

The Apocalypse — part 1, Rev. 1 - 3.

(Part 2 is found in the file apoca2.doc, part 3 in apoca3.doc.)

The Visions of John in Patmos:

being Notes on the Apocalypse.

E. Dennett.

Contents

The Visions of John in Patmos:	1
being Notes on the Apocalypse.	1
PREFATORY NOTE.	2
INTRODUCTION.....	2
THE APOCALYPSE.	5
REVELATION 1.	5
THE VISION OF JOHN.....	5
REVELATION 2.	10
(1) THE CHURCH OF EPHEBUS.	10
(vv. 1-7.)	10
(2) SMYRNA.....	15
(vv. 8-11.)	15
(3) PERGAMOS.	20
(vv. 12-17.)	20
(4) THYATIRA.....	25
(vv. 18-29.)	25
REVELATION 3.	31
(5) SARDIS.*	31
(vv. 1-6.)	31
(6) PHILADELPHIA.....	37
(vv. 7-13.)	37

(7) LAODICEA.....	42
(vv. 14-22.)	42

"I am . . . the bright and morning star." Rev. 22: 16.

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following chapters, first issued in the *Christian Friend and Instructor*, have been carefully revised; an Introduction has been written, and a few notes added where any additional light has been received through subsequent consideration and study of the Scriptures. They are now commended to the Lord, from whom alone came the ability to write them, for His blessing, and to the careful attention of the reader. May He who closes the canon of inspiration with the announcement, "Surely I come quickly," produce in the hearts of both reader and writer the response, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

INTRODUCTION.

THERE is a great difference, carefully marked out in the Scriptures, between the ministry of John and that of Paul and Peter. That of Paul is stated in Colossians 1, and had a twofold character, corresponding with the two Headships of Christ, as there given; viz., that of the gospel which was preached in the whole creation under heaven, flowing from Christ's pre-eminence in creation; and that of the church, the body of Christ, as connected with Him as its Head. The ministry of Peter, on the other hand, was confined to the circumcision; and, while he touches on the church as a spiritual house, which was being built up of believers as living stones on Christ as the Living Stone, he yet, as guided by the Holy Spirit, views believers in the character of pilgrims on their way, with Christ risen as their living hope, to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that falleth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1: 1-5.) But John holds a different place. He does not enter on dispensations; nor, though once or twice stating the fact (as John 13: 1, John 14: 1-3, John 17: 24, John 20: 17), does he take the saint, nor even the Lord Himself, up to heaven. Jesus, for him, is a Divine Person, the Word made flesh manifesting God and His Father, eternal life come down to earth. In addition to this, another kind of ministry was committed to him, even if at the moment mysteriously, by the Lord after His resurrection, in the words addressed to Peter concerning John, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John 21: 22.) For there can scarcely be a question that the book of Revelation is the fulfilment of the mission, for which he was thus designated.

It may be said, moreover, that a closer examination reveals an intimate connection between the last two chapters of his gospel and the Apocalypse. In John 20, in addition to the setting forth of the assembly as gathered with Christ Himself in the midst, there is the conversion of the

Jewish remnant of a later day, typified by Thomas who believed when he saw. (See Zechariah 12: 10-13.) John 21 gives the gathering in of the nations in the millennium, shown in figure by the disciples letting down their net on the right side of the ship, at the command of the risen Christ, and not being able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. There are therefore three epochs in these chapters; that of the church, that of the conversion of the Jewish remnant, which will take place at the Lord's appearing, and that of the ingathering of the nations, after the kingdom has been established in power. The book of Revelation contains these three epochs, presented in a special way, after the vision of the Son of Man recorded in Revelation 1, together with the events in heaven and the judgments upon earth, which are connected with, and precede, the appearing of Christ, as the rightful Heir, to take His power, to make good in government all that God is, as revealed in relation to the earth, and to reign until all enemies are put under His feet. The eternal state, in all its beauty and perfection, closes the subject of the book — that wondrous scene wherein God is all in all.

The reader will be the better prepared to study the book intelligently, if the special aspect in which the church is presented in it is considered. It was Paul's mission to unfold the truth of the church as the body of Christ, and as the habitation of God through the Spirit. (See, for example, Eph. 2 and 3, in addition to Col. 1, already cited.) "But John's ministerial testimony as to the assembly views it as the outward assembly on earth in its state of decay — Christ judging this — and the true assembly, the capital city and seat of God's government over the world, at the end, but in glory and grace. It is an abode, and where God dwells and the Lamb." In a word, the church as seen by John (Rev. 1 - 3) occupies a *Candlestick-position*, and is thus regarded as God's light-bearer, His responsible witness in the world. It is in this character that the church is subject to judgment and rejection, as recorded in Rev. 2 and Rev. 3.

This may be a little more fully explained. Before Christianity, Judaism, Jerusalem as its expression in the kingdom, was God's candlestick, and this was symbolized by the seven-branched candlestick in the tabernacle and the temple. The prophet could therefore say to Israel, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord"; for they, and they only, were set as a testimony in the world to what God was as revealed to Israel. As the candlestick which God Himself had set up and lighted, Jerusalem was subject to judgment, and finally was publicly rejected. And there were four stages in this process of judgment and rejection. At the end of Matthew 23 the Lord passed sentence upon it, in the words, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (vv. 38-39); and the following verse tells us that He "went out, and departed from the temple." The cross, in the next place, demonstrated that the Jews had rejected their God. The chief priests said, "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19) Still the long-suffering of God lingered; and the apostle Peter urged repentance on the nation, that their sins might be blotted out, so that the times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord, and that Jesus Christ might be sent back to them. (Acts 3) This new dealing of God with His people continued until Stephen; and then the nation rejected the testimony of the Holy Ghost, even as they had that of Christ. It was now all over with the Jewish nation; and yet it was more than thirty years after this before God *publicly*, and in the face of the whole world, removed His candlestick by the destruction of Jerusalem, which was the "judicial end of Jewish history." And the point to be observed is this: that the responsibility of Jerusalem, as God's candlestick, remained until she was judicially and publicly removed. As another has said: "Jerusalem was the seat of God's

testimony. His candlestick had been there. I need not insist amongst Christians that the light and the presence of God were spiritually dwelling in the midst of Christians. *Nevertheless, Jerusalem's responsibility and her position before the world only ceased in her destruction by the judgment of God.* After this, God's candlestick, in a terrestrial sense, was in the professing church. Till then, Christians had been, to the eye of the world, a sect of the Jews."*

**Collected Writings of J. N. Darby, vol. v.*

The application of these principles to the church, as God's vessel of testimony in the world, is evident. In this character, as is plainly seen from Rev. 1 where Christ is viewed as Son of man in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and from the threat to remove the candlestick of Ephesus, unless there should be repentance, the church is come into the place of Jerusalem as God's light-bearer in the world. And as occupying this position, she is judged, and the final sentence is recorded in Revelation 3, in the letter to Laodicea, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." But, as in the case of Jerusalem, there may be several stages in the execution of the sentence. When the saints are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, He totally rejects the outward professing thing as His witness; but its responsibility will remain as long as it occupies the place of profession before the world. There may be therefore, as with Jerusalem, some public visitation of judgment which will be seen to be the setting aside for ever, as His witness, of that which had borne the name of Christ.

If the reader has at all comprehended the candlestick aspect of the church, as now described, it will immensely facilitate his understanding of the first three chapters of Revelation, and, at the same time, save him from being carried away by the many erroneous teachings abroad on this portion of the Scriptures.

A word or two may be added, though the subject is dealt with also in the text, on the question of the angels. As everywhere, in accordance with the symbolism, the stars set forth subordinate authority; thus the sun is supreme, the moon derived, and the stars subordinate authority. (See Genesis 1: 16; Psalm 136: 9.) They are also light-bearers, and as such are set by God Himself in the firmament of heaven. To bear these features in mind will aid in the interpretation of the symbol as applied to the angels of the churches. First, they are, then, God's representatives in the church, not the church's representatives before God; they are there to rule for Him, and, while the church, as we have seen, is to be a light-bearer to the world, the stars (the angels) are to give light in the church. It is as God's (Christ's) representatives that He holds them, as seen in chaps. 2 and 3, responsible for the state of the assembly.

The question whether an angel sets forth an individual or a number is easily answered. These seven churches represent church states; for example, Ephesus describes the state of the church after the death of the apostles; and bearing this in mind, it would be idle to speak of an angel in the whole church standing for a single person. That there was the actual assembly at Ephesus is not forgotten; only the fact of its being the representative of the condition of the whole church shows the impossibility of interpreting the symbol of one person. From the meaning of it, as given above, an angel describes all, in any phase of the church depicted under the seven churches, whether few or many, who occupy the place of light-giving and authority in the assembly.

The bearing of this interpretation of the angels will be readily apprehended. If they are God's representatives, it is their state that is dealt with, and with their state as responsible before God for the assembly. It must, however, be remembered that the state of the church is largely determined by the state of the stars; for those that give light, teach, and those that rule, possess the formative power. Hence it is that the instruction in these letters is for all who have ears to hear, and to hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. The address to the angel of Thyatira, for example, contains at least four classes. There is, first of all, the angel to whom it is sent. Jezebel is next introduced; and it should be distinctly noted that the angel is blamed for the allowance of Jezebel, and for the introduction of her teaching — the beginnings of the Romish systematized error; there is the faithful remnant; and, last of all, there is the overcomer. What we desire to lay stress upon is, that Jezebel represents the Papal system, and that the Lord held the angel responsible for its appearance and establishment. In like manner, as to Sardis, it is the angel that has fallen into the state described, is held responsible, and is called upon to repent. But on the very principle affirmed, that the angel possesses formative power, he becomes the expression of an almost general state of things. We say "almost general," because an exception is made in the words, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments."

The rest of the book is explained, according to the light given, in the order of the chapters; and if the reader does but weigh the statements made, and compare them with the teaching of Scripture, remembering, at the same time, that the Holy Spirit alone can effectually convey the mind of God, and open our hearts to receive it, he will certainly be led into the understanding, if in measure, of the important contents of this portion of the inspired volume.

THE APOCALYPSE.

REVELATION 1.

THE VISION OF JOHN.

BEFORE entering upon a consideration of the epistles to the seven churches, the vision in which John received his commission must necessarily, if briefly, occupy our attention. First, however, it may be pointed out, as bearing on the nature of the book, that God Himself is the source of all the communications it contains. It is "*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass*"; and then, as we read, "*He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.*" (v. 1.) The following words will explain the significance of these expressions: "The revelation is one belonging to Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, and He signifies it to John. Though God over all, blessed for ever, He is here seen as Son of man, the rejected Messiah or Lamb, and so Head over all things. The fact that the revelation is one confided to Him is important, because it at once makes it the testimony of Jesus, and the word of God, being communicated by Jesus, and given to Him by God. This testimony of Jesus and the word of God comes as a vision to John, who bare record of all he saw."

After this description of the nature of the book, the Spirit of God, in whose power John bears record, pauses, before proceeding, to pronounce a special blessing upon him that reads, and upon those that "*hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written*

therein: for the time is at hand." (v. 3.) Thereby we are warned against allowing this book to fall into neglect, and encouraged by the promised blessing to read, and to treasure up its divine words in our hearts, and the more in that the time is at hand when all will be fulfilled. The pure light of this prophecy shines out upon the darkness of this evil day, to show the path of God's people, as well as to indicate the future both of the Church and the world, while awaiting the Lord's return.

John, in the next place, commences his address *"to the seven churches which are in Asia,"* and, first of all, sends to them the message of grace and peace, yet not, as in the Pauline epistles, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (and this will teach the reader the character of the ground John here occupies), but from Him who is, and was, and is to come. This expresses God in His absolute existence, the "I am," but as connected, or rather identified, with the One who had revealed himself in previous ages, even to the patriarchs and to the saints of old, and who, as the coming One, would make good on the earth all that *He was as so revealed. It is also *"from the seven Spirits which are before the throne,"* not now the Holy Ghost dwelling in the Church on earth, but the Spirit in the plenitude of His power, and hence sevenfold, and before the throne, because connected with the government of the earth. Lastly, it is from *"Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."* (v. 5.) This comprehensive presentation of Christ is all in relation to the earth, for, as the "faithful witness," it is what He was down here for God; as the "first-begotten of the dead" it is rather the character in which He will take His power and kingdom; while "the prince of the kings of the earth" exhibits His title about to be made good in actual and universal sovereignty. But no sooner is Christ thus brought before the soul of John than, speaking on behalf of all the saints, his heart overflows, as wrought upon, inspired, and taught by the Holy Spirit, in strains of adoration, *"Unto Him that loved* us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings† and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."* In this utterance of praise, John represents the first redeemed company (the saints of this period) found in this book, but the saints rather as associated with Christ in the kingdom; and, speaking as their mouthpiece, he celebrates the eternal love of Christ — that love which led him to give Himself for us, to cleanse us from our guilt through the efficacy of His precious blood, and to associate us with Himself in His own royal priesthood. John concludes with an ascription of glory and dominion which, raised on earth, will be sung for ever, and as fittingly when we are for ever with the Lord as now upon the earth. The song is eternal in its character.

*It is now generally accepted that "loves" is the correct reading.

†Or, "a kingdom."

In the following verse (7) the appearing of Christ, His coming in the clouds of heaven, with its effects, is announced, and it is closed with the response, *"Even so, Amen"* (compare Rev. 22: 20); and thereon we have the solemn affirmation of what God is, *"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."* (v. 8.) "We here find what is so remarkable in John — the mixing up of God and Christ. Verse 8 cannot be said to be one or the other. It is Christ; but it is Christ, Jehovah, Almighty, the Lord; who is, and who was, and who is to come; the first and the last." (Compare Rev. 22: 12, 13.) It is the infinite One, who sums up, comprehends all existence, whether past,

present, or future, in His own being; the Almighty, whose power will be displayed in the future as it has been in the past and the present; and He is Christ the Lord.

First, then, we have the saints of this dispensation; afterwards the appearing of Christ, and the One who appears is none other than Jehovah, the Almighty. This is, as another has pointed out, "the complete circle of John's position, from John's day to the end."

John now proceeds to give his own circumstances: "*I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*" (v. 9.) Apostle though he was, as also the beloved disciple who had been permitted to recline his head on Jesu's breast, he yet, in the true spirit of humility, only styles himself the "brother" of the saints, and their "companion" in the tribulation which was the lot of all the faithful. In consonance, moreover, with the character of his ministry, as here recorded, he takes up the position of being in the kingdom, and hence also in the "patience of Jesus Christ"; for if Christ waits patiently until His enemies are put under His feet, John, if in fellowship with his Lord, must also wait. But he is withal a prisoner, an exile on account of his fidelity in preaching the word of God, and in proclaiming the testimony of Jesus Christ. Had Satan then succeeded in stifling the voice of this courageous witness? So it might have appeared even to despondent saints. Not so, however; for Satan, in stirring up this persecution, was but blindly accomplishing the divine will. God had now other work for John, work that required the servant to be in solitude for a season; and He thus allowed him to be banished to this lonely spot, where, undistracted by other voices, or by his daily service among the saints, and alone with God, he could, in undisturbed communion, become the channel of these divine messages to the assemblies. Torn away by human authority from his beloved service among the churches, he became thus, through the Spirit, their instructor down to the end. In this sense he tarries on earth until the Lord's return. (John 20: 22.)

So far all is introductory. The vision in which he is instructed as to his service follows. The day on which it took place was the Lord's day — the day which all Christians know by that name.* We state the significance of this fact in the language of another: "In the day of resurrection — his own place — the day on which Christians meet, the apostle, removed from the society of Christians, still enjoyed the special elevating power of the Holy Ghost, though alone." For, indeed, he became "*in the Spirit on the Lord's day*"; *i.e.*, he was so possessed with the power of the Spirit, that the Spirit, for the time being, so completely controlled the vessel that John would be unconscious of bodily existence. In this state he enjoyed fully the opened ear and the anointed eye, and was thus divinely qualified for the mission to which he was now to be called. Accordingly he tells us: "*I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, [I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and] † What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*" (vv. 10, 11) This is his commission in its general character; and John instantly responds to the divine command thus received; for he says, "*And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.*" It is another illustration of what is so often seen in the prophetic books; viz., that He who commands His servants Himself bestows the power for the execution of His word. Having turned, the vision is unfolded to his spiritual gaze; and the first thing that attracted his attention was "*seven golden candlesticks.*" (v. 12.) ‡ The Lord Himself afterwards explains the meaning of this symbol, thus

giving the key to its interpretation, "The *seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*" (v. 20.) This shows at once that these seven churches are taken as representative of the whole church, and of the church during its whole history upon earth. The state of seven existing churches is portrayed to exhibit the commencement of the decline of the church, as in Ephesus, and its increasing corruption, onward to its rejection, as the vessel of testimony on the earth, as in Laodicea. This will be more fully developed when we enter upon the consideration of the churches themselves; but it should be now observed, that it is therefore plain that the church is not here regarded as the body of Christ, nor even as the house of God; but rather in its responsibility as God's witness-bearer upon the earth, and as such subject to judgment and rejection in this character even as Israel of old. The following remarks may aid the reader to seize more intelligently this aspect of the church: "These churches are seen as distinct light-bearers; that is, in their place of service, or rather position of witness in the world. They are viewed in their own proper character as of God; as set by Him in the world, they are of gold; He may take them away because they give a dim, or no true light or witness for God; but the thing taken away was founded in divine righteousness, and founded originally by a divine hand."**

*It would not be for profit to enter upon the discussions which have been raised on this point. The conclusion given above will commend itself to every simple soul.

†The words enclosed in brackets are omitted in the best MSS.

‡Some translate "lamps," others "lampstands." It is the same word in Hebrews 9: 2, used of the seven branched golden candlestick in the tabernacle.

***Synopsis of the Books of the Bible. Vol. v. p. 571.*

But it is with Him who is standing in the midst that the Spirit of God is chiefly occupied: "*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*" (vv. 13-16.)

Three things in this description have to be noted — the character in which Christ is here seen; His attributes as set forth by the various features of His appearance; and, lastly, what has been aptly termed His "official supremacy," as betokened by His holding in His right hand the seven stars, etc. First, then, He is seen, though in relationship — the relationship here described — to the churches, as Son of man. This is undoubtedly because He has here assumed a judicial aspect. (Compare John 5: 27.) Hence He is seen "in the wide character in which He is set over all the works of God's hands, and Heir of all the promises and purposes of God to man, according to divine righteousness." But as Son of man He is not actively engaged in service, for His garment is ungirded, though He has on the girdle of divine righteousness. At the moment He is surveying, and judging, rather than serving.

Next come the different traits of His appearance.* First, "His head and His hairs were white as wool." This plainly identifies Him with the "Ancient of days" in Daniel 7: 9; and this will enable the reader at once to understand how different the character He here takes from those relationships of grace to His people as set forth in the epistles. Thus in this chapter, as we have seen, Jesus Christ is Himself Jehovah, and the Son of man is the "Ancient of days." All divine glory therefore is displayed in Him who was once the humbled Christ. For the remaining features we again transcribe the remarks of another: "But in this glory He has the attributes of judgment — eyes of fire, that which pierces into everything, and fire is ever the sign of judgment. This was its piercing, searching character; His feet, the firmness with which sin was met; for brass is righteousness, viewed, not as intrinsically in God to be approached, but as dealing with man in his responsibility as man. The mercy-seat was gold, the altar and laver brass; but there it was as an altar; that is, dealing with sin for man. A sacrifice through fire was there, but here the burning furnace of judgment. The voice was the sign of power and majesty."† lastly, His official supremacy is portrayed. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches‡ (v. 20), and these the Son of man holds in His right hand. Stars are commonly in the Scriptures the emblem of those in subordinate authority, and such were the angels of the churches; and we learn therefore that in the church, as set up in divine order by God Himself, the Lord upholds those in responsibility in His right hand; that is, by His own divine power. The two-edged sword represents the piercing, searching character of the Word in judgment (see Hebrews 4: 12); and we are thus recalled to the fact that Christ as Son of man tests, judges, everything in the midst of His people, as to their state and ways, by His own infallible word. Then, last of all, His countenance was "as the sun shineth in his strength" — that is, He possesses the supreme authority — for it is this the sun as a symbol indicates. (Compare Matthew 24, Revelation 12)

*As a contrast let the reader ponder the description given in the Cant. 5: 10-16.

†*Synopsis of the Books of the Bible. Vol. v. p. 571.*

‡We leave further discussion as to the meaning of the term "angels" until we come to the letter to Ephesus.

The effect on John of the unwonted appearance of Him whom he had known in the days of His sojourn on earth, whom he had seen as transfigured on the mount, and whom he had often beheld after His resurrection, was that he "*fell at His feet as dead.*" (Compare Isaiah 6, Daniel 8: 15-17, etc.) It is therefore to reassure His servant, as well as to sustain him, that, as John tells us, "*He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*" (vv. 17, 18) If therefore the One John saw in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks was Jehovah, the Almighty, the Ancient of Days, He was also the One who had tabernacled amongst men, the lowly Jesus; He who had been crucified, but had risen out of death in the power of an endless life, and had, in virtue of the work wrought out on the cross, become the possessor of the keys of hades and of death. In a word, He was the risen Redeemer, who now wielded sway over the whole realm of death and Satan's power.

Such was the glorious Personage who presented Himself to His servant John, and who commissioned him to record, first, "*the things which thou hast seen*" — that is, the vision which

had been displayed before his eyes; secondly, "the *things which are*" viz., the things relating to the whole Church period, as found in Rev. 2 and Rev. 3; and, thirdly, "*the things which shall be hereafter,*" or the things that shall be after these; that is, after the church period, as found recorded in the rest of the book. Then, last of all, an explanation is given (already considered) of the symbols of the seven stars, or the seven candlesticks, John had seen in the vision. This is the close of the introductory vision, which, when understood, gives the key to the interpretation of the communications made to the seven churches.

REVELATION 2.

(1) THE CHURCH OF EPHEBUS.

(vv. 1-7.)

THIS is the first of the seven assemblies to which John was directed to write through its angel. This assembly occupies a very important place in the New Testament scriptures. Both Paul and Apollos laboured in that city (Acts 18: 18-28); and it was Paul who afterwards baptized the disciples there in the name of the Lord Jesus, when, moreover, on the laying on of his hands upon them, they received the Holy Ghost. It was at Ephesus also that the apostle seems first to have separated "the disciples" from the unbelieving Jews, and where the preaching of the Word was accompanied by special displays of divine power, which awakened the bitter and violent opposition of the adversary. (See Acts 19) The free activity of Paul, as the apostle of the Gentiles, was closed too by his remarkable address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, in which he warned them of the perils that awaited them after his departure from the entering in among them of "grievous wolves," who would not spare the flock; and from men, who would arise out of their own midst, "speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them," and in which, at the same time, he cast them, and through them believers of all ages, upon God and the word of His grace as their unfailing resource in all their dangers and need. (Acts 20: 17-38.) Lastly, it was to the assembly at Ephesus that Paul was commissioned to write that wondrous epistle wherein he, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, "gives the richest exposition of the blessings of the saints individually, and of the assembly, setting forth at the same time the counsels of God with regard to the glory of Christ." It will be instructive to remark, that if the assembly at that time had not been characterized by the power of the Holy Ghost in life, service, and testimony, she could not have received these exalted communications.

The reader will observe that John is enjoined to write, not exactly to the church, but "*unto the angel of the church of Ephesus.*" Two things must therefore be considered before the letter itself occupies our attention — the meaning of the term "angel," and the period of the church's history indicated.

1. The angel of the church. The significance of this appellation must be gathered from the use of the symbolism of the star in scripture. A star, or stars, as may be gathered from Rev. 12: 1-4, will mean subordinate authority; and we read expressly in Psalm 136, "The moon and stars to rule by night." (v. 9.) And comparing this passage with Genesis 1: 16, it is evident, as pointed out in the Introduction, that the sun sets forth supreme, the moon derived, and the stars subordinate authority. Now "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13: 1), and this *is true of the

church, as of the kingdoms of the world; and hence it is that Christ had the seven stars in His right hand. The angels therefore of the churches, as symbolised by the stars, signify those whom God has set in the church for light-giving and for rule, and as such they are His representatives. It is on this account that the Lord holds them responsible for the state of the assembly, that He addresses them. in these letters, and gives to them rebuke or commendation according to their condition. Sometimes a faithful remnant is distinguished from the angel as in Thyatira, and sometimes, as in Smyrna, where there was nothing to blame, the angel and the saints can be addressed interchangeably. But it is the angel who is held to be responsible, and for the reason that it is those who give light (teach), and those who rule, who form the state of the assembly, and it is these who are represented by the angel. It must not be, however, for one moment forgotten that the assembly itself is likewise responsible; that all who compose it are accountable for their, and the assembly's, spiritual state. Three considerations will explain this. In verse 5, though the angel of Ephesus is addressed, the term "thy candlestick" is used, when manifestly it is the candlestick of the assembly; secondly, the proclamation is made in verse 7, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith *unto the churches*"; and thirdly, there is the promise to the individual overcomer. On these grounds, therefore, we have not hesitated in our remarks to speak of the assembly's condition and responsibility, as well as that of the angel. The same thing is found in the history of the kingdom. God held the kings as responsible for the state of the people; but, as the addresses of the prophets show, He did not, on this account, absolve the people from guilt. Still the kings, as the angels, were those who were set in responsibility as God's representatives.

2. The period indicated must also be considered. It seems well established that John must have written the book of Revelation about the close of the first century, the year 95 or 96 A.D. being that generally determined. It was therefore at the close of what may be termed "the apostolic period." But the nature of these communications must also be remembered. This letter was sent to the angel of an actually existent assembly — an assembly, moreover, typical of the state of the whole church immediately following upon the days of the apostles, and perhaps also prophetic of certain phases of the life of the churches down to the end. It is quite true that only the last four of these seven churches go on to the close, and that the first three are successional, and represent successive states; still, it is never to be forgotten that every one of these letters contain instruction for all time — first for the church, and then in principle for the individual. "The word of the Lord endureth for ever"; and we are justified therefore in insisting on this threefold application; viz., to the state of the assembly at Ephesus; to the state of the whole church as set forth by that local assembly; and lastly, to any assembly or individual at any period whose state might correspond with that here depicted. At the same time the angel of Ephesus undoubtedly represents the condition into which the church fell immediately after the departure of the apostles.

Following upon the address of the letter, we have the character in which Christ presents Himself to the angel of the assembly: "*These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*" (v. 1.) In some of the letters there is a connection between the character of the presentation of Christ and the state of the assembly addressed. Here it is simply the general character in which He is seen in relation to the whole church in the previous chapter. He is the One that holds in His right hand of power the seven stars, those who are in the place of responsibility before Him for the assembly, and who

now walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks to survey their condition, to test their state by His word, which is as a sharp two-edged sword, and to judge their character as His responsible light-bearers amid the moral darkness of this world. We thus learn that to occupy the place of rule or responsibility among the saints *for Christ according to God*, is to call in all the sustaining power of Christ; and, secondly, that in estimating the state of an assembly as a witness-bearer, the Lord judges according to His own infallible standard of holiness. An unfaithful witness ceases to give a testimony that Christ can accept. What a solemn warning is hereby conveyed to His people in every age!

In the next two verses we have the general state of the angel of the church at Ephesus. *"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars. and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."** (vv. 2, 3.) The first expression, found also in the succeeding letters, conveys the fact that the Lord ever beholds the condition of His people, that their state and activities are ever before, and examined by, His eyes. This follows from the position He here takes as walking in the midst of the candlesticks. It is well to recall this, for often there is a temptation, to close up questions, or even to cover up sin, in the assembly to prevent discussions, or for the sake of peace, regarding the faces of men more than the fact that Christ searches into everything with His eyes, as a flame of fire. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4: 13.)

*The reading more generally adopted is: "Thou hast patience, and. hast borne for my name's sake, and hast not wearied."

Then, after the statement of His general knowledge, follow the details of the condition of this assembly. And what a record it is! There had been activity and suffering ("endurance"), there had been the faithful exercise of discipline; moral and doctrinal evil had been alike refused and abhorred; they had endured, and had borne, and for the name of Christ they had been unwearied in labour. Suppose now the record had gone no further, would it not be said, Here is the exhibition of a perfect assembly! What assembly today could compare with this picture? Ah, it is indeed profitable to hold up the mirror of God's word before ourselves, that, wherever there are the twos and threes gathered out to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they may discover their real condition, and challenge it, by the light of such a description as this.

But the point is, Possessing all these admirable characteristics, characteristics which would abundantly satisfy man, was Christ satisfied? He proceeds, *"Nevertheless I have* against thee, because† thou hast left thy first love."* (v. 4.) "Ephesus had gone on well in maintaining consistency; but that forgetfulness of self and thinking only of Christ, which are the firstfruits of grace, were gone"; and, as we find everywhere in the Scriptures, nothing can compensate for want of heart for Christ. It is this indeed that He ever looks for from His own, being, as He is, exceedingly jealous of the affections of His Bride. The first love is that absorption of heart with Christ which is ever produced by an overwhelming sense of His grace and love in redemption. It is touchingly alluded to by Jehovah through the prophet, when pleading with His people on account of their backslidden condition. He says, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not

sown." (Jer. 2: 2.) So, in dealing with this assembly, the Lord recalls her first love — a love that displays itself in the happiness begotten by the knowledge of His love, in that holy ardour and devotedness of which His love is the only motive (compare 2 Cor. 5: 14, 15) — and, mourning over its absence, warns her that He cannot pass it over. Let every assembly, then, throughout the land lay to heart these pleading, solemn words. Let all be on their faces before God with searching self-judgment, as they confess the truth of this indictment, and seek the needed grace for the recovery of this priceless blessing, this "first love," which alone can satisfy the heart of Christ.

*The introduction of the word "somewhat" is unnecessary, and unduly softens down the point of the Lord's complaint.

†Better translated "that."

Exhortation and warning follow. *"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly,* and will remove thy candlestick† out of his place, except thou repent."* A principle of the first importance, constantly affirmed in the Word, is contained in the first clause; viz., that to discover the character of our failure, or the extent of our backsliding or departure from the truth, we must ever go back to the commencement. For example, the state of the church today can only be truly discerned when compared, or rather contrasted, with what it was when first founded at Pentecost. Ephesus in like manner must remember *whence* she has fallen, as only then could she gauge the extent of her failure. Together with this there must be, or, we might more accurately say, there would be, repentance; for once discovering, by grace, the depth of our fall, self-judgment, viewing our condition as the Lord Himself sees it, and contritely owning it, would necessarily follow. Then, moreover, the "first works" may be done, inasmuch as when we have taken our true place before God in real humiliation, He can again work mightily through His people to bring them back to their "first love," from which their "first works" atone can proceed. Unless therefore the, or, we may say, *an* assembly regains heart for Christ, there cannot be a true testimony for Him in the energy of the Spirit through her first works. There may be faith, but though it were faith that could remove mountains, and there were not also charity (love), it would be nothing; there might be also unceasing labours of philanthropy, but these without love would not profit. (See 1 Cor. 13) Without the first love therefore the church will utterly fail to be a transcript in any measure of the heart of Christ, as well as of the grace of God, before the world. Hence the solemn warning that the Lord was coming to Ephesus, and would remove her candlestick out of its place, unless she repented. We say unless *she* repented, but it must be borne in mind that, in accordance with the true position of the angel, the work of self-judgment and recovery must commence with those whom God holds as His representatives.

*The word "quickly" is of doubtful authority.

†This term may again be noticed, The Lord says to the angel, "Thy candlestick," and yet it is Ephesus that is the light-bearer. The church must therefore be addressed through the angel, and for the reason that the state of the one is generally the state of the other. This must be borne in mind in reading these comments.

The reader will remember that this warning has no reference whatever to the question of individual salvation, that it concerns entirely the church as God's light-bearer in the world; and thus, that its meaning is, that if Ephesus did not recover her first love, the Lord would refuse her as His responsible witness, because, in truth, she would in that case have become a false witness. Whether the church of God on earth — and it will be remembered that Ephesus represents the state of the whole church at that period — has ever recovered her first love the reader can easily ascertain. If she has not, she can be no longer be regarded as bearing a true testimony for God; that is, as a corporate organisation. Nor let the application to separate assemblies be ignored. What of the various gatherings with which we, beloved fellow-believers, are connected? Are they in the condition of Ephesus? Nay, could the Lord commend so many things in them as He does in this assembly? What room is here afforded for heart-searching? Oh that these words of our blessed Lord might produce a mighty response throughout the length and breadth of the land!

Spite of the condition of this assembly, the Lord cannot restrain the expression of His love, and thus, after the solemn warning of coming judgment, unless she repented, He returns to commendation. "*But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.*" (v. 6.) So far there was communion with His mind, and this it is which elicits His approbation. The Nicolaitanes, it would seem from history, were a sect who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, combining a profession of faith with loose and ungodly lives. Ephesus hated their impurities, as also did Christ.*

*At the beginning of the eighteenth century other ideas concerning this sect were promulgated, ideas derived from the meaning of the name. Thus some have maintained that Nicolas, or Nicolaus, is the Greek translation or form of Balaam, and have in this way connected the two sects. (See Rev. 2: 14, 15.) Others, confining themselves to the significance of the name, have maintained that the Nicolaitanes ("conquerors of the people") represent the growth and encroachments of the clergy. This latter idea has been often reproduced. That, however, given above is most generally received, even also as it is the best supported by historical evidence.

The epistle closes with a proclamation and a promise: "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*" (v. 7.) An immense principle, of far-reaching application, is contained in the cry to him that hath an ear. The individual saint is invited to listen to the messages of the Spirit to the assemblies, so that, in communion with the mind of Christ, he might also judge their state by the light of the written Word. In other words, every believer is here made responsible to understand the state of things around him in the professing church. This at once sets aside, and is in entire opposition to, modern (ancient as well as modern) high church claims. According to these, the "church" is the authorized interpreter of the Word, and the authoritative expounder of all questions of faith and morals; and consequently the demand is advanced, that individual consciences must be in absolute subjection to the decisions of the "church." According to these words of our Lord, the church is to be tested by the individual saint, by every one that has an ear to hear. There could not be a more complete denial of the claims of Popery, and the principles of Romanism wherever found, than that exhibited in this proclamation.

In consonance, moreover, with this principle of individual responsibility, the promise likewise is made to the overcomers — it is "to him that overcometh." Overcoming here is not the victory over the world of which John elsewhere speaks (1 John 5), though there should surely be that also in the case of the believer; but it is overcoming the evil specified in the assembly. That which the Lord here deprecates is the loss of their first love. Whoever therefore, by grace, regained this would be, in the sense of this scripture, an overcomer, and, as such, would be entitled to the special promise here made. The promise itself is general. In Eden, in man's paradise, there was the tree of life; but this tree of life is in the paradise of God, and would therefore never be forfeited. In this way the Lord seeks to encourage the saints to overcome, giving them this promise to cheer their hearts and to sustain them in their conflict with the evil that was already springing up within the sphere of the assembly.*

*The question is sometimes put, Will not all saints, whether overcomers or not, eat of the tree of life (and also share in the other special promises) in the paradise of God? This is to miss the whole point of the instruction. The Lord speaks only to the overcomer, and he only has this promise for present comfort and encouragement while in the sphere of responsibility and conflict.

(2) SMYRNA.

(vv. 8-11.)

The assembly at Smyrna, like that at Philadelphia, is free from blame. The word addressed to the angel is one of comfort and encouragement, as suited to the special circumstances; and is thus a revelation of the heart of the Lord for His own.

The first thing to arrest our attention is the character in which Christ presents Himself to the angel of the church. In the case of Ephesus, as there pointed out, the general position of Christ, as walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, and holding the seven stars. in His right hand, is assumed; here there is a distinct relation between the character of the presentation and the circumstances and state of the assembly. It is thus: "*These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.*" (v. 8.) He had so named Himself when addressing John, who had fallen at His feet as dead when he beheld Him in the vision as the Son of man, and yet the Ancient of days. He recalls the same truths, truths connected with His person and work, for the sustainment of this persecuted and suffering assembly. As "the first and the last" He reminds her of the eternity of His being, that "He is before all things" (Col. 1: 17), that He is "beyond as before death God Himself; but more than that, He has Himself met and gone through its power."

The adaptation of such a presentation to those who had death daily in prospect can readily be apprehended. It would draw away their eyes from the perils by which they were surrounded, to Him who is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever; and who, having gone down into death, had through death "destroyed" him that had the power of death, and delivered those who through fear of death had been all their lifetime subject to bondage. Now it was precisely through fear of death that Satan, at this moment, was seeking to terrify and turn aside this assembly. To meet this effort of the enemy, this roaring lion, the Lord, in His infinite grace, calls the attention

of His beloved people to Himself as the One who had risen out of death, having exhausted for His people all its power as the judgment of God; so that they might, if death were in view, be for ever able to adopt the triumphant language of the apostle, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin: and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15: 55-57.)

It will aid for the clearer understanding of the circumstances of this assembly, and the message addressed to its angel, if its relation, as to time, with Ephesus is shown. Ephesus represents, as the reader will remember, the sub-apostolic period; that is, the period immediately following upon the apostolic age; and the state of the assembly was then characterized by the loss of her first love. But God, whatever the state of His people, never abates His love for them; and hence it is, that in Smyrna, which represents the period next after that of the Ephesian state of things, we find persecution. God allowed it, permitted Satan to stir it up, that He might use it to arrest the church's growing decline. Satan's object was to extinguish God's testimony upon the earth; God's aim and end through Satan's activity was to purify, to restore, His people, in order that His testimony through them might shine out the more brightly upon the moral darkness of this world. He deals in the same way with individuals. In Job's case, as also in Peter's, Satan sought to pervert and to destroy their souls. "The end of the Lord" was their fuller blessing — an end that was abundantly realized.

The condition of the angel of this assembly is first given, *"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich), and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."* (v. 9.) Nothing escapes the notice of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire. Even as from the mountain-top, though it was night, He beheld His disciples toiling in rowing, so He beholds all the circumstances of the angel of the church at Smyrna. So much is contained in the first words, common to these epistles, "I know thy works."* Afterwards we have two words which unfold the special condition of the assembly — tribulation and poverty. Tribulation will mean, as often in the New Testament, the trials consequent on persecution.† The strong wind of persecution had once again set in upon God's poor of the flock, raised by the god of this world in his enmity against Christ. We who live in this day, when the profession of Christ entails no cross, unless indeed it be accompanied with devoted discipleship, cannot easily understand the perils by which the saints in early centuries were surrounded. Often regarded as the enemies of their neighbours, as, well as of the state, they were frequently surrounded by their foes, who, like a pack of hungry wolves, sought to devour them from off the face of the earth. To confess Christ under these conditions was to hazard life, property (if any were possessed), and friends; and thus it came to pass, as we read in the Hebrews, that many "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented." (Heb. 11: 36, 37.) And what supported them under these unparalleled sufferings? The knowledge that the Lord loved them, and that, as here, He knew their tribulation. They thus willingly suffered the loss of all things, knowing that they had in heaven a better inheritance.

*Some editors, however, omit these words from this epistle; but the truth is implied, if not stated.

†See for an example of this 2 Thess. 1: 4.

It is exceedingly significant that the word poverty should follow upon tribulation. The poverty of this assembly might be the consequence of its persecutions, even as we read of some who, in the tribulation of their day, took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, because, like Moses, they esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. It must also be borne in mind that, in days of persecution, those who are rich, even if really converted, are more liable to the temptation to withhold a confession of Christ. The poverty mentioned, therefore, might easily be accounted for, even if we did not recall the words that "not many mighty, not many noble, are called . . . but God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised . . . yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Cor. 1: 26-29.) One thing we may be sure of, that this assembly, characterized as it was by poverty, was despised and contemned by the world. Whatever gains the adhesion of the leaders of this age will always be held in esteem; but to be identified with a rejected Christ is always to secure the world's scorn. Hence the Lord Himself said to His disciples, "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

But what is the Lord's estimate of this poor assembly? There is ever utter contrariety between His thoughts and those of the world; and He thus says, after naming Smyrna's poverty, "But thou art rich." So is it even with poor believers; for "hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" (James 2: 5.) The same writer also says, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted," exalted surely by grace alone, through the infinite and eternal blessings which he possesses in Christ, which are the true riches. This truth needs insisting upon in a day like the present, when the mammon of this world has become the snare of the professing church, and when those who claim the possession of more light, as well as to be in the path of separation, are in danger of being attracted by the world's respectability, wealth, and position. It is then of this poor assembly, that possessed none of these things, that the Lord says, "Thou art rich" — rich, not in the eyes of men, but towards God. How blessed such a commendation! And what joy must it have begotten in the midst of this suffering assembly!

It was not only the persecuting, worldly power that Satan had stirred up against Smyrna, but also the deadly opposition and enmity of the Jews. By these the assembly was blasphemed, that is, railed against, or slandered. As we find everywhere in the records of preaching the gospel, the Jews were ever foremost among the enemies of Christianity.* And this is easily understood. They had been God's chosen people; they possessed the sacred oracles; their rites and ceremonies were divinely instituted; and they had been invested with special and exclusive privileges and promises. When, therefore, the middle wall of partition between them and the Gentiles was thrown down, and grace was proclaimed to all alike, consequent upon their rejection of the Messiah, their deadliest enmity was aroused, and, in Satan's hand, who stirred up their hostile jealousy, they became his most effective instruments to oppose the church of God; for in this way he united in his cause religion with the world. It is ever the case, as another has written, that those who have the pretension of being the legitimate, hereditary people of God are always the persecutors, whether Jews or Christians.

*See, for example, 1 Thessalonians 2: 14-16.

But the Lord passes judgment upon them, and exposes their true character. They were not Jews, He says; *i.e.*, they had forfeited their claims to be His people by their rejection of Christ. The believing remnant now occupied the place of the Israel of God. The Jews prided themselves upon being Abraham's children, but this gave them now no title to God's favour; and the Lord expresses this in the strongest possible way when He says they are "the synagogue of Satan," for this is what they were morally, as led on, gathered together, and energized, by him for his own evil purposes. This is a solemn lesson for those who array themselves in opposition to, or who slander and speak contemptuously of, the feeble few who today seek to maintain, with whatever failures, the honour of Christ and subjection to His word. Nothing but faithfulness to Him, begotten of His own grace, and sustained by His own power, could lead any to take the outside place without the camp; but it is those that are there whom the Lord guards and blesses, so that opposition to them is opposition to Him.

Exhortation, comfort, and promise follow: "*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you* into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*" (v. 10.) The first word, if an exhortation, is full of encouragement. Sufferings lay in the path of the saints, but they were not to be afraid. Why, short-sighted unbelief might enquire, did not the Lord interpose to shield them from these fiery trials? It was because He loved them too well. God's people — the church — as before pointed out, were being drawn into the vortex of the world; and it was to effect their deliverance from this danger that persecution was permitted to arise. This was the Lord's chosen instrumentality to accomplish His purposes of love; but if His saints must thus suffer, He will yet draw near to them with words of cheer and consolation.

*The reader will remark that the Lord here passes from the angel, in His address, to the saints. This shows that in Smyrna the condition of the assembly, corresponded with that of those represented by the angel. This is not always the case.

He reveals, moreover, the form of the coming trial. Through the activity of the devil some of them should be cast into prison, where they should have the honour of suffering for the name of Christ, being counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. But wherefore? That they might be "tried." In such ways the Lord purifies His own from the contaminations of the world, tests their faith, and brings out what is lying dormant in their hearts. Even the Lord Himself trod the path of temptation. He was tempted in all points as we, apart from sin; and He could thus say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." But we, alas! like Peter, often do not know ourselves until we find ourselves in the presence of the enemy; and it is on this very account that we need to be tried, both to learn what we are, and then what God is for us in the trial.

Another thing is revealed for their comfort. If Satan was about to be let loose upon them, the trial should be limited. The tribulation should only last for ten days.* Lastly, the Lord promises the crown of life to those who should be faithful unto death. It is essential to perceive that this fidelity unto death is not faithfulness throughout our natural lives, but martyrdom for the sake of Christ and His word. It is an exhortation to be faithful, even at the cost of life; as, for

example, Stephen and James, the brother of John, were, and as thousands since their day have been, by the grace of God. It is this character of fidelity the Lord urges upon this assembly in the circumstances of tribulation, through which she soon would have to pass; for there are many saints Who would find the prospect of death, a death of martyrdom, a death, in the eyes of men, "of shame and loss" — the most searching test to which they could be subjected. He who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust — yea, more, who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities — provides therefore the antidote; cheers His people, in view of the impending trial, and incites them to constancy and courage, with the promise of the crown of life. One perceives instantly the blessed adaptation of the promise to the circumstances. What would constitute the temptation to unfaithfulness? The fear of death, or a clinging to life in this world. It is to meet this, and to raise the thoughts of any of His own who might be feeble and despondent about the present, that He speaks to them of the crown of life — life in its full fruition, crowned, as it were, with His own special approbation; life, eternal life, disencumbered from all entanglements, feasting to the full on its own proper objects, displayed in all its perfections in its own proper sphere in the Lord's own presence, where, conformed to His own image, those who have been faithful unto death here will enjoy the special place in glory which the Lord in His grace may award. This is the crown of life. †

*Whether this is an actual or typical period, the truth remains the same; viz., that Satan could not extend this tribulation beyond the time divinely appointed. This reveals clearly to us that Satan, in all his efforts against the people of God, can only accomplish God's will.

†To speak of the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, etc., as so many different crowns to be worn by the believer is to materialize the blessed spiritual truths which are exhibited in the figure. No doubt, however, they are special distinctions, which the Lord is pleased to bestow as rewards for service.

As in Ephesus, the epistle closes with a call for attention, and the promise to the overcomer, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*" (v. 11) Again the individual is made responsible, not to hear and yield obedience to the church, but to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. These are very different things, for hereby we are each reminded of our responsibility to listen for ourselves to the word of God. Freedom of conscience is much vaunted, but here we learn that the word of God is supreme, has authoritative claims upon the conscience, and demands from every believer unhesitating and unquestioning obedience. The only infallibility therefore to be found is in the Scriptures. To transfer it to the church is a direct contravention of these words of our blessed Lord.

Finally, we have the promise to the overcomer. To overcome in Ephesus is to recover through repentance that first love which had been lost, and to do the first works. Here it is to be found faithful unto death, to be courageous for the Lord and His testimony in the face of all Satan's terrors. It is therefore through perseverance in fidelity, and victory — surely only in the power of the Holy Spirit — over all timidity and cowardice, that a saint in Smyrna would be constituted an overcomer. And to all such the promise is, that they should not be hurt of the second death. Satan may be permitted to kill the body, as in the case of John the Baptist, but after that there is no more that he can do. The moment the body dies, the spirit departs to be with

Christ, and the body is watched over, and at the coming of Christ will be raised in incorruption, and death will for ever be swallowed up in victory. Death therefore should have no terrors for the saint, whatever the form in which it may come; and nothing will impart more courage to him in the prospect of it than the assurance of the full consequences of the death and resurrection of Christ; viz., the complete deliverance of His people from sin and all its results. When therefore they are threatened with martyrdom, if they cleave to Him, He sustains their souls by holding out before them this blessed promise, that on them the second death — the lake of fire — has no claim. It is the full result on the side of deliverance, of His own death on the cross.

(3) PERGAMOS.

(vv. 12-17.)

THE church at Pergamos represents the public state of Christianity, not immediately following upon Smyrna, but the state rather into which the church declined after the blessing realized through the persecution which arose at that period. When the church had lost her first love, God in His care for His people permitted persecution to arrest' further backsliding. This end was accomplished for a season, and then, when the revived energies of the church again drooped, there was further decline, decline now into a worldly state and condition.

The same thing precisely may be seen in the book of Judges, where the history of God's dealings with Israel shadows forth His ways with the church. The book of Judges is a history of revivals — the record of Israel's failure in the land, and of God's constant intervention in grace for their succour, when they had been humbled before Him through the power of the enemy. The remarkable thing, however, is (and it is exceedingly instructive to notice it), that every fresh interposition on behalf of His people, every new revival, as it may be termed, left them. when the sense of the grace they had received had died out, in a worse state than before. So it has been in the history of the church. Revival after revival has been sent in mercy to restore the life of the saints, to deepen God's work in their souls, and to call them back to the authority of God's word; but when each succeeding wave of blessing has passed away, the outward state of Christianity has ever deteriorated. This is illustrated also in the first three churches; so that, coming to Pergamos, we find, in comparison with Ephesus, notwithstanding God's interference in Smyrna, a sad decline. Sorrowful as the truth is, it is but the history of every dispensation. Whatever God has set up in this world has failed from the very commencement, and has constantly, in spite of all His grace, pursued a downward path, and ended, even as Laodicea teaches us in respect of the church, in total failure and rejection. To understand this is to possess the key for the interpretation of all the successive dispensations.

The presentation of Christ to the angel of Pergamos is again in reference to the state of the assembly: *"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges."* (v. 12.) The meaning of this symbol is constant; it is a figure of the word of God, and of the effect of its judicial application. We read, for example, in Hebrews: "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:

12, 13.) This striking scripture combines indeed the omniscient eyes, which are as a flame of fire, with the all-penetrating, searching, and exposing effect of the application of the divine Word. When the Lord therefore describes Himself in this way to the angel of Pergamos, He is warning the assembly that He is about to search into and declare her spiritual condition, that He is judging her state by the application of the infallible Word. The following verses contain the result of His judicial examination.

First, however, He places what is possible to her credit. He says, "*I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, * where Satan dwelleth.*" (v. 13.) It is ever the Lord's way to commend, wherever there is anything that meets with His approbation, before He declares the failures of His people. It is so here, although the facts intermingled with His approval constitute really the gravest grounds for censure. For, after the reminder that He knows their works, He adds, "And where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." Where then is Satan's seat? Satan is, as we know, the god of the world, and the world therefore is the place of his throne.† What an anomaly then for the church to be *dwelling* in the world! Saints are not of the world, even as Christ, when down here, said that He was not of the world; and we learn from the Ephesians that they are seated in the heavenlies in Christ. It is to heaven accordingly the church belongs, and it is there, while earth is the scene of her testimony and service, that she should now in spirit dwell. But, alas! we behold in Pergamos the fact that the church had forgotten both her heavenly calling and her heavenly character, and had settled down in the world. Afterwards, in this book, we read of the "dwellers upon earth," and this expression signifies a moral character, those whose minds were upon earthly things. In like manner, dwelling where Satan's throne is, is descriptive of character and state, showing that the assembly had fallen from her pristine condition, had, under the influences of the age, lost sight of her true place and her heavenly hopes, and had accepted a home in the world.

*Once again, we may call attention to the way in which the Lord passes from the angel to the saints. It shows that, while He holds the angel responsible for the state of the assembly, He has the assembly in view in the instructions and warnings given.

†The word should be rendered "throne."

Still there were things the Lord could commend. Pergamos had held fast the name of Christ, and had not denied His faith. The name of Christ is generally the expression of the truth of what He is; but put here in combination with the faith the meaning will be slightly different. It will probably be holding fast the confession of the name of Christ, confessing Christ boldly, though dwelling where Satan's throne was, and not denying the faith; that is, the truth concerning Christ. (Compare 2 Tim. 4: 7; Jude 3, etc.) The first part of the commendation is stronger than the second, inasmuch as "holding fast" is more positive than "not denying." Still it was no small thing, and as such it was grateful to the Lord's heart, and hence His delight to notice it, that, notwithstanding the worldly circumstances of this assembly, His name was held fast and His truth not denied. Would that so much could be said in this day! For what do we behold? Alas! the confession of Christ given up on every hand, and His truth rejected, and this in

the midst (and might it not be said as a consequence?) of the boasted progress and enlightenment of the nineteenth century.

A circumstance, moreover, is added which augments the force of the Lord's commendation. This degree of faithfulness had been maintained even in the midst of violent persecution, during which "my faithful witness," the Lord says, "was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." Nothing is known of Antipas* beyond what is here stated. His name is written in the everlasting Word, and the Lord's own verdict is appended. From this we know that, in the presence of the power of Satan (where Satan dwelleth), he bore faithful testimony, that he was one that could not be silenced, and that, like Stephen, he sealed his testimony with his blood. Yea, even as his Lord, he resisted unto blood striving against sin. And who shall tell, whether it was not his noble example which was used to sustain this assembly, notwithstanding she had slipped into the world, in her holding fast the name of Christ, and not denying His faith?

*A theory has been broached on the foundation of the meaning of his name, "Against all;" but all such speculations are devoid of authority.

After having praised all that He could praise, the Lord proceeds to point out the things that deserved His censure. *"But,"* He says, *"I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate."* (vv. 14, 15.) The rapid progress of the church's decline, as has often been noticed, is seen in the fact that whereas in Smyrna Satan is outside as a roaring lion, a persecuting Satan, here in Pergamos he is inside as a seducing Satan, perverting the saints by false seductive teaching. The words used are very significant. It is not that the church has adopted the teaching, but there are those inside that "hold" the doctrine, and they were allowed, it would seem, to hold it unmolested and unrebuked. What then was the doctrine that drew forth the Lord's reprobation? It was the doctrine of Balaam — a very gross doctrine, as he taught it in order to seduce the children of Israel. But it is the thing signified which has to be ascertained. Speaking through Balaam, Jehovah had said that Israel should dwell alone, and should not be reckoned among the nations. The fact of the Lord's presence with them separated them, as Moses had said, from all the nations of the earth. Now it was just this separation from "the world" that Balaam was seeking to break down when he enticed Israel to unite with the Midianites in their worship and sins. *Association with the world in its pleasures, sins, and pursuits is therefore the doctrine of Balaam;* and the consequence of its acceptance is the loss of Nazariteship, the loss of separation from evil, and of devotedness to the Lord.

And was this sect a mere passing phenomenon in the church's history? Is it unknown today? Is it not true, on the other hand, that it has from that day gone on increasing in numbers and influence until the whole church has become leavened with this pernicious doctrine? There are undoubtedly those, as in the latter days of the kingdom (Ezekiel 9: 4), who sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in her midst; but it is not too much to say, that the whole church, as existing today, holds this doctrine that the Lord here condemns. Is it not the case, moreover, that the feeble few who at first sought to purge themselves from it are in danger of falling again under its influence? Who will deny, indeed, that even these are exhibiting

increasing signs of worldliness; that, restive under what is now thought to be the undue narrowness and exclusiveness of those whom God in His mercy first called out to be the depositaries of His recovered truth, they are beginning to be more tolerant of those who hold Balaam's doctrine? May the Lord Himself produce searching of heart and self-judgment in connection with this subject.

There were also at Pergamos those that held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. We see again the evidence of advance in evil. The Lord commended Ephesus, because she hated the deeds of the Nicolaitanes; He now rebukes Pergamos, because there are within her borders those that hold their doctrine. This wretched sect — a sect which covered up, even as the Pharisees of old, godless lives under a pretended sanctity, and a punctilious regard to religious duties (See Matt. 23) — had now found a recognized place among the saints. It could not be otherwise, since the assembly had abandoned her pilgrim and unworldly character, and had, in imitation of Lot, not only pitched her tent towards, but had even taken up her abode in, Sodom. Separation cannot be maintained in the world, dwelling where Satan's throne is. Once adopt the world as our home, we must become worldly in habits, thoughts, and practices. This explains the existence of these sects in Pergamos, which had thus glided into the acceptance of that which the Lord hated.

But the church had been espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ. It is impossible therefore for Him to allow her without warning to continue in unfaithfulness. Accordingly He cries, "*Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*" (v. 16.) The warning to repent is addressed to the church, for the Lord seeks to arouse her to self-judgment for having tolerated this evil teaching within her borders. He will give her the opportunity of having fellowship with His own mind about the evil, that she may have the privilege of caring for the honour of His name. It was so in Israel. Jehovah ever called upon His people, when evil and corruption abounded, to sanctify His great name, while warning them at the same time that if they failed to do so He would Himself take the matter in hand and sanctify His own name.* In like manner here the assembly is called to repent, but failing this, she is warned that the Lord will come to her quickly, and will fight against (not her, but) them — that is, those who hold the evil doctrine — with the sword of His mouth.

* See, for example, as an illustration of this principle, Ezekiel 36: 16-24.

This gives a principle of the utmost importance, as applicable to cases of discipline in the assembly, or to the state of the whole church. Thus if evil is permitted to pass unjudged in the assembly, owing to the indifference or laxity of the saints, or from unwillingness to face the difficulty, the Lord will first wait in His long-suffering, and seek through one and another, by whatever means He may choose, to awaken the consciences of His people; and then, if they fail to respond to His exhortations, He will come in Himself and deal with the evil which the assembly had failed to judge, and in which all, by refusing to judge, had become implicated. It should never be forgotten that holiness becomes the house of God, and that our God is a consuming fire.

The sword of His mouth is, as before explained, the living and powerful word of God. It is with this the Lord fights against evildoers; and thereby He teaches us that its authority is supreme over His saints, and that the state of the assembly, as well as the doctrine and conduct of the

saints, must ever be judged by this infallible standard. Well would it have been for the church at large if this had ever been remembered.

As in the other epistles, we have, lastly, the proclamation and the promise. The proclamation is to every one that has an ear. So in the days of His flesh the Lord often cried, "He that hath ears to ear, let him hear"; that is, he that hath an inward ear, an ear opened by the Holy Spirit to listen to, and to receive, the communications made. Every one such is called upon to attend to "what the Spirit saith to the churches," and these divine messages are to sink into our souls, excluding man's thoughts, and to govern our conduct. It is to us individually, to you and to me, beloved reader, the Lord thus speaks, as He reminds us of our individual responsibility.

The promise is special and twofold: *"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."* (v. 17.) The overcomer differs again from the one in Smyrna. To overcome here is not merely to resist, and successfully to resist, the teaching of the sects named; but it is also to listen to the call to repentance. For though the proclamation is to saints individually, and the responsibility is individual to heed the communications made, it is not possible for a saint to divest himself of responsibility for the state of the assembly. The state of the assembly involves all, so that all have to be exercised on account of it in self-judgment before God. If, therefore, any would be overcomers in a Pergamos state of things, they must judge the evil of the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes, and they must humble themselves before God because these evils are, if not accepted, yet tolerated, mourning on account of the dishonour thus done to the Lord's name.

To all such there is a twofold promise; first, that they shall "eat of the hidden manna." There is a very distinct relation between the promise and the evil in Pergamos. The temptation was to eat of things sacrificed to idols; the Lord says, "I will feed you with that which alone can satisfy." In such a way He would encourage His own to resist the seductions and gratifications of the world. And what is the "hidden manna"? It is, as has been written, "Christ as known in His walk down here, though now in glory — the corn of that heavenly land. The 'hidden manna' was not the daily manna, but the manna which had been laid up in the ark, and kept as a witness in Canaan." What answers to this figure is clearly Christ in heaven; but His being in heaven, at the right hand of God, constantly reminds us of what He has been down here in the wilderness, of what He was as tempted and humbled; and, being ourselves in wilderness circumstances, beset, as in Pergamos, by special temptations, we delight to recall Him to our remembrance, and to feed upon Him, as the One who was tempted in all points like as we are, apart from sin, and we are sustained and strengthened. We thus, eat of the "hidden manna"; for, as the manna, Christ is no longer seen, being hidden in heaven.

"There on the hidden bread

Of Christ — once humbled here -

God's treasured store — for ever fed,

His love my soul shall cheer."

There is also the white stone with the new name written thereon, known only to him who receives it. Two things are thus implied; the Lord's approbation, and, secondly, this approbation conveyed in a special way, so that it becomes a secret between the soul and the Lord. The following remarks express this: "The 'white stone' seems to mark the individual approbation of Christ; the 'new name,' peculiar intercourse between Christ and the individual, different from that which all share alike, different from the public joy. . . . Besides the public joy, there will be Christ's peculiar private individual recognition and approval — the 'white stone,' and the new name 'which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.'"* One can readily comprehend the sustainment and courage which such a promise would minister to those who, by God's grace, were standing for Him against the corruptions that had found their home in the assembly, and who, on this very account, would surely incur the disfavour and opposition of those who were tolerating, if not associated with, the seducing doctrines. To seek alone the Lord's approbation, is the offspring of the single eye, even as it is the source of all strength in conflict and service. The lord give us all to make this our daily object! (2 Cor. 5: 9.)

**Collected Writings of J. N. D. Vol. ii. Practical, pp. 509-10.*

(4) THYATIRA.

(vv. 18-29.)

A new state of things altogether is introduced with Thyatira. Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos represent, in their prophetic aspect, three successive phases or states of the whole church. Thyatira represents also a church state, only coming on the scene, as to the church condition it portrays, after, and superseding Pergamos, it continues, unlike the first three assemblies, on to the close. Pergamos passes over into Thyatira, and then Thyatira remains, as one phase of the church, to the end. This is seen by the introduction into this epistle of the Lord's coming. (v. 25.) Another characteristic of this assembly is that a remnant, a faithful remnant, is distinguished. This is more plainly perceived, if verse 24 is read, as it, should be, "But unto you I say, unto the rest in Thyatira," "the rest" being the remnant, and as such directly addressed, and not, as the whole church is, through the angel. This borne in mind will enable the reader to understand more readily some parts of this communication.*

*As pointed out in the Introduction, four parties are distinguished The angel to whom the letter is sent, and who is responsible for the state of the assembly; Jezebel — the source of Popery, as well as the expression of it — suffered by the angel; the remnant; and the overcomer.

As a whole, then, this assembly gives a picture of the state of the church during the Middle Ages, down, perhaps, as has been often said, to the time of the Reformation. The grounds of this conclusion are found in the previous church states. If Ephesus sets forth the period immediately succeeding the apostles, Smyrna shadows out the age of persecution, which, as the church histories show, will bring us down several centuries later; and then Pergamos indicates the period, as, for example, in Constantine's days, when the Church became allied with the world. In this way, if we remember the successional character of these several states, we are brought, as has been observed, to the Middle Ages; yet not so far as Luther's time, inasmuch as Sardis followed soon upon the mighty movement of which he was the instrument.

The character in which Christ addresses this assembly through the angel is quite different from that in which He speaks to the preceding churches. Here, first of all, it is as "*Son of God*"; and it is as Son, as will be remembered, that He wields authority over the house of God. (Heb. 3: 6.)* The eyes "*like unto a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass,*" are in entire accord with His presentation as the One who exercises this authority; for the eyes like to a flame of fire symbolize His all-searching, penetrating judgment, and His feet of fine brass the firmness with which He deals with sin, and deals with it in divine righteousness; for brass is an emblem of God meeting man in his responsibility according to His righteousness. The brazen altar teaches this truth; for it was there that God met those who approached, and there that His righteous claims were satisfied by the offered sacrifice.

*The rendering in the English version, "His own house," would seem to make it Christ's house. It should be, however, "His house"; i.e., God's house.

The very character, therefore, in which Christ is here seen demanded, and demands, solemn attention. He has not abandoned one of His relationships of grace, nor abated one jot of His ineffable love for His people; but He comes here, let it be recalled, to deal with the public state of the church, and with the church as His responsible light-bearer, or witness, in the world; and coming for this purpose, He reminds the angel of His absolute authority over the house of God, of His all-penetrating, consuming judgment, and of His constant purpose not to pass over sin or failure. These solemn characters never cease, as long as the church holds the responsible place of testimony; and however she may have failed and surrendered her testimony, she is no less in the place of responsibility before God. This holds true also in principle of single assemblies, and even of individual believers. May the Lord lay our responsibilities more deeply upon our hearts.

After the presentation of the characters the Lord here assumes, we have, first, His commendation: "*I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, * and thy patience, and thy works; and the last more than the first.*" (v. 19.) This is very great praise, and it has occasioned perplexity to some, in that, if Thyatira† represents the Popery of the Middle Ages, such an eulogium was possible. It must be borne in mind that, all through the Scriptures, whenever there is corporate failure, the faithful remnant become invested with the corporate position before God. The Jewish remnant, for example, came, on the nation's apostasy, into the place of the nation. So in the church of God; and, on this principle, the Lord is able to impute to Thyatira all the state and activities of the devoted saints in her midst.

*The order should be, even as it is the order morally, "Charity and faith and service."

†This statement needs modification in so far as it is rather Jezebel, and the state of things produced by her teaching, that represent Popery. This was tolerated by the angel, and thus there was moral identification between the two; but the angel is plainly held responsible for the allowance of Jezebel.

Concerning this class of faithful witnesses at this period, we cannot refrain from transcribing the following words: "Nowhere, perhaps, is there a more deeply interesting story; nowhere longer and more unwearied patience; nowhere truer, or perhaps so true, hearts for Christ

and for the truth, and for faithfulness to Him against a corrupt church, as in the saints of the Middle Ages. Through toil and labour, hunted and punished; in spite of a system far more persevering, far better organized, than heathen persecutions, violent as for a time they surely were; with no fresh miraculous revelation, or publicly sustaining body, or profession of the church at large, clothed with universal acknowledgement as such, to give them confidence; with every name of ignominy that people or priest could invent to hunt them with, they pursued their hemmed but never abandoned way with divinely-given constancy, and maintained the testimony of God, and the promised existence of the church against the gates of hades, at the cost of rest and home and life and all things earth could give or nature feel. And Christ had foreseen and had not forgotten it. Weakness may have been there, ignorance have marked many of their thoughts; Satan may have sought to mix up mischief with their good, and sometimes succeeded but their record is on high, and their Saviour's approbation will shine forth when the books ease-loving questioners have written on them will be as dust on the moth's wing when it is dead. . . . This the Lord owns in Thyatira. It made no part of the church for men then; it makes none for many wise people now. It is the first part for Christ."*

**Collected Writings of J. N. D. Vol. ii. Expository.*

This extract fully explains the ground of the Lord's commendation, and entirely sets aside the attempt made in some quarters to find support in this verse for the Popish doctrine of works as constituting merit before God. The very order of the words teaches otherwise. After the general statement, expressive of the Lord's perfect knowledge, comes "charity" [love], which in its essence is the divine nature, and the root, therefore, of all spiritual activity; next, faith, that faith which works by love; and then service, patience [endurance], and works; and these more than the first. It is thus the increasing devotedness of the saints, and this exhibited in the midst of the fiery trials through which they were passing. It was this, so precious to the Lord, that drew forth His approbation.

Having expressed this, He points out in the next place the grievous things that called forth His censure. *"Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman* Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols."* (v. 20.) It is well known, as a principle in Scripture, that a woman, when introduced as a type, is expressive of a state, whereas a man indicates the activity or conduct in that state. Hence it makes no difference to the interpretation whether we read "woman" or "thy wife," for in either case the angel is held responsible for Jezebel; and the very name Jezebel points to the meaning. She was the wife of Ahab, who was responsible to God for the kingdom; but he "suffered" Jezebel to govern, to "teach," and to produce in that way the apostate state of Israel. In like manner the "angel" of Thyatira had, unfaithful to his responsibility as God's representative in the assembly, permitted the teaching of "Jezebel," the fruit of which was seen in every kind of spiritual corruption and worldliness, and that originated a system of doctrine which begot many adherents (vv. 22, 23), and produced that masterpiece of Satan, in his imitation of the truth of God, which is known the wide world over as Popery.

*Some prefer the reading, "thy wife." If this is adopted, it will mean that not only had the angel allowed Jezebel to teach, but that also he had entered into an alliance with her; and that he was therefore doubly responsible.

Into such a condition had the church now fallen; and so far from Jezebel being sensible of the evil of which she had been the wicked instrument, she refused to, acknowledge it and repent; for the Lord says, "*I gave her space to repent . . . and she repented not.*"* If we adopt the reading referred to below, it is not only that Jezebel neglected to avail herself of the opportunity of repentance, vouchsafed in the Lord's long-suffering, but such was her hardened condition that it was not her will to repent; and it may be that these words also contain the assertion that Popery will continue, as we know will be the case, unrepentant on to the end.

Judgment is now threatened. "*Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.*" (vv. 22, 23.) It is very striking to notice that, although we have been told that Jezebel "will not repent," the Lord still says, when giving these solemn warnings of coming and certain judgment, "Except they repent of their deeds." It reveals both His long-suffering and His yearnings over His professed people for their recovery and restoration. The judgment, which is of the severest character, is denounced upon Jezebel and them that had committed adultery with her. (Compare Ezekiel 16; Revelation 18: 39, etc.) "It would be forced association with those she had once seduced to the ruin of them all," and "piercing judgment, according to God's own nature and requirements." The activity of Jezebel is seen from the fact that there are "children" — those who had been begotten and formed by her evil teaching, and who therefore presented themselves as the expression and exponents of her views. Alas! how large a number of such are seen on all sides in the present day, not only within the confines of Romanism, but also amongst those who, while Romanists at heart, still maintain an external link with that which was once known by the name of Protestantism. All such, wherever found, shall be "killed with death."

*The preferable reading is, "And she will [or "willeth"] not repent." The Revised Version and most others now adopt it.

This judgment may have a twofold application — present in government, and future, when every one shall give an account of himself to God. This would seem to be the case from what follows. First, the churches will know — and this could only be from the visitation of these judgments in time — that Christ searches the reins and the heart; and secondly, everyone will receive according to their works, which is the character of eternal judgment.* (See Rev. 20) Such is the Lord's estimate of, and judgment upon Jezebel — upon, that is, the public state of things which her activity had produced; not only, it should be remembered, upon the Jezebel state of things in John's days, nor upon that existing in the Middle Ages, but also upon that which is here prophetically shadowed out in every age until the Lord's return.

*This introduction of the words "every one of you" contains the solemn warning that while the "angel" is held responsible for the state of the assembly, and while "Jezebel" will be punished for her evil course, every professed believer is also accountable to God for his own works.

In the next place, the Lord turns to those who, notwithstanding they were in Thyatira, were separate from its evil. "*But unto you I say, unto the rest* in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.*" (vv. 24, 25.) We have now, and for the first time, in the growing corruption of the church a faithful remnant distinguished — and it is this remnant, let the reader remark, not the public body, not that which occupied the place of the church before the eyes of the world, which elicited the Lord's approval. And what characterized this residue? Refusal of the current teaching of the day, and consequently standing apart from the worldliness and corruption which had now obtained a recognized place. The time had thus come when those who departed from evil were accounted mad;† for those with whom they refused to walk charged them with knowing the "depths of Satan"; that is, with being led by him, as having fallen into one of his most subtle snares. And what was the occasion of this fearful charge? Separation from evil, a manifested purpose to walk in the path of truth and holiness. It was this that led Jezebel, her associates and her children, to hold this feeble few up to public odium, as they insinuated that they were in secret commerce with Satan. History has often repeated itself since that day; for whenever any of God's people have ventured, in obedience to the word of God, to separate themselves from the corruptions of the professing church, or to purge themselves from the vessels of dishonour, they have in like manner incurred the severest condemnation, and often the most evil charges, even on the part of their fellow-Christians. But it was enough for this "rest," as it has been for the true remnant in every age of the church, to have the Lord's verdict. He says, "You have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak." Whoever seeks to care for the honour of Christ must be satisfied with His approval.

*So it should be read, as before noticed, not "*and the rest.*"

†See marginal rendering of Isaiah 59: 15.

One thing only does the Lord enjoin upon the remnant: they were to hold fast what they had until He came. This might seem to be a small thing; but in the midst of corruption, when fidelity to Christ is frowned upon on every hand, and when the most powerful influences are brought to bear upon, in order to seduce, those who are maintaining the truth, it is no small thing, having done all, to stand. The whole armour of God is requisite for it; and hence the Lord would encourage the remnant to hold fast. The encouragement lies in the words, "*Till I come.*" The prospect of His coming was a strong incentive to courage, as it reminded them that His eye was upon them, and that their conflict would issue in being for ever with Him. Nothing cheers the soldier in the fight like the eye, and the expected succour, of his leader; and nothing cheers the believer, in the stress of his conflict, like the expectation of the return of his Lord.

There is another significance in the introduction here, for the first time in these epistles, of the Lord's coming. The first three assemblies, in their wider aspect, represent, as already seen, three successive phases of the church after the apostolic era and onwards. Thyatira succeeds, but, unlike the others, continues on the scene as *a* phase of the church, even after the appearance of Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, and goes on concurrently with them until the end. This explains the mention here of the coming of the Lord. Another thing should, however, be added. Until Thyatira the possibility of recovery, although all the future was lying before the Lord's eyes, was not publicly abandoned; but now the church-state has become so hopeless that the

Lord directs the faithful remnant to His own return as their encouragement, resource, and hope. Happy are those saints who can apprehend this revelation of the Lord's mind.

The promise to the overcomer follows: *"And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."* (vv. 26-29.) The reader will not fail to note a change, also indicative of the new phase commenced by Thyatira. Until now the cry, "He that hath ears to hear" precedes the promise to the overcomer. Now, and in the remaining churches, it follows. "In the first three," as has been written, "the hearing ear is spoken of in connection with the general testimony to the Church, before singling out the faithful remnant who overcome. In the four last the exhortation follows the overcoming." "This marks out the remnant as separate from the body in general. The position of the remnant is specially marked out as being no longer in connection with the general body of the church, but with the place in which those stand to whom the promise is sent as to him that overcometh."*

**Lectures on the Addresses to the Seven Churches, by J. N.D.*

Two things constitute the overcomer in Thyatira. First, holding fast what they had, spite of the corruption of Jezebel, maintaining their separation, walking in the path of subjection to the word of God; and, secondly, keeping Christ's works unto the end; that is, the works commended in verse 19; viz., charity (love), faith, service, patience, and works. Keeping in this blessed path until the end, cheered by the prospect of the Lord's return, and holding fast what they possessed, they would be overcomers, and entitled to feed upon these special promises. These promises have a twofold character: association with Christ in the kingdom, governing the nations righteously, and consequently executing judgment, "even," He adds, "as I received of my Father." The overcomer should receive from Him even as he had received of the Father (compare Rev. 3: 21); and then also He will bestow the morning star.

The reference in the first part of the promise is to the second psalm (cp. Ps. 110), where the nations are given to Christ for His inheritance in response to His own request ("even as I received of my Father"), and where, as a consequence, we read, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (v. 9) The overcomer, therefore, should share in the glory of the Messiah's kingly rule. The promise of the morning star speaks of far more intimate, and heavenly, blessing. The morning star is Christ Himself, and Christ Himself displayed in all His heavenly beauty before the hearts of His people, as their proper portion and hope while watching during the night, or rather while the night is waning, for His return. As the Sun of Righteousness He will burst forth upon the world at His appearing (Malachi 4); as the Morning Star, the harbinger of the coming day, He shines for the church, and thus constitutes her characteristic hope. And it is as so presented to her that her affections are drawn forth and, that having thus her desires for His return awakened, she, as taught by, and in union with, the Spirit cries, "Come." (See Rev. 22: 16, 17.) This promise, therefore, is one of exceeding preciousness: "I will give him the morning star." The overcomer should thus possess, and be associated with, Christ Himself in His heavenly character in a peculiar way, as the satisfying portion of his heart amid the darkness around, to encourage him to successful conflict

with the power of evil within the church, and to animate his soul with the speedy expectation of the coming of the Lord.

The significance of the place occupied, for the first time, by the cry, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,*" has already been explained. And if this is understood, the reader will the more readily enter into the solemn responsibility attaching to all by whom this cry is heard. Raised in the midst of an Ephesian state of things, it is repeated with increased urgency, again and again, all through the history of the church; and blessed are those who listen and bow to the instruction thus given by the Spirit of God.

REVELATION 3.

(5) SARDIS.*

(vv. 1-6.)

*It should perhaps have been pointed out that, as Thyatira reaches the end, Sardis is a new start, as it were, produced by a new action of the Spirit of God. This new and vigorous movement was soon arrested, and it speedily lapsed into the condition of its angel, having a name to live and yet dead. The issue is, as seen in Laodicea, rationalism, that is infidelity, whereas the close in Thyatira is ritualism. How significant is this twofold issue!

THE peculiarity of the last four assemblies is, it will be remembered, that while they follow one another, as to their development, they all continue until the coming of the Lord. They do not displace one another (we speak of their prophetic aspects) as Smyrna displaces Ephesus, and Pergamos Smyrna; but, though coming successively on the scene, they will all abide to the close of the dispensation. Sardis thus came into existence after Thyatira, and this gives at once the clue to its identification. If the state in Thyatira produced by Jezebel represents the Popery of the Middle Ages, Sardis, in the state of its angel, sets forth Protestantism. But we must still enquire, Of what period?

The mighty movement called into being by the Holy Spirit through Luther and his co-workers, whether in their own or other lands, was the origin of Protestantism. In his days the teaching of Jezebel had full play, and, with the exception of those who sighed and mourned in secret over the corruptions everywhere prevalent, was generally accepted. The children of God were in full association with the world, and would have thought it a strange thing to refrain from "eating things offered to idols." Separation from evil, save on the part of the persecuted remnant, was wholly unknown.

It was in the midst of this state of things that Luther, a vessel chosen and prepared of God for His service, appeared; and he had the privilege of recalling the people of God to the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, and to the fundamental truth of justification by faith. It seemed, at the outset, the dawn of a new day, and souls on every hand drank in the blessed truths, which he and his coadjutors proclaimed, as the weary earth drinks in the fertilizing showers of heaven. Having their soul-thirst thus satisfied, they were strengthened to break off from their necks the

yoke of Rome. Thousands joined in the movement — some, alas! from political motives — and Protestantism became a power in the world.

But the energy of the Spirit of God as thus displayed (for that it was His work few can doubt) soon ceased, was speedily lost amid the worldly and human activities that sought to avail themselves of His blessed work for their own selfish ends; and then the Reformation sank down into the expression of antagonism to Rome, using its new light and truth as the battle-axe of its conflicts. *This was Sardis. Not the Reformation in its pristine energy, but the Reformation as it became after its life and power had evaporated.** And this is Sardis, developing ever sadder and more corrupt elements until the end.

*The proof of this is seen in verses 2 and 3, where the angel is exhorted to strengthen the things that remain *and are ready to die, etc.*

In view of this explanation the character of the Lord's presentation to the angel is very significant: "*These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars.*" (v. 1.) The church on earth is the habitation of God through the Spirit, and is the sphere, therefore, of His operations and power. But, as we have seen, Sardis* presents no sign of His activity; and it is just because of this that the Lord presents Himself as possessing the plenary power (seven is the perfect number) of the Holy Ghost in His ministrations. The church may thus fail; but Christ (and this is for the comfort of His people amid decay, corruption, and death) never fails; and hence, whatever the state of the church, He still has at His disposal all the Spirit's power. This is an immense principle for the sustainment of the saints, constituting indeed their resource in all times. At Pentecost, for example, the Spirit wrought without let or hindrance, and the consequence was power in testimony, the energy of the "first love," and the perfect fellowship of the saints. Contemplating all this, and contrasting it with what is now seen, we might become utterly despondent unless we were reminded, as here, that there is as much power available today for faith as then — that Christ still has the "seven Spirits of God" at His sovereign disposal. Blessed consolation!

*We say Sardis; but the reader will remember that it is really the angel, those set to teach and to rule who are addressed. Still it is these that produce the public state. Rationalism, for example, has ever come down from the "teachers" to the people. The remnant in this assembly are those who repelled the influences of the angel, and maintained holiness in life and walk.

He has also the "seven stars." It is not now said, as to Ephesus, that He holds them in His right hand; that is, that He upholds them by power; but they still belong to Him, and He would have them both owning His authority and also counting upon Him for the supply of their need in His service. The more broken the state of things the more He would have those who might take the place of leaders amongst the saints connect every thing with, as well as derive every thing from, Himself. When there are no visible sustainments for those in responsibility it is the more important (though this be ever so) to lean wholly on Christ.

The condition of the angel of the assembly is described in one short, sad, and pregnant sentence: "*I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*" (v. 1.) The works are general; and "knowing" these is merely the statement that nothing escapes the Lord's

notice, that He is cognisant of all the condition of His people; and then, as the result of His investigation (for He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks), He gives His verdict — His infallible verdict. And what is it? A name to live, but a name that belies its actual condition; for He says, "Thou art dead." Such was the state of the angel of Sardis — the actual, existent Sardis — as it presented itself to the eyes (and His eyes are as a flame of fire) of Christ. And this state of things represents also Protestantism as it was after the days of Luther; and, be it remembered, as it will be found until the coming of the Lord.

What then are the present applications of these solemn words? Three at least may be noted, and to these special attention is invited. First, then, there is the obvious one to the Protestantism of this and other lands. And when we speak of Protestantism, we do not speak, let it be noted, of individual congregations, but of Protestantism as a whole, as it presents itself in the world. Is its condition otherwise than here given? Even the most superficial observer must admit its truth, and even that it is now worse than here stated. All the evangelistic movements of the day, all the meetings and conferences for the promotion of the spiritual life, are outside of the recognized organisations of Protestantism, and cannot therefore be pleaded in mitigation of this verdict. In Protestantism itself rationalism, political zeal and activity, worldliness in its manifold forms, are its vital forces; but where is there the sign of the activity of the Holy Spirit? No; spiritual stagnation — yea, death — everywhere characterizes it, even while boasting of its glorious traditions and of having a name to live. That there are here and there congregations of another order, ministered to by devoted men, we gladly admit; but this fact in no wise alters the general condition of Protestantism.* A second application, as in the case of Ephesus (and Sardis was a single assembly in John's day), may be made to individual churches or gatherings; that is, if there is an assembly anywhere corresponding in its spiritual condition with the description here given, then this letter, with its searching statements and warnings, should be seriously weighed in the presence of God. Lastly, if there is an individual — a professor — who has a name to live amongst Christians, and who yet is spiritually dead, he also would do well to ponder this divine communication.

*In evidence of this the "Down-grade" movement may be cited. Its earnest opponent found but few supporters in his own denomination; and some of these finally accepted a compromise which *involved* the toleration of the very doctrinal errors against which the protest had been made.

We come now to exhortations and warnings: "*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard; and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*" (vv. 2, 3.) The words "be watchful" really mean *become* so, showing that at this time they were not watchful; for, as has been seen, it was a time of spiritual death. And the consequence of not having been watchful was that the things which remained were drooping and ready to die. These had formerly been channels of energy, instinct with life, but now were languishing from lack of spiritual energy; forms of life still remaining, but only forms, now that the life which had called them into existence had waned if not departed. The ground of this exhortation is found in the succeeding clause, "I have not found thy works perfect before God."* There were, therefore, activities still sustained in Sardis; and it is often the case that activities, which have been really

called forth by a genuine work of the Holy Spirit, will be carried on, and sometimes with increased zeal, long after the power that evoked them has ceased. It was and is so in Sardis, as may be seen in its various societies, with their multiform organizations, for the accomplishment of religious and philanthropic ends. But the Lord had examined the nature of these "works," and His sentence is that they are not "complete before my God." Before man they might appear as worthy of all commendation; before God they were deficient, lacking in the essential element of good works; for, inasmuch as they were not produced by the energy of the Spirit, they were not Christian, but indeed dead works. It is the motive that determines the character of all our activities, and the motive is never Christ unless the Holy Ghost is their power.

*The true rendering and reading are, "I have not found thy works complete before my God."

Having exposed the real condition of Sardis, the method of restoration is next indicated. They were, in the first place, to remember how they had received and heard; that is, they were to call to mind the source of all the blessings they had "received," that it was nothing but grace which had bestowed upon them such unspeakable privileges (compare 1 Cor. 4: 7); and they were to measure themselves by the standard of the truth they had "heard" at the outset. This exhortation contains a most interesting principle. The responsibility of this assembly is seen to be according to the light it had actually received. (Compare Matthew 11: 21-24.) Sardis therefore, and consequently the Sardis of today, is judged by the light it received at the Reformation; viz., by the truth of the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, and by the doctrine of justification by faith. Could it, can it, stand the test? Why, it is in the heart of Protestantism that the full inspiration of the Scriptures is being everywhere denied, and that the dogma of justification by faith is treated as a relic of an ignorant age. Sardis would indeed do well to ponder upon these words of the Lord which point out the measure of her responsibility.* The Lord thus calls upon her to hold fast, not to let slip, and to repent, to humble herself before God, as she contrasts her present with her former condition, that there, in the true spirit of self-judgment, and owning her sad declension and fall, she might seek grace for revival and recovery.†

*It is interesting to notice that the responsibility of the individual, at least of the servant, is according to a different standard. If he does not do his Master's will, even though ignorant of it, he will be beaten with few stripes; for since the Master's will is revealed in the Scriptures there is no excuse for ignorance. (Luke 12: 48.)

†As an illustration of the fact that the angel is God's representative in the assembly, it will be noticed that all these exhortations and warnings are given to the angel. While the assembly cannot but be responsible for her state in the individual believers of which she is composed, it is to those who form the teaching body, and to those that have the lead, that the Lord looks for recovery.

Space is thus given for repentance. Should she, however, not avail herself of it, then the Lord would in His wisdom deal with her according to her deserts. The reader will remember once again that it is not Christians the Lord will judge in this way, but the church as His vessel of testimony, as His responsible light-bearer amid the darkness of this world. And what is the judgment denounced? It is that the Lord will treat the church — Sardis — even as the world, if

she does not repent. This will be understood if we turn for a moment to 1 Thess. 5. Writing to the saints, the apostle says, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. . . . But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." (vv. 2, 4.) In the previous chapter he had explained to the saints that they would be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, before the day of the Lord, commencing with His appearing, would be introduced. It is on the world, therefore, that the day of the Lord will come as a thief; and now Sardis is warned that, unless she repents, the Lord will come upon her in like manner. She will thus be treated as the world. It is, indeed, on Christendom, whatever its ultimate form after the church is caught away, that the day of the Lord will burst with special judgments; and it will be too at the very moment when those within its sphere are beginning to say, Peace and safety; that sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. — Such will be the doom of that which, having a name to live, was yet dead.

As in Thyatira so also here a remnant is distinguished. *"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments: and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."* (v. 4.) "Names" in this place, is used for persons, but as showing the Lord's intimate knowledge of them, and perhaps, at the same time, betokening the smallness of their number. The word "even" should be omitted, for the surprise is rather that there were not more separate ones in the midst of that which had rebelled against the corruptions of Thyatira. Not defiling their garments will mean that they had been kept untainted by the evils around. James thus speaks of keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1: 27); here it would not only be from the world, but also from the contaminations within the sphere of God's professing people. How precious this faithful remnant were to the heart of the Lord is seen from His promise concerning them: "They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy." Maintaining holiness of walk and conduct while in the sphere of responsibility, their distinguishing recompense should have a conspicuous relationship to the moral separation then maintained. The practical holiness of their walk here should have its fruition in walking with Christ in white — the expressed reward for their fidelity. And He is pleased to add, "for they are worthy" — made worthy indeed by His own preserving power, but having this worthiness imputed to them by His own grace and love. (Compare Luke 21: 36.)

Three distinct promises are made to the overcomer. To overcome in Sardis would be to remember how they had received and heard, and to hold fast and repent, and to acquire the condition of those who had not defiled their garments. This is seen from the character of the promises. First, he should *"be clothed in white raiment."* The correspondence between this promise and that to the faithful remnant unmistakably shows that the overcomer would be brought into that class. On four different occasions white robes or raiment are mentioned in this book. The multitude, that no man can number, who have come out of the great tribulation, are said to have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This is what may be termed judicial cleansing.* (Rev. 7) To the martyrs that were seen under the altar white robes are given (Rev. 6: 9-11), and here perhaps as a token of the Lord's approbation. In Revelation 4 and Revelation 19 the elders and the Lamb's wife are seen clothed in white raiment; and in the latter case we have the Holy Spirit's own interpretation in the words, "The fine linen [clean and white] is the righteousness of saints," or the righteousnesses of saints. This gives the clue to the white raiment of our passage. inasmuch as the promise refers to a future heavenly condition. The

Lord thus promises that the fruit of overcoming should be manifested and enjoyed in heaven; that every act of faithfulness to Him which led to separation from unholiness here, should have its future appropriate recompense in an eternal display in His own presence.

*This interpretation may perhaps be questioned on two grounds; first, that the blood is for the person, for his guilt; and, secondly, that we are never said in Scripture to apply it to ourselves. Since therefore the force of the phrase is, "In the power or the virtue of the blood," it may mean that, being under its efficacy, they washed their robes, maintained purity of walk and life. The reader will weigh this suggestion.

The second promise, "*I will not blot out his name out of the book of life,*" bears also a very marked relation to the condition of things in which the overcomer had been found. That which had characterized Sardis was having a name to live while it was dead. How many dead names, names of dead professors, therefore must have been on its registers; and every one of these would finally be erased. In God's book of life (see Phil. 4: 3; Rev. 13: 8; Rev. 17: 8; Rev. 20: 15) there will be no erasures; but when profession is included, enrolled, it is otherwise, and it is this which the Lord signifies by this promise. There may be another meaning. When godly believers, in their desire to be found in obedience to their Lord, are compelled to stand apart from the prevailing religious corruptions, they incur the hostility of that which claims to be the church, and their names are taken off from human registers. But the Lord would sustain the hearts of His faithful ones in their trials by the assurance that their names should not be blotted out of the book of life.

There is yet more; for He adds, "*I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels.*" What an honour! but one, too, publicly conferred upon the overcomer. There is nothing a soldier more ardently covets than to have his name mentioned by his commander in the despatches which announce a victory to the Queen and her government. But what is such a mark of distinction compared with this bestowed by the Lord upon those who have fought the good fight, finished their course, and kept the faith! He confesses the names of all such in the audience of His Father and of His angels. This, if an unspeakable honour, is none the less overwhelming grace. It may seem now a small and even a despicable thing for a saint to maintain the place of separation from evil, and to successfully resist all the seductions with which he is plied to fall in with the habits and practices around in the sphere of profession; but when the name of such an one is uttered by the Lord before the Father, and before all the heavenly host, there is not one in all that countless throng that will not esteem this token of approbation as the highest honour that could be possessed. May every believer who reads these words be stirred up to seek grace to be accounted an overcomer.

The epistle closes, as in Thyatira, with the proclamation to him that hath an ear-proof of the intense yearning of the Lord over His people, and of His ardent desire that His words may find entrance into, and beget a full response from, their hearts.

(6) PHILADELPHIA.

(vv. 7-13.)

After Sardis comes Philadelphia; but it must be again borne in mind that, if the last four assemblies successively appear, they yet all go on concurrently to the close; that, unlike the second, third, and fourth, which displace their predecessors, these four continue, after they have come upon the scene, until the coming of the Lord. There is, moreover, a great contrast to be noted between Sardis and Philadelphia. If Sardis is Protestantism, of which there can be little doubt, it is not Protestantism, as has been previously pointed out, in its pristine energy, when the Spirit of God wrought mightily through chosen vessels, and produced what has been called the Reformation; but it is rather what Protestantism became, sunk into, after the energy of the Holy Ghost had ceased, when its life and power had crystallized into rites, forms, and organizations. Philadelphia, on the other hand, is presented to us in all its freshness and beauty, and hence elicits from the Lord nothing but commendation and promised blessing. The Lord's eye and heart are both refreshed and gratified by this assembly.* Another thing should be observed. Both Thyatira and Sardis are intensely ecclesiastical, present themselves in the world as public church organisations; whereas Philadelphia and, in a measure, Laodicea, are more moral states and conditions. This will be seen more fully afterwards; only it will help to the interpretation if this is remembered.

*It should, however, be noted that the assembly as such does not appear. The address is to the angel all through, whether commendation, promise, or exhortation. It is, therefore, the state of those symbolized by the angel; but we cannot doubt that the assembly is, as it were, behind the angel; that, in other words the states of the angel and of the assembly are identical.

Coming to the letter to the angel of this assembly, we have, first of all, after the address, as in the others, the characters in which the Lord is presented: *"These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."* (v. 7.) The difference in this presentation from those already considered is at once perceived. Here it is what He is in Himself, moral character, as might be said, exhibiting, it is true, what the Lord is, but indicating also what this exhibition should produce in His people, if rather we may not say His requirements from those who would, in an evil day, meet His mind and receive His approbation. As another has written, "It is His personal character, what He is intrinsically, holy and true, what the Word displays and requires, and what the Word of God is in itself — moral character and faithfulness. Indeed, this last word includes all-faithfulness to God within and without, according to what is revealed, and faithful to make good all He has declared." And it should not be forgotten that this presentation of Himself is abiding, and, as such; declaring to the saints of today that nothing which does not answer to Him as the holy and the true can command His approval. "There must be what suits His nature, and faithful consistency with that Word which He will certainly make good."

Together with this He possesses "the key of David"; that is, as is plain from the scripture whence this figure is taken (Isaiah 22: 22), the power of administration. Outwardly He does not interfere, and to unbelief He might appear as utterly unconcerned as to the confusion and tumult around, as He did to His disciples, when sleeping in the boat while the storm was raging. But He

never surrenders His prerogative; He possesses the key of government, and it is He, therefore, and He alone, "that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." What a consolation! It might seem to be human instrumentalities alone that often close the door; if so to sight, they are but carrying out His will, though they themselves may be acting in the flesh. The servant should not, therefore, attempt to open a closed door; while, on the other hand, if the Lord has opened it, he may peacefully rest in the assurance that none can shut it.

Having called attention to Himself and to His administrative power, the Lord then addresses the angel of the assembly: "*I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.*" (v. 8.) Inverting the order, we may, first, dwell on the characteristics of this assembly, as they form, in fact, the ground of the announced open door.

The Lord's interest in the state of His people is again declared by the word, often considered in the previous pages, "I know thy works." Nothing escapes His eye; and here indeed, as in the Canticles, He has come into His garden to eat His pleasant fruits. The features mentioned may not seem, at first sight, so greatly attractive; and yet it is these feeble expressions of the power of the Spirit that delight the heart of Christ.

(1) "Thou hast a little strength." Notwithstanding that the Lord has only commendation to give to the angel of Philadelphia, there is no display of power and energy, as in Pentecostal days. The time for this, indeed, had long since passed, and now feebleness, or little power, marked the condition of Philadelphian saints. It was of necessity so (we speak of Philadelphia prophetic rather than the historical assembly), for while it is complete and corporate, it yet, considering its co-existence with Thyatira and Sardis, must have a remnant character. The natural mind, and even godly souls, when uninstructed in the Word, long for the exhibition of power as in days of old; but let all such learn, from this divine communication, that, within the circle of that condition that meets the Lord's mind, there never can be anything else than "a little strength."

(2) "Thou hast kept my word." This is the feature that ever delights the heart of our blessed Lord — and a feature, above all others, that distinguishes moral state. This may be seen from another scripture: "If a man love me, he will keep my word*," etc. (John 14: 23.) Keeping His word means treasuring it up in the heart so that it moulds, governs, and produces obedience. The term "word," moreover, is very comprehensive: it includes the sum and substance of all the Lord's communications to His people. When therefore He says to the angel of Philadelphia, "Thou hast kept my word," He signifies that His people prized it as their greatest treasure, and that they were individually governed by, and in subjection to it; and that consequently He had His rightful place of supremacy in their hearts and in their service. Would that there were more collective purpose of heart to win the same blessing and the same approval!

*It should be "word," and not, as in our translation, "words."

(3) "And hast not denied my name." "Name," as is usual in Scripture, is the expression of what Christ is, as revealed to His people, and will include, therefore the truth of His person and work, as well as His authority, as set forth by His full title, "Lord Jesus Christ." It is somewhat remarkable that it should be put in a negative form; but it was, and is, no small thing to find, in

the midst of declension, and even surrender of the truths of redemption, if not apostasy, those who were collectively keeping the Lord's word and not denying His name. The remnant in the midst of apostate Israel in the days of Ahab are described in a similar manner, as those who had not bowed the knee to Baal. To borrow another's language: "It seems little; but in universal decline, much pretension and ecclesiastical claim, and many falling away to man's reasonings, keeping the word of Him that is holy and true, and not denying His name is everything."

It is to the angel of this assembly in this condition that the Lord says, "I have set before thee an opened* door, and no man can shut it." This implies, as we gather, that wherever the condition here indicated is found, the Lord opens for His servants a door — a door for His testimony and service, and a door which He will keep open, whatever the hostile efforts to close it. It was so in the Lord's own service in the midst of Israel. To the outward eye, He had but little strength; He was crucified in (*ek*) weakness, He lived by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. He truly did not deny His Father's name, and there was ever before Him, spite of the craft, malice, and enmity of man, an opened door. To Him the porter opened; and so now to all who, in any measure, possess the moral characteristics here given. We never therefore need to be anxious about open doors for service; our only concern should be to be in the state to be used, and then a door will always be opened, even though there be many adversaries.

*So it should be given. It is not a door standing open, but one that the Lord has opened. It would have been closed had He not opened it.

Promises follow. The first concerns their ecclesiastical surroundings: "*Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.*" (v. 9. Compare Isaiah 60: 14.) Who, then, are these claiming to be Jews? There can be little doubt that they are "those who found religion on ordinances and not on Christ," those who are governed by traditions and ecclesiastical usages, and not by the word of God, those who make an "ecclesiastical pretension to a successional God-established religion." Not that these say, in so many words, that they are Jews, but they do in effect, for they distinctly take Jewish ground in their sacerdotal orders, robes, rites, ceremonies, and temples, or "sacred" buildings. And these have always been, when the law permitted, the active persecutors of those who, refusing the old traditions and usages, have sought to be guided alone by the word of God; and, when restrained, they have treated them with contumely and scorn. They claim, through apostolic succession from Peter, who was the Jewish apostle, the apostle of the circumcision, to be the divinely established church; but it is of these the Lord says, they are "of the synagogue of Satan," not exactly *are* it, but *of* it; they belong to the synagogue which is morally under Satan's power.

In this day all such as are prominently before the world occupy in the world's eye the place of the church, while those who with a little strength seek to keep the word of Christ, and not deny His name, are, if noticed, despised; but the time is coming when these relative positions will be reversed, and when those who are now exalted by their pretensions shall come and "worship" before the feet of Philadelphia, and know that she has been the object of the Lord's love.

Such comfort does the Lord administer to His true-hearted and afflicted people! It was His own path, contemned by the religious leaders of His people, yea, rejected and crucified. Now He is the exalted One, and they will one day have to bow the knee at the name of Jesus, and with their tongues confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

We have, in the next place, a promise of another sort: "*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*" (v. 10.) The meaning of "the word of my patience" may be gathered from Rev. 1: 9. John describes himself as "your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ." The whole of the present interval is the time of Christ's patience, for He waits at the right hand of God until His enemies shall be made His footstool; and He has taught His people this, "and given the word that in teaching directs the path and spirit and conduct of him that waits. They wait with Christ according to the word of His patience." This is a most blessed state of soul, for, unless we remember the character of the present moment, we are tempted to be impatient in the presence of the activities and power of evil; but once call in the thought of Christ quietly waiting, and the fact that the longer He waits the more extended will be the day of grace, our souls being encouraged will find rest in communion with Him. For this reason it was that Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that the Lord would direct their "hearts into the love of God, and into the patience* of Christ." (2 Thess. 3: 5.)

*"Patient waiting" is a paraphrase; the word is really "patience" or "endurance."

Philadelphia had enjoyed communion with the Lord in keeping the word of His patience; and, as an incentive to perseverance in this path, He ministers the suited promise that He would keep her "from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." This "hour of trial," of which the Lord speaks, is not the unparalleled sorrows of which we read in Matt. 24, concerning which He says, "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." (v. 22.) This is the Jewish tribulation, connected with Antichrist, and confined to Jerusalem and Judea; but the hour of temptation of our scripture (coincident as to time possibly, and even springing from similar causes, inasmuch as the head of the Western Empire and Antichrist will be associated) is to come "upon the whole habitable world." The object of this permitted trial is "to try them that dwell upon the earth." This does not mean the inhabitants of the earth: it is a moral expression to denote those who, as in Philippians 3, mind earthly things, those, in fact, who, having refused God's testimony, have their thoughts, affections, and desires confined to, and bounded by, this present world.

But it is asked, Will not all God's people, the whole church rather, be kept from this hour of trial? Undoubtedly so, for indeed it will not arrive until after the church is caught away to be for ever with the Lord. But the point is, as also in some respects in all the promises to the overcomers, that the needed encouragement for the saints in their special circumstances is thus ministered. The Lord had spoken of the word of His patience which the angel of Philadelphia had kept; and from this we gather, that this assembly existed, or, if we speak of prophetic Philadelphia, does exist, in the presence of a large display of the power of evil; and this called for, and through grace they had exhibited, much patience in intelligent fellowship with their Lord. It was to the saints in these circumstances the Lord gave this promise, wherein He

reminded them that the time was coming when there would be an universal and almost unhindered display of evil; but they should be kept out of it, because they were keeping the word of His patience. Thereby He ministered present sustainment and consolation to their hearts, in reminding them that in this future season of fiery trial they would have found their eternal joy in His own presence.

Still further encouragement follows - "*Behold,* I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*" (v. 11) This assembly is surrounded with evil of every kind. Jezebel holds undisputed sway in Thyatira, Sardis has a name to live and is dead, is corporately characterized by lifeless profession; and hence it needs no small fidelity and energy to cleave to the Lord and His truth in such circumstances. There are many seasons, in such a time as the present, when the subtle temptation presents itself, Is it any longer possible to maintain the honour of the Lord and His truth? With all that calls itself Christian in opposition, might it not be better to pursue an individual path? It is to meet this wile of the enemy that the Lord utters these words. He knows and sees the stress of the conflict; and, as beholding it, He would cheer His faithful ones in the prospect of His coming to maintain the struggle, even until their hands, like the hand of Eleazar the son of Dodo, are weary, and cleave to their swords. The force of the words is, "I am coming quickly; hold fast what thou hast until I come, that no man take thy crown," the crown of My approbation and smile. It is as if one saw a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a spar, and cried, "Hold on, I am coming!" Blessed Lord, Thou seest the difficulties of Thine own in keeping Thy word, and not denying Thy name! Thou knowest all their feebleness, and how they are nearly overwhelmed by the rising waters around. Keep them therefore ever in recollection of this word, that Thou art coming quickly, and thus strengthen their faith, and encourage their hearts. Only thus will they be kept from losing their crown.

*The word "behold" should be omitted.

We have next the promise to the overcomer: "*Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.*" (v. 12.) The character of the overcoming in this assembly is specially to be observed. There is no evil indicated to be withstood and overcome; it is not even perseverance in fidelity that is urged upon the saints, even at the cost of a martyr's death, as in Smyrna; but overcoming here is simply *maintaining*. "Hold that fast which thou hast;" "him that overcometh," that is, in holding fast, "will I make a pillar," etc.

It will also be noticed that the promise to the overcomer has reference to Philadelphia's present condition. Here, it has little strength; the Lord would make the overcomer "a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out" — stability and permanence marking his condition in contrast with feebleness here, and transitoriness. Here, keeping the word of Christ constituted the overcomer's crown, above with Christ, he should have written upon him "the name of my God," the expression of all that God is as revealed in Christ, and unfolded in His word; "and the name of the city of my God, new Jerusalem," the display of God's glory in the church in her glorified condition (see Rev. 21: 10); "and my new name," for here the overcomer had not denied the name of Christ. My *new* name, "the name not known to prophets and Jews,

according to the flesh, but which He has taken as dead to this world (where the false assembly settles down), and risen into heavenly glory." It is intimate association with Christ, as shown from the repetition of the word "My," in every variety of His heavenly glory — in His own relationship to God, to the church in her public display in glory as the dwelling-place of God, and in His own personal glorified condition as Man at the right hand of God.

The proclamation, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*" (v. 13), closes the epistle; and well might we, in the presence of this gracious communication, unite in fervent supplication, both for the hearing ear, and the understanding heart.

(7) LAODICEA.

(vv. 14-22.)

Everything which God has entrusted to man in responsibility has utterly failed. Adam in paradise, Noah in the new earth, Israel under law, the priesthood, prophets, and kings — all alike failed in their several positions. The church, alas! is no exception to the general rule; for in Laodicea we behold its final condition as estimated by Him whose eyes, as He walked in the midst of the seven candlesticks, were as a flame of fire. And, again, it should be remembered that the root of the state of this assembly is found in Ephesus — in the loss of her "first love." It was there the decline commenced, and, whatever the gracious interventions of God to recover His people, this decline continued, expressing itself, as we have seen, in various and widely different forms, until at length the limits of divine forbearance are reached, and the Lord declares His unalterable purpose of "spueing" the church, as the vessel of testimony, out of His mouth. He finally rejects, as His witness, that which bears His name on the earth.

It is this hopeless, and now irremediable, condition of Laodicea which accounts for the special characters the Lord assumes in His presentation: *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans* write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.*" (Rev. 3: 14.) All these characters express what the church should have been for God in the world; but, having falsified every one of them, and thus become a false witness, the Lord presents Himself as the One in whom they have all been verified and secured. God will have His glory maintained. He will permit His people to have the privilege of making it good; but on their failure, He will Himself vindicate His own name. (1) First, then, Christ is the "Amen." The key to the meaning of this word may be found in 2 Cor. 1, where we read, "For all the promises of God in Him" (the Son of God, Jesus Christ) "are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." (v. 20.) That is, in Him is the affirmation, and in Him is the confirmation, of the truth of all that God has spoken. So here the Lord, as the Amen, presents Himself as "the fulfilment and the verifier of all the promises of God." The church, we repeat, should have been this, but, having forgotten her heavenly calling, and the source of her power and blessing, she has found a home in a scene where the Lord Himself was rejected, and has, in this way, become the denial of, instead of being the Amen to, the promises of God. (2) Connected with being the Amen, Christ is also the faithful and true witness; and He was that both concerning God and man. Here it is probably in the former aspect He is seen, as God's faithful and true witness. This, as before noticed, is, from the very figure of the golden candlestick found in the first chapter,

what the church was intended to be in this world. The apostle Paul therefore, writing to the Corinthian assembly, says, "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ." (2 Cor. 3: 3.) But how could an assembly that, in its own estimation, was rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, be the faithful and true witness of Him who, when down here, had not where to lay His head? (3) He was, moreover, "the beginning of the creation of God." Adam, the responsible man, was the beginning of the first creation; but in the cross of Christ the first man came to his end before God, he was for ever judged and set aside, and has been once and for all superseded by the Second Man, the Lord from heaven. As soon as Christ came into the world He was the second Man; but He did not take the place until He was risen from the dead, the Head now of a new race, as well as the Head of His body the church. It is Christ, therefore, as risen and glorified, who is the beginning of the creation of God, and it is to Him in this condition that the church, the church which is His body, is united by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and hence it is that the church "ought to have displayed the power of the new creation by the Holy Ghost; as if any man is in Christ it is a new creation, where all things are of God." Instead of that, as Laodicea testifies, she has become the expression of her own importance, covetousness, and earthly-mindedness. What an immense consolation then it is, in such a state of things, to look upward and to find that, while everything has slipped from our grasp, to our own shame and confusion of face, God finds the perfect answer to all His own thoughts of grace, and has secured all for His own beloved people, in Christ.

*As a great deal has been made of the use of this word, it may be mentioned that the correct reading is *Laodicea*, and not, as in our version, *Laodiceans*.

The condition and judgment of Laodicea are now given — "*I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. So then became thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*" (vv. 15, 16.) Though bearing the name of Christ, and presenting itself in the world as the church, such was its moral condition, the principal feature of which was indifference, springing from the want of heart for Christ, and expressing itself in that spurious charity which regards all "religious" beliefs as alike good, provided there be sincerity. There is consequently lukewarmness, no zeal for Christ, and no hatred of sin; but a mild self-complacent toleration of all, and of all things; and connected therewith the substitution of humanity for Christ, and, as a consequence, philanthropy for religion. As has been written long ago, "It would not renounce Christ, would keep up profession, but would sacrifice nothing for Him, it would keep the church's place and credit, yea, claim it largely on many grounds as a body; but spiritual power, in individual association of heart with Christ or trouble for Him, was gone."

Such was the condition of Laodicea as discerned, and infallibly discerned, by Christ; and it was nauseous to Him; He abhorred it, and therefore declares irrevocably that He will spue it out of His mouth. He does not say when He will do so; but the decree has gone forth from His lips, and will never be recalled. Its meaning is, that He will totally, and for ever, reject the assembly as His public witness, His responsible light-bearer in the world. This is its primary application; but surely every individual believer may learn, both for instruction and warning, that nothing, no state or condition, is so displeasing to Christ as lukewarmness or indifference.

The Lord, in the next place, exposes the cause of the condition He condemns, and, though He has pronounced judgment, He indicates the remedy: "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and*

increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." (vv. 17, 18.)* As may be gathered from Deut. 8, and other scriptures, the danger in the wilderness for God's people is that of murmuring and unbelief, the danger in the land, when surrounded with blessings, is that of self-sufficiency and self-exaltation. It is into this latter danger that Laodicea has fallen. Possessing all the light of the word of God and familiar with the spiritual blessings which are the church's acknowledged portion, she forgets the source of her wealth, and ascribes all to herself. It is she who is rich and increased with goods, and has need of nothing. In other words, she makes everything of man, and nothing of Christ — save to use His name for her own exaltation. "In Laodicea, all that they professed to have, all that man could estimate the value of, was false and human. I do not mean mere outward riches, but all that could give a larger pretension to wisdom and knowledge and learning, perhaps a pretended fuller view of Christianity itself."

*This should read rather, "And eye-salve to anoint thine eyes." The eye-salve must be "bought" of Christ, equally with the gold and the white raiment.

And what, beloved reader, exists today as the counterpart of this description? Nay, what is it that will finally form Laodicea? It is, in one word, rationalism — that rationalism which is current under the name of Broad church theology, and which, daily on the increase, occupies a large place in the Anglican establishment, and has almost completely flooded whole fields of Dissent. For the teachers of this school bend all their efforts to eradicate the distinctive truths of Christianity; to rehabilitate the first man, notwithstanding he has for ever been judicially set aside in the cross of Christ; and they are never weary of proclaiming that the light of reason, of their own minds, is all-sufficient to guide them, both in deciding what is the word of God, and also in their journey through the mazes of this world. It is their perpetual boast that they are enriched with all the accumulated treasures of the science, philosophy, and civilization of the nineteenth century. Yea, truly, according to their own estimate, they have need of nothing!

But what is the estimate of Christ? He says, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" and, more than this, He says that Laodicea does not know that she is in this miserable plight. What a difference between the thoughts of Christ and those of this assembly! *She* claims superior knowledge! *He* says she is utterly ignorant! *She* revels in her fancied wealth and possessions! *He* says that she does not possess one single thing. Which estimate then are we to accept? Remember, dear reader, in answering this question, that the Lord had surveyed this assembly with eyes that were as a flame of fire, testing and penetrating into the real character of everything that met His gaze. Remember, too, that it is He into whose hands all judgment has been committed. Can you doubt then which is the true verdict? When will souls learn that man as man is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked? And this assembly, by its vain self-sufficiency, her self-importance fed with pretended light from human sources, had got "off the ground of Christianity, and on to that of the world or natural man;" and hence her sad and lamentable condition.

Nothing could show out more fully the Lord's tender grace and long-suffering than the counsel He gives to Laodicea under these circumstances. She has turned wholly away from Christ, except in profession; and yet He would fain draw her attention to Himself as her only source of recovery. Let us then look at what He so graciously proffers. There are three things — "Gold tried in the fire!" — a well-known symbol of divine righteousness, which in Christ, as has been remarked by another, is never separated from life; "white raiment," which, as may be seen from Revelation 19, sets forth the righteousnesses of saints, the fruit of the power of the Spirit following upon the possession of, and upon the becoming, God's righteousness in Christ; and the "eye-salve," or unction of the Holy One (1 John 2: 20), which is the only source of spiritual perception and intelligence. The exhortation "to buy" these things of Christ will be readily understood in the light of other scriptures. (See Isaiah 55: 1; Matthew 25: 9, 10.) It is simply a figure of grace, buying without money and without price."

Concerning the significance of this counsel of the Lord, we transcribe the following words: "They are the divine gifts and power of Christianity *in contrast* with what man possesses as man, with that of which he can say, 'Gain to *me*' — man's conscious possession of that which gives importance and value to man in his own mind. . . . What was wholly wanting was what was divine and new in man. . . . They are specifically divine things connected with man's rejection and acceptance in Christ alone, to be had only in Christ and from Christ, and nowhere else; not an improvement of man, but what was divine, found in and obtained from Christ."*

**Collected Writings of J. N. D.*, vol. ii., "Expository".

Down to the end of verse 18, the Lord addresses the angel of Laodicea. In verse 19, in view of the possibility of individual believers being found in this corrupt assembly, He announces a general principle of His dealing with His people, and then, as standing outside, appeals for admittance to anyone who should hear His voice. The principle then is, "*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*" (v. 19) That this principle is applicable to those in relationship with Christ (compare Job 5: 17, 18; Proverbs 3: 11, 12; Amos 3: 2; Hebrews 12: 5-8, etc.) will scarcely be questioned. It lies indeed at the foundation of God's governmental ways with His people in this world, and hence the exhortation, "Be zealous therefore, and repent." The Lord thus warns any of His people, as well as those who were only professors, that His rod was already lifted up, and that, unless there were repentance, He must let it fall for chastening and rebuke. Precisely the same thing is seen in the discipline He exercises at His table. "If," says the apostle, "we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged;" and again, "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (1 Cor. 11: 31, 32.) It is therefore out of the tenderness, out of the love of His own heart, that this warning proceeds. He never afflicts willingly; but if His people continued deaf to His entreaties and appeals, He loves them too well to allow them to pass on unrebuked and without chastening.

In the next verse we have, first, the position which the state of Laodicea has compelled Him to assume: "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.*" The church on earth is God's habitation through the Spirit, and yet we find in this scripture that Christ is constrained by the condition into which it has fallen to be outside.* Judgment is not yet executed; He has not yet spued it out of His mouth; but He has taken His place outside. So also we read in the Gospel of Matthew that,

immediately on His passing judgment upon the temple, and Judaism, in the words, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate," He "went out, and departed from the temple." (Matt. 23: 38; Matt. 24: 1.) It is the same with Laodicea; it has become man's house, not God's — a testimony therefore, not to Christ, but to man's own importance and self-sufficiency. In sorrow, and, as we know from the analogous case of the departure of the glory from the temple (Ezekiel 10, 11), reluctantly, the Lord, unable to bear longer, consistently with what He is, with the moral corruption and perversion of the truth, which had become associated on earth with His holy name, will go forth, and for ever take His place outside the professing church. And let it not be overlooked that, even though Laodicea may not, so far, be fully developed,† the Lord may act in this manner, even now, in respect of individual assemblies. If one of these falls morally into correspondence with Laodicea the Lord could not sanction it by His presence in the midst, for in such a case the saints could no longer be said to be gathered unto His name.

*Remembering the candlestick character of the assembly here, this interpretation may perhaps be questioned. But while it is true that He is outside the hearts of those addressed, seeking admittance, it is also to be remembered that Christ is not within Laodicea, for in no sense could it now be said to be God's habitation through the Spirit.

†In fact, though that which will form Laodicea is plainly seen on every hand, the actual time of its full presentation *as Laodicea* is not stated, nor when it will be spued out of the Lord's mouth. See *Introduction*.

If, however, the Lord has definitely taken His place outside of Laodicea, He has not abandoned any of His own who, failing to discern that the Lord has departed, may still be inside. Hence He says, "Behold, I stand at the door, *and knock*." Full of long-suffering and grace, He waits upon any who may have been carried away by the seductions around them, lulled to sleep by the atmosphere in which they have been living, and with urgent appeals seeks to arouse them out of their lethargy. He thus stands at the door, the door closed upon Himself, and knocks, if perchance any true-hearted but slothful saint, like the bride in the Canticles (Cant. 5), may respond, Should there be even one such who shall hear His voice and open the door, He says, "*I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*" (v. 20.) The order of the possible response is to be observed. There is first hearing His voice — His call to repentance — and then opening the door. Now the bride heard His voice, but lacked the energy to open the door until it was too late. It is not enough, therefore, to hear His voice; many believers, found, alas! in evil associations, do this, but remain where they are; and so it may be with saints in Laodicea, unless, indeed, in His mercy the Lord lays hold of them, as the angels did Lot in Sodom, and compels them to open the door.

The door being opened ("if any man . . . open the door"), how rich the blessing realized. First, "I will come in to him" — not into Laodicea; its doom is sealed; but in to him, to him who, by grace, had opened the door. And coming in He will manifest all His grace. "I will sup with him"; that is, "I will come down to where he is, and have fellowship with him in his things." How wondrous His condescension! But if He first will sup with him who has opened the door, it is that He may lead him up into the higher blessedness of supping with Himself, of having fellowship with Him in His things, communion with Himself, the most exalted privilege, though

intended for every saint, and the most blissful enjoyment, that any can possess whether in time or in eternity; for it is the realization of our perfect association with Christ.

The promise to the overcomer is of a very different character from that in Philadelphia. It is, *"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne."* (v. 21.) Overcoming here would be hearing the voice of Christ, and opening the door to Him; for this involves a judgment of the Laodicean condition, and separation from it morally. Every one then, thus overcoming, should sit with Christ in His throne. He Himself had overcome (see John 12: 31, John 16: 33, though this he not all that He overcame), and was set down with His Father in His throne; and, in like manner, the overcomer in Laodicea should sit with Him in His throne. It is promised association with Himself in the public display of glory in the kingdom. Infinite grace surely, and yet a very different character of blessedness from the intimate and heavenly association with Himself promised to the Philadelphian overcomer. Both alike are the aifts of His grace, but the gifts are manifestly in relation to the path and testimony of each while upon the earth, in the scene of the Lord's rejection.

Finally, as in the three previous communications, the proclamation to him that *"hath an ear"* closes the letter. And this proclamation is still sounded out, with increased energy, among the people of God. Oh! that it might both find and create many an opened ear, that, the hearers rousing themselves from their supineness, and indifference may listen to *"what the Spirit saith unto the churches,"* and that, through grace, they may receive strength to judge all they are connected with by the unerring standard of the living Word; so that, taking their place apart from the evil, they may have the girded loins and the burning lights while awaiting the Lord's return.*

*It is to be particularly observed that there is no allusion to the coming of Christ in this letter. The reason may be that, as stated in the Introduction, while the Lord may morally reject that which will constitute Laodicea at the rapture of the saints, He may not execute His public judgment upon it till after the saints are with Himself, just as Jerusalem was not publicly judged for more than thirty years after Pentecost. He will then let the world see that He has removed His candlestick.