the righteous are in God's keeping; His jewels, soon to be made up in resurrection. This place is also called "Paradise."* It is the locality in which Jesus promised the dying robber a place, on the day of his departure from earth.

"Death" is also, in this book, the name of a *place.* The death of the body introduces the soul of the wicked to a new region, which is also called "Death." 'Tis the place of the spiritually dead. 'Tis called in the Old Testament, "Abaddon," or Destruction;" because *the lost suffer there the law's penalty of endless death, and destruction already begun. "Hades is naked before him"* (God) says Job, "and *Destruction* hath no covering" (Job xxvi. 6). "*Hades and Destruction are never full,*" says Solomon (Prov. xxvii. 20), again showing that they are *places.*

This fearful place is called, also, the Abyss, or "Bottomless pit." 'Tis a place of fire; for when it is opened, smoke, and creatures that torment, come forth. Rev. ix. Into this, as a place of punishment, Satan is cast for the thousand years. In it was the rich man of the parable fixed. *The nearness of "Hades" and of "Death" is clearly implied in that parable:* for Dives and Abraham can converse together across the great gulf.

But *after the world is destroyed,* the first "DEATH," or place of punishment for the souls of the wicked, gives

place to Gehenna, or the lake of fire eternal, which is the "SECOND DEATH." The sinner's body and soul have then been re-knit, and the sentence of endless woe has been passed. Jesus has the keys of both Hades and Death, and *summons the departed* thence, at the Great Judgment of the dead (Rev. xx.) after which the old prisons, "Death and Hades," *are broken up*.

19. "Write *therefore* the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which are about to take place after these things."

We have, in this verse, a key to the true analysis of the book, and a lever to upturn from the foundations several erroneous schemes of interpretation.

The division of the book is *threefold*: answering to the three titles of the Father, and of the Son; and it relates to the Past, the Present, the Future.

1. "THE THINGS WHICH THOU SAWEST." (Past.)
2. "THE THINGS WHICH ARE." (Present.)
3. "THE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE AFTER THESE THINGS." (Future.)

The first division contains the vision which has just been commented upon. To it the Saviour refers in the next verse, in a way that makes His meaning quite clear. "The things *which thou sawest*" ( $\alpha\epsilon\iota\delta\epsilon\varsigma$ ) is Jesus' description of the first section. And in the next verse, He says, "The mystery of the seven stars *which thou sawest* ( $\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \epsilon\iota\delta\epsilon\varsigma$ ) upon my right hand, and the seven golden lamp-stands."

"*The things that are*" *abide still*. Till the dispensation is changed, the churches are recognized. And it does not appear that the *new dispensation will begin*, till Israel has returned to his own land in unbelief, and *restored the temple with its sacrifices*. God has no memorial of Israel before Him, now that they are rooted up from their land. But when once the temple *and its sacrifices are restored*, Israel comes again under

His eye for judgment, and the long-delayed wrath of the day of the Lord (which is seen beginning in chapter iv. of this book) descends.

Yet I would not lead the believer to suppose that *any series of earthly events* must precede the removal of the *Lord's watchful ones* from the earth.

*If the Church still be recognized in our day* (which few will deny), *then we are not under any of the seals, or trumpets, or vials*, as most affirm. We are yet among "the things that are." The dispensation has not yet altered. It is not till it changes, that the prophetic part begins.

3. "And the things which are about to take place after these things." This sufficiently explains itself. *The last division of the book begins on the completion of the two first: and not till then.* The last epistle to the Church of Laodicea declares that Jesus is about to spew her out of His mouth. iii. 16. Herein we have Christ's notification of the rejection of the Church from being His witness. And the preceding epistle to Philadelphia warns us of the "hour of temptation which is about to come upon all the world;" while the word ( $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\lambda\omega$ ) seven times repeated in the prophetic part of the book, points us to what is meant by "the things which are about ( $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\lambda\epsilon\iota$ ) to come to pass."

That, in the *prophetic* part of the book, we obtain quite a *new dispensation*, is manifest from *the removal of the former vision*. The lamps are no more beheld. *The holiest portion of the temple*, before concealed by a door, *is thrown open*, and the *throne of God's justice appears*. Jesus takes a new attitude altogether. He who was Priest is seen as the Sacrifice, and the Kingly Agent of the throne. He who was all mercy rides forth to take vengeance.

Of deep consequence is it to note the words of the last division. Of itself it overturns the ordinary

interpretation, which assumes that the *prophetic part is a history of the Christian Church. Nay! the prophetic part does not begin till the churches, as unfaithful witnesses, are rejected by God.* A defective translation, by rendering the clause, "the things which shall be *hereafter*," covered up this pit-fall. Taken in so general a sense, it was supposed to mean only the prophetic part of the book. But when the full force is given to the words, and when we compare it with the statements at the opening of the prophetic portion, the *proof against the usual theory is complete.* At the opening of the prophetic vision, notice is given that the third division is commencing, by the *repetition of the words of Jesus.* "After these things, I saw, and behold a door opened in heaven, and (there was) the first voice which I heard, as of a trumpet, talking with me; saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must take place after these things."

This bears again upon the half-way view, which would reconcile the opinions of the Futurists and the Preterists. Some assert, that there are two interpretations of the Apocalypse, a longer and a shorter scheme. *But no!* if the third part speaks only of things which are to take effect when the churches have ceased to be recognized of God, then *either the churches are not now recognized, and have not for eighteen hundred years been owned; or the prophetic part is not yet begun.*

As the four Evangelists and the Acts give us the transition from Judaism to Christianity, so does *this book give the transition from Christianity to Israel, the Millennial age, and the eternity beyond it.*

20. "(Write) the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest upon my right hand, and the seven golden lamp-stands. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven lamp-stands are the seven churches."

A portion only of the vision which John first beheld

is explained ; because only that portion was symbolic. The lamps were a visible material reality. But their significance was a secret, they were emblematic of a spiritual reality on earth. *They are not called "symbols," but "mystery."* Our Lord's explanation is very important. *Whatever is symbolic is covered with the veil of mystery.* As then the book in general is called by God "the Apocalypse," or "the unveiling," IT IS NOT SYMBOLIC. Symbols there are in it, but many of them are explained. Symbols there are, but *wherever* they are found, *there is a veil over them.* I conclude, then, that the Apocalypse is not "a book of symbols," *but to be taken literally*, wherever absurdity does not result.

These stars are rulers, despised on earth, shining in heaven ; rejected by the world's governors, but owned as part of the furniture of God's temple above. They are appointed by Christ, and not by men. They are not created by each Church's vote, retaining their place and power so long only as they please the Church, and by virtue of their so doing. And, as they are not created by the churches, so neither do they cease to exist, if displeasing to them. Christ upholds. His supply of grace and His appointment made them what they are, *and to Him they stand or fall.*

"Angels," be it observed, is their *literal designation.* It is given as the explanation of the *mystic "star."*

These are the messengers of *Christ.* "As my Father sent me, even so send I you" (John xx. 21). They are ministers of the Priest of the heavenly sanctuary.

They are entitled "angels of the churches," as Hengstenberg remarks, because they were sent of God to the churches, to be guardians of them. And he very appropriately compares with the expression before us, the one used by our Lord concerning guardian angels— "In heaven *their angels* [angels of the little ones] do always behold the face of my Father" (Matt. xviii. 10).

As the angel of the little one is he to whom he is committed by God, so is *the angel of the Church* that overseer to whose presidency the Church is, by our Lord, committed. And as those angels have in consequence the high honour of always having an audience of the Father, so these angels are always borne by Christ upon His hand.

Some regard the angels of the churches as *messengers sent by the churches to John*. But we have no account of any such persons being sent to the apostle. The angels were stationary in their especial sphere, and were persons of great influence, as is evident from the fact that *Jesus* in each case *holds them responsible for the state of the Church*.

Some regard them as *angelic beings presiding over churches*, as the angels of Daniel presided over nations. But this cannot be ; for the angel of Smyrna is required to be "faithful unto death" (ii. 10). And angels do not die.

They are thought by some to be merely *representatives of the churches*. But it is evident, that they are quite distinct from the body of the Church. The lamp represents the body of the Church ; and amidst the lamps *Jesus* walks. The star represents the angel : and the stars are carried by *Jesus* on His hand. As clearly as possible *he distinguishes the angel from the church*. "The seven stars are the *angels* of the seven churches, and the seven *lamp-stands* are the seven churches."

The only explanation which meets with ease all the conditions of the case, is that which supposes them to be the presidents, superintendents, or chief ministers of the churches. They were bishops, not of a diocese, but of a city-church. The name given to these officers in the Epistles of Paul is of equivalent meaning to that employed here. He styles them "apostles."<sup>1</sup> The angels were local, stationary apostles.

<sup>1</sup> ἄγγελος and ἀπόστολος, both mean "one sent" ; so do the equivalent Hebrew words, מלאך and שלח.

There was, I believe, a *divinely-appointed form of church government*, the same in all the seven before us. Each Church has its angel: there is but one angel to each Church. *Each angel is independent of the other.* There is no epistle to *the angel of the seven churches.* Each ruled the one Church found in each of the seven cities. He did not preside over the many churches of a country. This order was, I suppose, the complete and divine order. As the number of the churches is the dispensationally-perfect one of seven, so is the organization the perfect one, as designed by Christ.

Why are the angels and churches symbolized? The principle which, I believe, runs through the symbols of the Apocalypse, is, *that where any thing or person has two places, when it is in its natural place, it is described literally; but when away from it, it takes another form, and is represented in symbol.* The churches were literally on earth, and hence are literally addressed in the two next chapters. But they are only mystically and spiritually in heaven, and hence they are represented emblematically there.

“And the seven lamp-stands are (the) seven churches.” *Each Church was an assembly of believers.* All the believers in every city should be united in one fellowship. There was, in the day of its perfection, but one Church to each city; and but one government. This is represented by there being but one star, and one lamp to each city. Believers are designed of God to constitute one body. When viewed in relation to heaven, and the temple of the new covenant, they are a lamp-stand. *We are already in heavenly places representatively.* We are soon to be *really*, and in body there. (chap. vii.) We are *mystically*, while on earth, *part of the furniture of the heavenly sanctuary.* We are soon to be *priests really there.*

*Believers are not presented in this book as priests*

*entering into the Holiest, through the rent veil, as they are in the Hebrews. There the throne is "the throne of grace" (iv. 16). Here it is another throne: and all things in this book are adjusted with reference to that throne.*

While seven churches alone, and those of Asia, are directly addressed, Jesus includes in one of His epistles, "all the churches" (ii. 23); and the Spirit speaks to "the churches" generally (ii. 11, etc.).

## CHAPTER II

## I

## EPHESUS

1. "Unto the angel of the church in Ephesus <sup>1</sup> write ; These things saith he that holdeth fast the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden lamp-stands."

"WRITE." John was the secretary of our Lord. He penned these epistles, at the dictation of the great Lord to whom the churches belong.

The description of Jesus in the front of each epistle has a reference to the peculiar state of each Church. Jesus then informs us of his relations, both to the star, and to the lamp. For He addresses the angel directly ; but not the angel alone. His words are designed to affect the Church also, and each member of it.

The name of the angel is not given in any case : and vainly should we inquire for it. It is the office that is addressed ; and the lessons *belong to the dispensation, through its whole course*. Hearken, oh star ! *He* addresses you, from whom you derive all your brightness, all that prevents your fall. He speaks, to whom you will give account.

The danger to the golden vessels of the sanctuary no longer arises from the might of a Babylonian army

<sup>1</sup> It has been supposed that the names of the churches carry a secret meaning. In regard to some of these it is, I think, plain. But it is not clear in all. If it be true throughout, then Ephesus signifies "desire" (*ἐφesus*), i.e. Love to Christ.

outside, but from the judicial decision of the Lord Himself in the Holy Place.

The *churches here addressed are assemblies of believers*; each was a "congregation of faithful men." It is not said, "the Church of Ephesus;" but "*in Ephesus.*" The faithful were but a portion of the citizens in each of the cities addressed. Ephesus was still heathen; it was a witnessing remnant alone that constituted the Church. And thus it should ever have continued. Its standing was lost, as soon as ever the Church was made co-extensive with the population of the city.

2. "I know thy works, and labour, and thy patience, and that thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou triedst them which say they are apostles, and are not, and foundest them liars."

"I know thy works." This preface occurs before most of the epistles. He *who would judge aright must previously know*. Jesus does. He is the Faithful Witness; and His testimony arises from perfect acquaintance with the facts.

"And labour." The *person is accepted, and then the service*. Jesus begins with praising whatever He can find of good in each Church. The angel was active; probably in doctrine, toward the Church; and in evangelization, toward the world.

"And thy patience."

As patience is twice named, and occurs among points which specially refer to believers, I am apt to suppose that the patience has a double reference. First, toward the *Church*. The body of believers themselves need patience from the chief pastor. There are the ignorant, perverse backsliders, those compassed with each variety of infirmity, and beset with each kind of trial.

"And thou canst not bear those who are evil."

The wicked outside the Church of Christ are not to be judged. But discipline comes in to rebuke or exclude

those among the disciples who are guilty of sin. 1 Cor. v. Nor must the ungodly be admitted within the fold. Their persons must be rejected, as well as their works.

“And thou triedst those calling themselves apostles, who are not, and foundest them liars.”

From *this it is clear*, that *Apostles* were *reckoned*, both by the churches and by our Lord, to be a *standard office* in the Christian Church. For if it were not so, if it were believed in the churches that but twelve apostles were to arise, these impostors could only have attempted to palm themselves off by assuming the names of some of the twelve. But the original twelve were at this late date all cut off, but John. And John was well known at Ephesus. Under such circumstances, there was room for but one impostor, and for him to assume the name of John. But how durst he attempt it at Ephesus? But here were more claimants of the apostleship than one. Then, too, it would have been a question of physical identity. Jesus, besides, would have worded the charge differently, were but the original twelve to arise.

The tests applied therefore by the angel were those by which Paul proved his apostleship, where it was doubted. The churches he had raised, his beholding the Lord Jesus, his signs, wonders, and mighty deeds, were the proofs of office which he gave to the Corinthians. 1 Cor. ix. 2; 2 Cor. xi., xii.

3. “And thou hast patience, and didst bear for my name’s sake and hast not been wearied.”

The patience commended on this second occasion I suppose to be patience in regard to the taunts and persecutions of the ungodly. The angel bore with these various trials through the love of Christ.

Nor, though the trials from within and without were heavy, was He weary in doing well, or in suffering.

4. "Nevertheless I have this against thee, that thou leftest thy first love."

High is the praise given; but higher yet is the standard maintained by our Lord. He has blame in store for one so commended. His eye is on perfection.

The first love both toward Christ and His Church was slackened. To begin well is not enough: we must go on as we began; yea, and make progress. Christ is jealous of our affections.

Not force from without, making wide breaches in the walls, but the waning brightness of love, gives the first symptom of the passing away of the churches from being the witness for God.

The angel and the Church are thereupon called to *repent*. Remarkable word, as addressed to *believers!* Five churches out of the seven are thus exhorted; Ephesus is called to repent of decaying love; Pergamos, of false doctrine permitted; Thyatira, of evil acts; Sardis, of unwatchfulness, and institutions falling to ruin; while Laodicea is found boasting, at a time when her lukewarmness was rendering her loathsome to Christ.

But the repentance of the *angels*, and of the *churches* under their superintendence, is of course very different from that demanded of the *world*. The Saviour supposes the first parties to be *already renewed by the Spirit, and forgiven by His own blood*. But their life, in some respects, fell short of His commands: and in these things they are enjoined to change their conduct. But what if they should not? The threat held out to Ephesus is not eternal death; but *the removal of the Church from its post of witness for God*.

But in the prophetic part, where the world is in question, God sends visitations of *wrath*, expecting that men should be led by His judgments to repent of "murders, idolatries, fornications, sorceries, thefts."

The first epistle leads us to recognize the general tone of these seven addresses. It is *not the testimony of God's grace*, and His provisions of mercy, for the solace, and enlightening, and standing of the saints, individually, or as a body, before God. The tenor of the seven epistles is that of *demands levied on parties responsible*. The mercies which they had previously received, embracing everything needful, are assumed; and thereupon, answerable conduct is expected. Defection from this high standard is everywhere rebuked. The place of witness given by God is to be sustained in its fullness, both before God and men. The past is noticed, as the subject of praise or blame. Their *future destiny* is spoken of, as *dependent upon their deeds*. The issue of their trial is mentioned, not directly as prophecy, but as made to turn upon their *acquitting themselves answerably to their responsibilities or not*. ii. 5, 16, 21, 22; iii. 2, 11, 18, 20.

5. "Remember therefore whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works: or else I am coming to thee [quickly] and I will move thy lamp-stand out of its place, except thou repent. 6. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which  $\mathfrak{J}$  also hate."

Here is a fall, not of the star from Christ's right hand: for John saw all seven there: but a *descent* from the *previous high degree of grace*.

"Or else I am coming."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus threatens to remove the lamp. What is intended by that? It means, not the destruction of Ephesus, though Ephesus has been destroyed. The removal was an invisible one, in the heavenly sanctuary. To worldly eyes all might have been the same after the act, as before it: but its standing as God's accepted witness, would be gone. So, when Jesus left the temple

<sup>1</sup>The word "[quickly]" is noted by Tregelles as doubtful.

at Jerusalem desolate, as the house of the Jews, not of His Father, the marble and gold shone as ever: only a spiritual eye could note its desolation.

Jesus does not say He would *put out* the lamp. The stand being removed, the lamp would go out. The Church, unsustained of grace, would cease to be. Jesus does not say that He would give the place left vacant by Ephesus to another Church. No! The *dispensation is not to last*. This threat-addressed to the *first* Church, and the solemn reproof of the *last*, combine to testify the same truth.

From this we learn, that *no congregation of the faithful upon earth is infallible, or steadfast*. But does not Jesus promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church?" (Matt. xvi. 18). No, He does *not*! He promises, "That the gates of HADES shall not prevail against His Church." But *Hades* is a very different place from hell, and the Saviour's promise does not assert that His churches on earth shall never cease to exist, nor be overcome by Satan's deceits, or by force. He declares only, that the gates of the place of *departed spirits shall not detain His chosen in custody*, whenever He shall proclaim the hour of resurrection.

"Except thou repent." This passage is very important, as asserting the *efficacy of believers' repentance*, in turning aside the threatened judgments. *All threats uttered against them are conditional*—"To be fulfilled, if not repentant."

Jesus, ever ready to notice points worthy of praise, again commends the rejection of the practices of the Nicolaitans.

Who were they? Probably a branch of the Gnostics.

From the epistles to Timothy, who was left at Ephesus to counteract false doctrine, we infer, that they denied either the deity or the humanity of the Lord Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Church of God which He purchased with His own

They held fables, and the endless genealogies of the æons. They were guilty of profane babblings, and blasphemy. They set up contrasts, or "Antitheses," between the Old Testament and the New, rejecting the former. They refused marriage, and certain articles of food: probably wine, and animal food; practising austerities of various kinds. They denied the resurrection, explaining it away.

7. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

The Lord foresaw, that the churches, as corporate bodies, would not answer to the demands of God. Therefore He *addresses Himself to each individual* of them. Where the mass was a ruin, there might be individuals who maintained their Christian position. Hence the Lord, at the close of each admonition to the whole, lifts up His voice to each. The churches, *as bodies, are judged now in this dispensation. The members of them are to give account hereafter.* If impenitent, the lamp was (in this dispensation) to be removed; but the individual was to be requited in resurrection; as the promise proves.

"To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

*No promises* are made, throughout these epistles, to the Church, as a unity. The churches are *nowhere* in Revelation dealt with as a unit, to be rewarded alike. Nor are even the members of *each several Church* set upon the same level of reward. There were "a few names in Sardis" that should *receive a prize* at the hand of Christ, when the rest were accounted unworthy of it. The maintenance of our dispensational position of witness, or not, is that whereon the reward to each *blood*" (Acts xx.). "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16). This truth is prominent in both addresses to *Ephesus*.

is made to turn. The responsibility which the Lord lays on each is a partial responsibility. Ephesus is responsible for Ephesus alone: the indifference of Laodicea is not laid to its charge. The *seven churches* are not regarded as *parts of a greater whole, possessed of a united responsibility*. The *prizes held forth* to view are not to members of each Church, as such, or as simple *believers*; but to them as *overcomers*. This is very important. *Believers themselves are divided into victors and vanquished!* How possible it is for believers to sink down in worldliness, and lusts of the flesh of various kinds, experience will amply show. Life is a warfare with Satan, the world, the flesh: and some fall in a struggle against the stern necessities of life; some are drawn away by the pleasures and lures of the world. The *victory is not to every warrior* that enters the battle, *nor will the crown be awarded to each*.

The concluding call and promise are expressed in such general terms, that I suppose we should extend them beyond the members of the Church.

The rewards of the victors are something distinct from a *bare salvation*: they are a *special recompense* attached to some *special excellence of conduct*, under peculiar kinds of trial. To the *detection and resistance of the frauds of Satan*, a *different reward* is promised from that *attached to suffering for Christ unto death*. As in a variety of ways we may be overcome by our enemies' fraud and force, so in a variety of ways may we receive corresponding reward.

## II

## SMYRNA

8. "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write : These things saith the First and the Last, who became dead, and returned to life."

THE first attribute of Christ *imports His Deity*—He is "the First and the Last."

But this Mighty One, who once descended to death, has now risen out of it, and is beyond man's power for ever. What believer then need fear death? The Saviour has passed through its fortress. He is Almighty, and will make a way for His people's rescue. Beyond death lies their reward.

9. "I know thy tribulation and poverty."

The ordinary reading, which inserts "thy works," is rejected by the critical editions. *Internal evidence is against it also.* Jesus is speaking throughout of suffering, and not of action. In times of persecution, the Church can do but little.

Jesus was aware of the "*trouble*" of the saints. He knew it by experience, having Himself passed through the same. Both Jew and Pagan joined to persecute the saints. This word is, in the Apocalypse, only used of the churches; and it hence serves to *identify the Great Multitude* of chap. vii. 14 *with the saved of the churches.*

The angel was poor, and most probably the Church

was so too. The poverty was, as we may gather, the *result of persecution*; for it is spoken of *between* the "tribulation" and the "blasphemy" as the persecutors.

9. "And the blasphemy from those who say that they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

The Jews were the great enemies of the Church in Smyrna, and the agents of Satan against the angel.

It was, no doubt, felt to be peculiarly trying to the believers of that day, that the Jews, to whose sacred writings they appealed, made common cause with the heathen against them. It was calculated to suggest the doubt whether they could be right.

The sin thus noticed as beginning under "the things that are," and confined to the Jews, in *the prophetic part*, embraces *the whole world*, and attains its most fearful height. The *seeds* of each future development of iniquity *cluster round the churches*, or are found *within them*.

The blasphemers said they were Jews, but were not. They were *Jews outwardly*, but *not within*. And in this dispensation *only the inward Jew* is recognized of God. Rom. ii. 28.

They are *Jews literally taken*, but had they been in God's sense, *true Jews*, they would have *joined the Church of Christ*.

10. "Fear not <sup>1</sup> the things which thou art about to suffer; <sup>2</sup> behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tempted; and ye will have a tribulation of ten days. Become <sup>3</sup> faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."

The Saviour is fortifying the president of the Church in Smyrna *against troubles to come*. They are beforehand known to Christ. He is our watchman, from His tower above foreseeing, and *forewarning of trials* in the distance.

<sup>1</sup> For  $\mu\eta\delta\epsilon\nu$  read  $\mu\eta$ .

<sup>2</sup>  $\text{Μέλλω}$ .

<sup>3</sup>  $\text{Γίνου}$ .

But the affliction was to assail, not only the president but some of the members of the Church. "The devil will cast *some of you* into prison." Here *the angel is distinguished from the believers generally*. Here too is *special membership*. The Church of Smyrna constituted a body, of which those in communion were the special members.

In this is Jesus *the prophet* of His Church : and His far-reaching eye discerns evil to come, not only in its human branches and stems, but in its root in the heavenly places, among *wicked spirits there*. Eph. vi. 12. He points out to us *Satan*, as the *prime agent and mover* in the *afflictions of his churches*.

God was pleased to give Satan permission, for His own glory's sake, and for the vindication of His saints. They were not insincere : and in the fire of persecution their steadfastness would prove them genuine gold.

The duration of the persecution is defined. The Lord on high limits His enemies' rage, and lets us know that the chain is upon the ravening lions and raging bears.

It was to be "a tribulation of ten days."

How strangely has it been asserted as the rule, that in prophecy a day is to be interpreted as signifying a year ! (1) "For yet *seven days*, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth *forty days and forty nights*" (Gen. vii. 4). How was this fulfilled ? After *seven years* did it rain for *forty years* ? "And it came to pass after *seven days*, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth" (10). "And the rain was upon the earth *forty days and forty nights*" (12).

(2) "The three branches are *three days*. Yet within *three days* shall Pharaoh lift up thy head." How fulfilled ? "And it came to pass the *third day*, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants" (Gen. xl. 12, 13, 20).

(3) "Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you ; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate *every day*. . . . On the *sixth day* they shall prepare that which they bring in " (Exod. xvi.). How fulfilled ? In days.

(4) God promises flesh to Israel. "Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but even a *whole month*, until it come out at your nostrils." How fulfilled ? Was it for thirty years that the quails were given ? No ! Literally, for thirty days. Num. xi. 19, 20.

(5) "Prepare your victuals," says Joshua, "for within *three days* ye shall pass over this Jordan " (Josh. i. 11). Did they wait three years ? or three days only ?

(6) The very case on which opposers rest, makes against them. "Your children shall wander in the wilderness *forty years*" (Num. xiv. 33). How fulfilled ? Did they wander 144,000 years ? Nay, but forty years only. To make the *year-day theory* correct, God should have said, "Ye shall wander in the wilderness *forty days* ;" which they should have found by experience to mean *forty years*.

But there is one passage which, more than any other, gives its *full and decisive denial to the scheme*.

(7) "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be *three days* and three nights in the heart of the earth " (Matt. xii. 40). How was this fulfilled ? Was Jesus three *years* in the tomb ? No !

*Then is the year-day theory false !*

The angel is exhorted to be faithful unto death. It is of course supposed that a violent death awaits him. This is the highest and last test of fidelity. Life might be offered to him upon evil conditions ; but they were to be refused. The kings of the earth expect allegiance of their subjects, even to the surrender of life. Much

more may the Creator and Redeemer ! Jesus does not say, "Till I come." *Nowhere* is the *Saviour's coming* made *equivalent in meaning to death*.

The reward is held up before the warrior. "I will give thee the crown of life." Resurrection, specially as already realized in our Lord's instance, is the *grand antidote to the fear of death*. In that, life lost for Christ is found again. Those who suffer unto death reign with Messiah the thousand years. Rev. xx. 4. But there are also special rewards distributed among those who are privileged to obtain a place in the first resurrection. There are *special crowns for special services*. To the elders who watch over Christ's flock well, "the crown of *glory*" (1 Pet. v. 4). But this is "the crown of *life*" promised also by the apostle Jacob (commonly called James).

1. This crown is the crown of *victory*. As men offered a parsley-wreath to the victors in their games, so does the Lord offer His crown to the wrestlers against Satan and his potentates. 1 Cor. ix. 25 ; 2 Tim. ii. 5 ; Heb. ii. 7, 9. Satan threatened *death*. Christ promised *life*. Satan would cast into *prison*. Christ would lift up to a *crown*.

2. 'Tis also the sign of *royalty*. "If we suffer, we shall also *reign* with him." 2 Tim. ii. 12 ; Rev. xx. 4.

11. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches : he that overcometh shall not be hurt by the Second Death."

The lesson of the Spirit is designed for each who has an ear : not only for those of that day, and of that Church. The Saviour finds no blame with this Church. As it was suffering for Him, He lays on it no unnecessary burthen. He bids it only be steadfast.

Then follows the promise to the victor. These promises divide the believers of each Church *into conquerors and conquered*. And the promises are, I suppose,

special: that is, that not every overcomer will enjoy all the promises; but only those who have been tried by the *special form of temptation* will receive the *prize* held out to the *victor in that contest*. For instance, some have to defeat Satan's wiles, and to that a definite reward is held out. Some have to meet his violence, as in this case; and, therefore, I conclude, that the reward now offered belongs to those who face prison and death for Christ's sake.

"The overcomer shall not be hurt by the Second Death."

1. The promise is equivalent to the assurance, that he shall be a *partaker in the first resurrection*, and the bliss of the thousand years. It is a manifest allusion to Rev. xx. 6. *The Second Death* does not mean spiritual death, but (as has been shown above) it denotes the place of eternal torment—"the lake of fire" (xx. 14).

The victor then over the fear of death obtains two desirable results: one negative, he escapes *all touch of the wrath of God*: one positive, he is a crowned conqueror and king for a thousand years.

This brings us to the (2) implication.

How strangely these words sound in our ears, if once we listen to their evident meaning! "The *conqueror* is to escape all touch of the lake of fire! Why, I thought—I have always believed—that this is the lowest and surest advantage, common to *all the saved*! Does it not belong to every believer?"

It would seem not. We must make room for scripture truths in our system; not cut and clip scripture to our systems. What is the evident implication of these two agreeing passages? Clearly, that it is *possible* that some *believers*, members of the churches of Christ, may be *hurt by the Second Death*.

"Do you mean, then, that all believers who do not obtain part in the first resurrection will be cast into the

lake of fire ? ” *Certainly not !* To be liable to a thing, and to experience it, are very different.

But he would steady His people against the fear of man by a more *tremendous fear*—even that of God.

When the last trial comes, and the persecutor says to the believer, “ Abjure your faith, or die ! ” there is great glory to God and profit to His churches, when the confessor accepts death, rather than abandon the faith. But what if he succumb before the enemy ? Great is the shame and mischief to God’s cause, to himself, and others.

Can a believer, under such trying circumstances, fall ?

Alas ! English ecclesiastical history has furnished sad instances of it.

“ Promise to read this paper in public, without omitting or adding a single word ” (said Barnes’ judges to him). It was then read to him. “ I would die first,” was his reply. “ Will you abjure, or be burnt alive ? ” said his judges : “ take your choice.” The alternative was dreadful. Poor Barnes, a prey to the deepest agony, shrank at the thoughts of the stake : then suddenly his courage revived, and he exclaimed, “ I had rather be burnt than abjure.” Gardiner and Fox did all they could to persuade him. “ They entreated him ; they put forward the most plausible motives : from time to time they uttered the terrible words, *burnt alive !* His blood froze in his veins : he knew not what he said or did . . . they placed a paper before him—they put a pen in his hand—his head was bewildered, he signed his name with a deep sigh. This unhappy man was destined, at a later period, to be a faithful martyr of Jesus Christ ; but he had not yet learned to ‘ resist even unto blood.’ Barnes had fallen.” *D’Aubigné*, vol. v. p. 250.

While then there are joyful promises, positive and negative, to him who, at the cost of life, maintains the

faith, what shall we say to those who are overcome in the struggle? The overcomer shall not be hurt by the Second Death, in consequence of his victory. Shall not then, the one so conquered be hurt by it, in consequence of his defeat?

Do these two texts stand alone? By no means. "Whosoever shall confess *me* before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, *him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. x. 32, 33). The consequence of Jesus' confession of *any* before His Father, will be their entrance into the millennial kingdom. But what will be the result of denying the Lord Jesus, and of being denied before the Father? Jesus is speaking to disciples, and He says, "Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear *Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna*" (28). Again, Jesus, treating of the very same subject, says, "I say unto you, *my friends*, be not afraid of them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. *But I will show* (Greek) *you whom ye shall fear: fear him who, after he hath killed, hath authority* (Greek) *to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, fear him*" (Luke xii. 4, 5).<sup>1</sup> What is this but to tell the believer, that it is better to suffer at man's hand his worst afflictions, than to suffer from God both before and after death?

"You do not hold the perseverance of the saints then? Now this is certainly a scriptural doctrine. 'My sheep shall never perish' (John x. 28)."

The perseverance of the saints is *a true doctrine*: yet there must be room found for *this* also. John's gospel testifies both these at once. But the text just quoted

<sup>1</sup> The same idea is given by John xv. 6. But there the offender departs from Christ freely, unimpelled by force.

should be rendered—"I give unto them (my sheep) eternal life, and *they shall not perish for ever.*"<sup>1</sup>

HENGSTENBERG gives nearly the same view of the inference. "He that overcomes, not only obtains a glorious good, but he also *escapes a dreadful evil.* Let him ponder well, when a choice is set before him, between the bodily death, as it is usually called, and the Second Death or eternal damnation [here I agree not] which they have to expect, who are not faithful unto death. Matt. x. 28. 'Fear not those who kill the body,' etc., coincides in thought."

The reader will thank me for supplying him with the following fine passage from ISAAC TAYLOR :—

"We of this age may expound as we think fit these appalling words ; or may extenuate these phrases ; or, if we please, let us cast away the whole doctrine as intolerable and incredible. Let us do so : but it is a *matter of history, out of question, that the Apostolic Church, and the Church of later times took it, word for word, in the whole of its apparent value.* It is true that several attempts were made to substantiate a mitigated sense : but it is certain, that the language of Christ, in regard to the future life, was constantly on the lips of martyrs throughout the suffering centuries. Often and often was it heard from out of the midst of the fire, and was lisped by the quivering lips of women and children while writhing on the rack."

<sup>1</sup> Οὐ μὴ ἀπόλωνται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. Read the same in the following texts, John iv. 14 ; viii. 51, 52 ; xi. 26. "Not for ever."

## III

PERGAMOS<sup>1</sup>

12. "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos, write—These things saith he who hath the sharp two-edged sword."

JESUS would steady the believers of Pergamos against the fear of the human sword, by the greater fear of the sword proceeding from Himself. If man is dreadful, God is tremendous. But the Saviour also exhibits this weapon as a warning against the false teachers of that place.

13. "I know where thou dwellest, where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and deniedst not my faith, even in the days (in which) ANTIPAS was my witness, my faithful one, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."

The Saviour makes allowance for circumstances. To Him are known the peculiar difficulties of our abode. Where wickedness abounds, and the current of example is almost universal, where the lures of sin are importunate, and force is employed on its behalf, 'tis an arduous task for the Christian to stand his ground.

The angel and the Lord's people at Pergamos were in a situation peculiarly trying. They dwelt beside "Satan's throne."

It was situated at Pergamos. How is this explained? 'Tis not easy to do so. We know but little of the city in question: not enough to settle the matter to our

<sup>1</sup> I am unable to perceive any profound meaning in the word Pergamos: and cannot agree with what has been suggested.

perfect satisfaction. But, I think, a beam of light falls upon the subject, when we know *that the worship of the Roman Emperors*, which was so rampant in John's day, and which is to be the last form of sin bringing Christ down from the sky, especially flourished in **PERGAMOS**.

Is it not marvellous to find five out of the seven cities mentioned by our Lord, *contending for the privilege of worshipping the emperor* ? and *such an emperor as TIBERIUS* ? But **PERGAMOS** appears the most prominent of the eleven. "The city of **PERGAMOS** made a merit of having already built a temple in honour of **AUGUSTUS**." It now covets the distinction of worshipping a second emperor.

This connects itself very closely with the awful height of wickedness which appears in the xiii. chap., and hints, very significantly, what the "IMAGE of the WILD BEAST" is.

Remember, Christian, that in the very apostolic age, while the churches flourished, and the lamps stood yet unremoved in the sanctuary, and tended by our Lord Jesus, Satan had his throne on earth ! He was able to hold his ground, close beside a Church of the living God. Was the Church to overthrow his throne ? Nay, it had already begun to give way to his deceits. He was more ready to prevail over the Church, than the Church over him. Are God's churches to convert the world ? and to dispossess Satan of his usurped dominion ? Nay ! *Satan holds his throne on earth*, through *all the period* characterised as—"the things that ARE." In "the things that are *after these things*," his throne blazes out into a lustre of dominion which it never yet has attained ; and 'tis only after "the **BATTLE** of the Great Day of God Almighty," and the devouring of his defying legions by the birds, that his throne is overturned, and his reign for ever at an end.

Jesus glorifies the name of His martyr. "ANTIPAS, *my witness, my faithful one.*" 'Tis a name not noted elsewhere. But it is the real name of one who suffered unto death for Christ. Unknown to men, 'tis enough that Christ has named him with terms of endearment. "Right dear, in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints." He will remember such a one in His kingdom and glory. The life lost shall then be found. Not ANTIPAS alone, but all His martyrs will then shine as the sun.

Again, our Lord notes the peculiarity of the situation of PERGAMOS. There, Satan not only held his throne, but dwelt. We must not marvel to find broken bones, and traces of blood, near the lion's den. Let us praise God, that we are not in a post of such danger! What a difference there is in the moral character and atmosphere of different places on earth! Satan, no doubt, would choose as his habitation one of the worst; and his presence there would make it worse still.

14. "But I have a few things against thee, that thou hast there them that hold fast the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things offered unto idols, and to commit fornication."

The Saviour will not pass by just occasions of reproof, even in those found worthy of praise. There were those in the Church *who ought not to be tolerated there.* They held the doctrine of Balaam. He instructed the king to seduce the tribes to fornication and idolatry by means of the Moabite women.

Satan has two chief plans of mischief against the people of God. He seeks to raise against the Church *the anger of man.* If that avail not, and the Church stand firm, he endeavours to raise against it *the displeasure of God, by alluring it into sin.* 'Tis often a very efficient plan. Smyrna resisted his assault in force. The wall of Pergamos begins to fall by secret mining.

The seductions of Balaam were two : “ the eating of *things offered to idols*, and the *committing fornication*.” Against their sins, so closely allied in heathen worship, the Holy Spirit by Paul raised a loud testimony. 1 Cor. vi., viii., x. But the corrupt leanings of nature prove too hard for the witness, and the terrors of the Most High.

15. “ So hast **Thou** also, those that hold fast the doctrine of Nicolaitans in like manner.”

In the epistle to Ephesus, the “ *deeds* ” of the Nicolaitans were condemned. In this, their “ *doctrine*.” Evil deeds never reach their height, never dare stalk abroad unabashed, till evil *practice* is sustained by evil *theory*.

Satan was now trying them, by the same device which he had contrived in the desert. *Nicolaitan doctrine had sprung up within the Church*. Those deceived by it were, *many of them, believers in Jesus*. Over such only had the angel of the Church power. For such only was he responsible. 1 Cor. v. 12, 13. They were *members of the Church of Christ, not mere pretenders*. For the Saviour, throughout the Epistles to the churches, *exposes false pretensions*. He twice discovers the Jews who falsely so called themselves ; He exposes the pretended prophetess of Thyatira, Laodicea’s vain boast of riches, and the angel of Sardis’ name of life, with sad reality of deadness.

Under the churches, there is the *lure to eat “ things sacrificed to idols ; ”* in the prophetic days, *compulsion to naked idolatry*. *The great False Christ is a Cæsar*. Rev. xvii. 9, 11. How appropriately then is the city that first introduced into Asia the worship of the Cæsars made to show the germ of the last outbreak of sin !

16. “ Repent therefore ; or else I am coming to thee quickly, and will war against them with the sword of my mouth.”

The angel was some one *possessed of the chief authority* in the Church ; and by the Lord Jesus, therefore, was held *responsible for the doctrines professed and taught*. He did not hold these evil views himself : but *he did not attempt to put them down*. Evil had entered into the Church more fully than at Ephesus. The angel there was praised, as unable to endure the wicked, and hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Here they were *permitted to teach*, and to *practise* their abominations.

He is, therefore, required to repent. *He must use discipline against the offenders*. Discipline, lovingly and firmly applied, would either recover the unsound to the true faith and practice, or exclude them. Left to itself, *false doctrine is leaven*, which is apt to spread, till the whole is leavened.

Be it observed, that the purity which the Lord Jesus sought, and the want of which He reprov'd, was not the purity of written articles of faith, which might remain unchanged, despite the complete falling away of the living members from the truth ; *but a purity of the persons united in fellowship*.

“ But to what extent is it lawful to seek to put any out from communion *because of difference of doctrine ? Is no difference of opinion to be tolerated ?* ”

Yes ! Differences of view on very many and important points are to be met with forbearance and Christian love. Rom. xiv., xv.

There are but *two exceptions* : (1) one of *doctrine* ; (2) one of *practice*.

(1) *That of doctrine* is found where the *parties are “ Antichrists,”* denying the *Trinity*, or the *two natures of Christ*. 2 John 6 ; 1 John iv.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Mr. Govett modified this view in later years. In his *Exclusion for Doctrine Unscriptural*, p. 23 (1885), he says : “ Even the Antichrists were not, by the authority of God, put out of communion after once being received at the Lord’s Table. They went out of themselves : 1 John ii. 18, 19.”]

(2) *That of practice, where open immorality is held and practised.* 1 Cor. v.

If the angel should be remiss after this warning, Jesus would come to him. No threat against himself, individually, is *expressed*; but the removal of the lamp, as at Ephesus, seems to be implied. The Lord's coming may be *either joyous or grievous* to His own people, according as He *finds their work to be*.

Here is "evil unjudged" in a church; yet the Saviour only warns. *The sound portion of the believers did not leave communion.* They are not taught by our Lord to do so; even if, after divine warning, the angel should leave the evil untouched.

But a sterner menace is directed against the criminals. Jesus held not the sword in vain.

*How awful a threatening to be uttered against a portion of his servants!* "I will war against them with the sword of my mouth."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

The Holy Ghost again throws wide the lessons of the epistle to every one of spiritually-opened ear. Where the majority fall away from their true standing, individuals may yet retain their integrity, and receive approval from the Lord Jesus. The address to the angel is over; every member of the Church is now appealed to.

17. "To him that overcometh will I give of the hidden manna; and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which none knoweth, save he that receiveth it."

What is the *meaning* of the promise? Here interpretations file off in two directions: some regarding it as spiritual; others as literal. Our maxim is, to apply the principle of *literality first*. Is it absurd to take it thus? Some may say, they think it is. How shall we decide it *then*? By scripture instances. *That cannot be absurd, which has already been in fact fulfilled.*

There was a literal eating of manna : why not again ? Christians are perpetually *forgetting the resurrection of THE BODY*. And though it may not, after that great change, need any supply of food, still it may be a pleasure to partake of it. Did not the Lord Jesus eat and drink more than once with His disciples, after He rose from the dead ? *The manna is the food of the tabernacle*, while the Lord's people are still in the *wilderness*, ere yet the new heavens and earth are reached. *The fruit is the food of the city*, after earth is destroyed, and the new earth is tenanted by its nations.

Here then we establish a very important difference between the *Gospel of John*, and his *Apocalypse*. Our Lord while on earth, arguing with the faithless Jews, *presents to them Himself as the spiritual manna*.

In the *Gospel*, Jesus is offering Himself to the *unbeliever*, that he may have *eternal life*. The manna is *spiritually taken*. In the *Revelation*, Jesus is offering reward to those who are *believers*, already possessed of *Himself as their everlasting life*. The promise now is to be fulfilled, not to every believer, and not to be received now by faith, but to be *enjoyed only* by the *conquering* believer, *after resurrection*. We cannot then understand it, in the same sense as in the *Gospel*.

'Tis *literally* to be taken then ! It stands as the Lord's antagonist promise to the Gnostic enticements to sin. They offered a place at the idol feasts ; both at Ephesus and at Pergamos. To each Church Jesus exhibits the promise of a better food. He promises the hid manna, as the *High Priest*, having the right of entrance into the Holiest, and having power over its ark. What were the idol-banquets in the temples of the heathens to this ?

We arrive at the second promise.

Jesus would give a white stone, on which should be engraven a new name.

What is the allusion here? Almost all commentators seek the reference in some custom found among the Greeks or Romans. But Jesus is assuming an attitude of opposition to the heathen and their abominations; is it likely that He would choose His allusion from among the things condemned?

Both the *manna* and the *white stone* are taken from the priestly functions of Aaron.

There is one case, which applies more nearly than any. It is that of Joseph, who is tempted to fornication, as these of Pergamos are. He overcomes, and receives from the hand of king Pharaoh great honours. "Pharaoh took off his *ring* from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand." "And Pharaoh called Joseph's name *Zaphnath-paaneah*" (Gen. xli. 42, 45).

But there is one point in all these cases which prevents entire parallelism. *They were all names publicly given, and known to many. This is to be a new name, unknown to any but the receiver.* It marks a secret understanding, and a gracious confidence between the giver and receiver.

Some have inquired—What will the name be? This it is useless to ask. It will be different in each case. It is of its own nature *a secret*. To attempt to know, what Christ declares none but the receiver shall know, is absurd.

It seems a reward founded upon those words—"Thou holdest fast *my name*." In the day of trial, this bespoke firm love. It will be requited by a new name, in the day of glory, when Jesus Himself takes His "*new name, which none knoweth but himself*." xix. 12.

Against the Gnostic enticement to the believer—that, "if he joined their party, his eyes should be opened to see secrets and wonders unspeakable"—Jesus offers heavenly secrets, and the confidence of His divine friendship.

## IV

## THYATIRA

18. "And unto the angel of the church who is in Thyatira write : These things, saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet (are) like to fine brass."

IN the present letter, for the first time, the name of the speaker is given. He who was seen by John as Son of *Man*, proclaims Himself also Son of *God*.

Two attributes of His, derived from the first vision, are given. "His eyes are as a flame of fire," to detect evil, and to terrify transgressors : and His feet as fine brass, to avenge himself upon them.

The Saviour's feet seem to be compared to fine brass (or copper rather), with reference to this : because copper is remarkable for its hardness. "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion ! for I will make thy horn iron, and *I will make thy hoofs brass : and thou shalt beat in pieces many peoples*" (Mic. iv. 13).

19. "I know thy works, and love, and faith, and service, and thy patience, and thy works, the last more than the first."

The Son of God is looking at the works of *the Church* now. The Lord is not, as yet, imputing to the *world* its trespasses. "Love" is put first, as the chief of all graces : in this the angel was praiseworthy. He held fast, too, the great facts and doctrines revealed by our Lord. He was active in the supply of others' wants, whether temporal or spiritual. He was, it would appear, remarkable for patient endurance ; for "thy" is

repeated before patience, as if to point it out to especial attention.

Moreover, there was no declension in works, but progress rather. Herein he stands favourably compared with the angel of Ephesus.

20. "But I have (this) against thee that thou lettest alone thy wife Jezebel; who calleth herself a prophetess, and teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols."

In the point in which he is blamed, the angel of Ephesus is his superior. His unbalanced love enervated his resistance to evil. What a story of imperfection is man!

The Saviour now *divides the Church into two parties*, the guilty, and the innocent; and gives suitable admonitions to each.

A great deal turns upon the reading here. Our translation has "the woman Jezebel:" I prefer, with Griesbach, Scholtz, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Moses Stuart, and Hengstenberg, "thy wife." The latter observes, "That the external reasons in support of the first reading greatly preponderate, is clear alone from its admission into the text of Lachmann. How should anyone have thought of thrusting in this 'thy'—the cross of expositors—into the text, if it had not originally existed?"

We can thus account for the *severity of our Lord's rebuke*. This offender was *doubly under his control*. (1) As head of the Church, he was bound to take the oversight of the members of it, and *could not be ignorant of his wife's proceedings*. (2) And, as *husband*, he was especially bound to *check conduct so lawless*.

It is not enough for those in authority not to favour what is evil: they *must resist it*, and use discipline against the offenders.

Even if the name were not a real one, but one bestowed by prophecy, she might still be a real person. Jer. xx. 3.

“Who calleth herself a prophetess.” Either she had no inspiration at all, or it was that of an evil spirit. She would need some authority to enable her to palm off her awful doctrines upon the Lord’s people. Pretending to receive intimations from God, she could speak of them as mysteries reserved for a select and sagacious few. Montanism and its false prophetesses arose afterwards near the same spot.

“She teaches and seduces my servants.” Three grounds of blame are stated. (1) She falsely professed herself a prophetess. (2) She taught *men*; which Paul by the Spirit forbid; even when the truth was taught. 1 Tim. ii. 12. (3) She taught abominable doctrine. Saints of God! Be not secure! The strongest may fall! She not only taught fornication as a theory: but she seduced to it in practice. The doctrine must needs lead on to the act.

21. “And I gave her time to repent, and she chooseth not to repent of her fornication.”

This is the day of God’s mercy, and He is slow to wrath. He is not careless of human sin, though sinners so misinterpret His grace, and treasure up wrath against its coming day. But long-suffering was tried in vain upon her. We are left under the belief that there was no hope of her recovery. Jesus accuses His servants to their face, in order that they may repent and amend. Satan accuses the Lord’s servants behind their back, that he may raise God’s anger against them: xii. 10.

22. “Behold I cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.”

Three judgments overhang her: (1) one on herself:

(2) one on her paramours : (3) one on her children.

(1) For the bed of sin, God would send the bed of pain. In her punishment she should read the displeasure of the Most High at her guilt. Hers was a sin unto death, and she should not recover.

(2) Vengeance would next fall on the adulterers. She was, as we again infer, a married woman. Her offence was literal adultery, not spiritual. As truly as the eating things offered in sacrifice was literal, so was the other sin.

Her fellow-sinners were to suffer great tribulation, if impenitent. When ? Must we assume that it would necessarily be in this life ? What says Romans ii. ? "To them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath, *tribulation* and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil," . . . . " *in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel* " (8, 9, 16). "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled : but *whoremongers and adulterers God will judge* " (Heb. xiii. 4).

The words " great tribulation " expound to us the meaning of " casting into a bed." Severer judgments are threatened, with increasing sin. And these menaces, be it observed, are addressed to *believers*, members of apostolic churches. "Therefore put away from yourselves that *wicked person* " (1 Cor. v. 13). But the same person, having become penitent, was restored to the Church at the next epistle. 2 Cor. ii. 5-10.

An opening for amendment is, in their case, left. They might repent, and the threatening not light on their heads. How gracious is the Saviour, who received repentant Peter !

23. " And I will slay her children with pestilence, and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches reins and hearts ; and I will give to each of you according to your works."

(3) Thirdly, her *children* are to be cut off by a special kind of death. That the Greek word signifies "pestilence" is clear, from its frequent use by the Septuagint, as the translation of the Hebrew רָבָרָב. "Lest he fall on us with *pestilence* (Gr. *θανάτος*) or the sword" (Exod. v. 3). "For now will I stretch out my hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with *pestilence*" (*θανάτος*). Exod. ix. 15; Lev. xxvi. 25, etc. The offenders with the *Moabitish women* were cut off by *pestilence*. Num. xxv. 8, 9. We have an instance of God's cutting off by sickness the child of David's adultery. 2 Sam. xii. 15-18. Was not that literal?

The design of the judgments of the Most High is to awake a solemn awe, and to deter others from sin. Thus, after the cutting off of Ananias and Sapphira, "Great fear came on all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts v. 11). In the words—"All the churches," Jesus recognizes others beside the seven. In the next words, and by the emphatic **3**, Jesus challenges to Himself the possession of that peculiar prerogative of Deity, the reading of the thoughts of all hearts.

But the principle of retribution is not only to be exhibited to us as carried into effect on others, it is to be applied to ourselves in particular. The Lord's knowledge is with a view to this active result: xxii. 12. It is to embrace not the guilty only, but "each." *It is to affect both believers and unbelievers.* "According to works," will be the great rule of the Saviour's millennial judgment. 'Tis often so asserted. Ps. lxii. 12, 13; Matt. xvi. 27; Rom. ii. 6. No one can obtain eternal life by his works. That is the gift of God to faith. *No believer will finally be lost because of his evil works;* for electing love and the righteousness of Christ will prevent that fearful issue. But for a *thousand years* he will reap the bitter fruits of them. Gal. v. 19-21; vi. 7, 8; Rev. xx. 4-6.

24. "But unto you I say, the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as hold not this doctrine, who knew not Satan's 'DEPTHS' as they call (them); I cast upon you no other burthen: But what ye hold, hold fast till I arrive."

The sound portion of the Church is now addressed. What was the relative proportion of this remnant we are not informed: but amidst the sin of some, they were guiltless. How full of instruction is this case! *Here was "evil unjudged" by the angel of the Church; there is no call from Christ, for the healthy portion to separate itself.* There is no hint given by our Lord, that the churches in general were to excommunicate all at Thyatira for the offences of some. Jesus Himself, after blaming the angel for his negligence, bids them only hold fast to the truth they possessed already.

*The whole Church was not defiled.* There was a sound remnant, owned by Christ, while they and He still acknowledged the offending angel as head of the local Church. *They were not responsible for the angel's offence.* They are not instructed to depose him. They were not to leave communion, but to hold on as they stood. The Lord added "no other burthen" to them. The Lord can acknowledge the offending angel as not only a believer, but possessed of many graces.

Why were the sound disciples at Thyatira not to leave the Church? Because it was *God's assembly of believers in the name of Jesus.* As Mr. Darby has well said, "The simple answer is, They were God's churches or assemblies in the place mentioned; and they could not be left: *corruptions are no ground for leaving the church of God.*" *Claims of the Church of England*, p. 31. "I should think it a great sin to leave a church of God because corruptions were found in it." 32.

The ground of difference between the sound and the guilty was that the former held not the false doctrine, which our Lord is reproofing. *We are responsible for*

*the doctrines we hold.* They are the masters of our spirit and conduct, as truly as the compass is the director of the ship's course.

The guiltless ones were ignorant of the awful wickedness of the others. "They knew not the depths of Satan." How wrongly then do Christians argue, that if *there be evil in a church, and false doctrine* allowed there, *all must be regarded as aware of it*, and be dealt with as if they not only knew, *but approved of it!*

The Saviour's words introduce us into the defence set up by the deceiver and the deceived ones. If remonstrated with because of the awful wickedness of their acts, they replied—"That merely superficial Christians might think so; but that enlightened men were not to be deterred from a right course by hard names. They had been led to *see their freedom from the law*, and would maintain it. Common Christians who halted at the surface might reprove, but it was only because it was a '*depth*' beyond them."

Jesus seems to employ the word in the sense of "precept." He would add no new command to those previously given. They were on right ground, and had only to maintain it still. How long? Till death? No! "Till I arrive." The Saviour may come before we die; He will so come to some. Death is not the Lord's coming to us, but our going to Him—"to depart, and to be with Christ."

The return of the Lord is the *object of the believer's hope*, not merely amidst the persecution of the world; but *amidst the troubles of the Church*. The churches are not to be restored to perfection, but to pass away: a better dispensation is to come in, with Christ's return.

26. "And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end—I will give to him authority over the nations, and he shall tend them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of earthenware are shivered; as  $\text{I}$  also have received from my Father."

The promises to the *conquering* believer *separate every Church that is not perfect into two classes*. While believers are regarded as *accepted* through the perfect work of Christ, *there is unity*. But, as soon as *our own works* are brought into question, as they are throughout these seven epistles, then *discrimination, differences, separation come in*. And these differences in present standing before Christ will, in the day of recompense, be *openly manifested by reward, reproof, or punishment*.

To the victorious is to be granted "authority over the nations." This marks the arrival of a new dispensation. *To rule as a king now, is exaltation out of due time* : and against it Paul warns the disciple : 1 Cor. iv. 8-14. We are to be subject to the powers above us (Rom. xiii. 1), and *to wait, till He to whom all authority in heaven and earth is given shall appoint us to reign*. Luke xix. 17.

The manifest reference of the passage is to Rev. xx. 4. That passage does not stand alone : see 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3. And our Lord's reference in this epistle is peculiarly valuable, as showing, that not the martyrs *only*, but the *keepers of Christ's works to the end* will have *part in the kingdom, and be possessed of royal power*.

A staff of *wood* will suffice for sheep, but the nations are not so gentle and useful. The chief shepherd over them and his subordinates must have a staff of *iron*.<sup>1</sup>

For behold the attitude of the nations when Christ returns ! xix. 15-21. They are assembled in arms against the Son of God ! And, *while the whole population at first will be servants of God*, yet, during the millennial reign, it will be shown again, *that the children of the renewed are not renewed*. Israel is the *only all-righteous nation* : for *to it alone is the promise made* :

<sup>1</sup> This expression, resumed xii. 5, enables us to identify the Man-child with saints of the Church.