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# Life and writings of John the apostle



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# JOHN THE APOSTLE.



LIFE AND WRITINGS  
OF  
JOHN THE APOSTLE

BY  
THE REV. JOHN THOMPSON, A.M.,  
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.



London:  
JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

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## PREFACE.

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THE Life and Writings of John the Apostle are most deserving of human study. He was the beloved disciple of Christ; and every one who can appreciate a kindly spirit will be disposed to regard the Lord's beloved disciple with kindly affection. Love breathes through every deed and word. His deeds are not minutely recorded, but enough is given to excite universal emulation. His words, or writings, present a wonderful combination of clearness, beauty, fervour, depth, and mystery. In dealing with these writings, the Author of the following Book has only given a synoptic view of their general principles and practical bearing upon all Christian history. Critical exegesis is avoided. Detailed application of Apocalyptic figures or symbols to any Church, or age, or nation, is not attempted. It is enough if our readers are led to feel that the writings of John, especially his Book of Revelation, with all its profundity, contain much which is easily accessible for warning, instruction, and correction in righteousness. Every studious mind who wishes minute exposition, or analytic interpreta-

tion, will find great abundance, with great variety, among ancient and modern commentators. Elliot in his *Horæ Apocalyptice* has given an elaborate summary of elaborate works on the Book of Revelation, which may guide any student to a comprehensive view of Apocalyptic literature. Alford's *Summary*, in his able work on the *New Testament*, shows the prominent divisions which the learned have followed in applying the Revelation of John the Divine to past, or passing, or future events. There is no lack of aid, and no lack of stimulus, in the prosecution of study in every chapter, and in every sentence, down to the minutest particular. Still we feel that the work of expounding every phrase has been overdone. Symbolic language, throughout the whole range of inspired prophecy, never keeps to the exact lines of logic and history. Ezekiel does not write like a mathematician. Daniel's visions are full of imagery. And the Seer of Patmos takes similar liberties with symbolic language, while he sets forth, more fully than many inspired prophets, the far-reaching principles which will regulate through all time the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ. We have tried to elucidate these principles, and now commend them to the practical study of every Christian.

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# PART I.



## LIFE AND WORK.



## CHAPTER I.

### FIRST AND SECOND BIRTH.

JOHN is one of the oldest and most familiar names in the world. In the Old Testament it is written *Johanan*; and sometimes *Jehohanan*. Its meaning is the "grace of Jehovah;" and was doubtless first given by a grateful Hebrew parent to a child whose birth was counted a special favour from the Lord. We find traces of the name, with its grateful signification, in different forms of human speech. In Hebrew we have *Baal-hanan*, denoting the favour of Baal; and in Latin we have substantially the same word in *Hannibal*, the famous Carthaginian commander.

John is the name of three prominent persons in New Testament history. The first is John the Baptist, whose divine commission was to preach repentance as a means of preparing sinful men for



the reception of their Saviour. The next we mention is John the Evangelist. His surname was Mark. He was a convert of Simon Peter; and was employed, by preaching the Gospel, to aid in founding the Christian Church. The third John, who occupies a very prominent place in the sacred volume, is John the Apostle, whose life and labours we now proceed to summarise.

#### JOHN'S PARENTAGE.

We begin with an account of his family relations. This account must be short, because little or nothing is known about his ancestors. There is no certainty about his tribe; and we cannot tell whether he belonged to a large or a small division of the Hebrew nation.

The father of John was named Zebedee, in Hebrew *Zabdi*, "Jehovah's gift." From a few New Testament expressions, lying here and there like ears of wheat in a harvest field, we are able to glean that Zebedee was a person in comfortable circumstances, who filled a respectable place in society. He was a fisherman; but in ancient, as in modern times, the fisherman pursued an honourable and occasionally a lucrative occupation. There is some reason to believe that he

possessed a goodly quantity of boats and nets. It is distinctly stated in Mark i. 20, that he had "hired servants," to assist in daily or nightly labour. The work of managing the whole business was too much for the father and his two sons. Hence the need of hired servants; and in the fact of their presence, we have plain evidence of Zebedee's favourable worldly circumstances. We learn also that his wife took part with other generous women (Matt. xxvii. 56, Luke viii. 3) in ministering to the wants of Jesus. The family was on friendly terms with Caiaphas, the high priest. Putting these simple facts together, and testing them either by an ancient or modern standard, we may safely conclude that Zebedee was counted a man of good standing in Galilee. We thus learn that there is nothing disreputable in an honest trade. Only let men or women do their duty with steadiness, sobriety, diligence, perseverance; and like Joseph in Egypt, or Zebedee in Galilee, or many others in many lands, they will win the respect of mankind.

The mother of John was named Salome. Many of our world's greatest men are more indebted to their mothers than to any one else upon the earth. A mother has a mighty influence in moulding the character of children, and should always labour

to make them grow in favour with God and men. The Bible sets forth, in glowing light, what a mother's piety did for Moses, and Samuel, and Timothy. The voice of church history repeats the happy tale in many forms, from Augustine to Philip Doddridge; and the last of our world's departed chiefs, President Garfield, was started by his mother's wisdom on a path which led to a high pinnacle of human eminence.

It was the same with John and his brother James, under the influence of Salome. She was a thoughtful, active, religious woman. Theophylact and other Christian fathers affirm that she was closely related to Joseph, the husband of Mary. If so we can understand her intimacy with the mother of Jesus; and also discover one explanation of Christ's affection for her children. It is pretty clear from Matt. xx. 20, that she had been thinking much about the coming kingdom of Messiah. She believed that the kingdom was at hand. She had a strong desire, and a right one, that her sons should occupy an honourable place in God's service. She wished them to sit, one on the right hand, and the other on the left of King Jesus. And in this way we learn that her heart hopes of highest good were centred in the promised Saviour. All high hope of men should centre in God;

because He will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly.

The religious thoughtfulness of Salome was followed, as it commonly is, by religious activity. Life cannot be idle, and the life of true piety will show itself in some form of usefulness. Among the women who followed Jesus, during His earthly ministry, we have a few beautiful examples of hearty devotion. Joanna, Susanna, and many others, ministered to Him of their substance. (Luke viii. 3.) Martha and Mary made their house His home in Bethany. (Luke x. 38.) His mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene, stood by His cross to the last. Several of these devout women attended their Saviour's funeral, and prepared sweet spices to perfume His sepulchre. (Luke xxiii. 55, 56.) And Mark tells us (xvi. 1) that Salome, the mother of John, took part in this service of tender devotion. It thus appears that John's father and mother had a place among the excellent in whom is all God's delight, or the righteous who will be held in everlasting remembrance.

#### JOHN'S BIRTH AND TRAINING.

All good authorities concur in thinking that

John was born about the first year of our Lord, in the village of Bethsaida. Jesus and John were about the same age. Bethsaida, as the Hebrew word signifies, was a fishing place, at the north end of Tiberias. It was also the native village of Peter and Andrew and Philip. This fact accounts for the intimacy of John with these men, which appears in Matt. iv. 18, 21, and John i. 40. They had been playmates in one another's homes. They had walked beside the Lake of Galilee, and had their rambles too, like other boys, among the hills and vales of their native district. These youthful associations cement young hearts together, and prepare them for co-operation in the active labours of manhood. The boy life of England has much to do with the manly industry which exalts our nation in trade and commerce; and the boy life of Bethsaida took its natural course, when Andrew and Peter, and James and John, became associated first in the fishing occupation of their fathers, and next in the higher work of bringing sinners to their Saviour.

We cannot tell much about John's upbringing. His means of education must have been limited. The village schools of England and Scotland have occasionally been favoured with distinguished teachers, who have made themselves and their

pupils famous throughout the world. The high eminence of John Knox, and Thomas Chalmers, and David Livingston, and Thomas Carlyle, is largely due to the labours of village schoolmasters. Many who now fill honoured places in the State and in the Church, began their studies in a village school ; and no one should ever forget the master who taught his young ideas how to shoot, or set him on the ladder of a good education. Such an education is a powerful factor in human prosperity.

The schools and schoolmasters of Bethsaida are all unknown to fame. There was no Gamaliel among them, like him who taught Paul to excel in Hebrew studies above many his equals. And we can only suppose that, in country fashion, the sons of Zebedee were taught the simple rudiments of useful knowledge.

Education, however, includes something more than book studies. There are the lessons of hard work; the friction of human intercourse; the study of men in their daily actions; the revelations of nature and providence, which form a grand course of human instruction. In one or more of these branches, every youth is set to be a learner; and some who can scarcely read a book, or write a letter, have yet learned, by shrewd observation, the way to great success in business.

The father of John taught him to be a fisherman. It was common among the Jews, even for wealthy parents, to teach their children a trade. No young man or maiden was left to be a sloth. Parents never know what changes for the worse may come in the course of providence. Riches are not everlasting. And all parents do well, like the Jews, in training their children to provide, if need be, for their daily wants. It was on this principle that Paul's father acted in training him to be a tentmaker in Tarsus. And Paul found the benefit of his tentmaking as a means of support in the city of Corinth, while engaged in the noble duty of preaching the Gospel. It was an honour to him that he could say on one occasion, "These hands have ministered to my necessities."

Pursuing the duties of a fisherman, John could not fail to learn the lessons of hard work. Hard work helps to make a strong mind and a brave heart. A young man learns what he is worth, and other people learn what he is worth, by his power of patient, persevering industry. Such industry brings a young man into contact with the world, leads him to study human nature, shows him how to do business with mankind, and gives him a thousand lessons on the dangers of temptation. And in this department of education, there is no

reason to suppose that John was a careless scholar.

Closely connected with the work of fishing, there was another branch of study peculiarly open to the sons of Zebedee. By day the adjacent valleys and surrounding mountains were covered with plants, or flowers, or trees, or fruit; ever teaching the elements of life science, or the manifestations of Divine beneficence. By night, during which the fishers' work is often done, there was opportunity on the quiet lake of considering the heavens in their shining grandeur; or opportunity, amidst the raging storm, of considering the mighty forces of the flying winds, or the flashing lightning, or the awe-inspiring thunder. No man need continue to say in his heart, like a fool, there is no God, where all surrounding creatures are preaching His omnipresence. No one who is too poor to pay for school instruction should miss the lessons which are freely given in the open volume of creation. A reflecting youth, like John, could hardly fail to learn wisdom among the wonderful works of God.

We are disposed to think that his religious lessons were chiefly given by his mother Salome. There would probably be a copy of the Law, or the Psalms, or the Prophets, in the house; and the



boys would be taught to read at their mother's knee the sacred words of Moses, or David, or Isaiah. It is certain that the Hebrew words of the Old Scripture rolls were read week after week in the synagogue. An inquiring child is sure to ask the meaning of such things; and parents should be always ready to explain among their little ones the lessons of the sanctuary. The Hebrew fathers were expressly taught to explain the passover in their dwellings. Thus saith the Lord, by Moses, in the Book of Exodus (xii. 26, 27), "It shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's pass-over, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses." We find in the Book of Psalms (lxxviii. 3, etc.) that Hebrew parents were taught to show the sayings of God unto their children. And if John ever did, as we believe he often did, inquire at home about the Sabbath reading in the synagogue, we are confident that his mother would be ready, to the best of her ability, with a word of explanation.

Our reasons for saying so are contained in the expectation which Salome entertained of the Messiah's coming, and her intense desire that her

two sons should occupy an honoured place in His kingdom. (Matt. xx. 20.) This incident, to which we have already referred, clearly shows that the mother of John was well acquainted with the Old Testament promises. She was able to apply them to Jesus Christ, and accept Him as the promised Messiah. She must also have taught her sons to know their Bible, and expect great things in the coming King; otherwise they would not have been parties to a petition for royal honours. From a child, therefore, like Timothy, we conclude that John was taught from his mother's lips the Holy Scriptures, which can make all of us wise unto salvation.

The benefits of a Bible, or a godly education are unspeakable. It is right to think highly about every kind of elementary instruction. No man has done the commonest duty for his children who does not teach them, or have them taught, the three R's. No parent has fully prepared his children for manly life, who has not qualified them for some useful occupation. This is the only fortune which a poor man can give to his offspring; and an educated child is the best fortune which any man, whether rich or poor, can leave behind him in the world. Such is emphatically the case with Bible, or godly instruction. What-

ever we say about this work in common schools, it should never be neglected by the Christian church and its Christian families. Every father and mother should make it a chief part of their life-business to train their children in Bible knowledge. It is the Book of books; and if Solomon is right in saying that scientific wisdom is above rubies, then Bible wisdom is above all the wealth of our world. Let our offspring be taught to know the name of God, the love of Jesus, the way of salvation, the practice of morality, from the sacred volume in our Christian homes or Sabbath-schools, and then may we expect the promised blessing—"Instead of the fathers God will take the children, and make them princes in all the earth."

#### JOHN'S CONVERSION TO JESUS.

The steps which led John to be a Christian are easily traced. He had reached the age of thirty years. About that time John the Baptist began his grand work of preaching repentance. He declared the kingdom of God to be at hand, and called upon men everywhere to welcome their king, Messiah. It was natural that John the son of Zebedee, in the flush of early manhood, under the impulse of a sacred aspiration, should

attach himself to the Saviour's forerunner. Theophylact records the tradition that Zebedee was an uncle of the great Baptist. If so his influence over John would be specially magnetic. Beyond question the Baptist's preaching was singularly fitted to impress an inquiring mind. He spared no fault in his stern denunciations. The Pharisees were a generation of vipers; coming wrath was depicted in fiery colours. Men were warned against every risk of trifling. An axe was lying at the root of every corrupt tree; and the great husbandman was ready to cut it down as a cumberer of the ground. Yet while the earnest preacher was fearless in showing the evil of sin, he was faithful in calling sinners to their heavenly Saviour. From himself, as the person who was sent to prepare the way, he referred men to Him who had come with salvation for the world. Such were the means employed to attract the inquiring; and among young men we find that the Baptist was successful in attracting Andrew the son of Jonas, and John the son of Zebedee.

How long these two men followed the Baptist, in the capacity of disciples, we are not informed. They had learned their chief spiritual necessities and blessings. If in darkness, they were told where to expect light; if in danger of perishing,

they were taught to expect the Son of God with salvation; if defiled by the mire of iniquity, they were pointed from the baptism with water to One who would baptise them with the renewing grace of the Holy Ghost.

The turning-point had now come. We fancy the son of Zebedee in a state of intense anxiety. Andrew and he, and their distinguished teacher, were walking in Bethabara, beyond Jordan. At a short distance, they saw Jesus coming near them; and, looking towards Him, the Baptist said to his two friends, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." It was done. "The two disciples heard him speak and followed Jesus." From the first interview John was so drawn to the Saviour, that he continued to be His devoted servant.

There is something profoundly interesting in the place where any soul is saved, and the text by which it is accomplished. Men go miles to see the birth-spot of warriors, and statesmen, and poets, and philosophers. There is a charm, almost a stimulus to noble action, in the thought that we are standing near the point where a great man began to live or started upon a career of usefulness. No one should visit such a place without forming a purpose to pursue some upward course

of activity. Here, then, we are at the spot where John became a follower of Christ; and we see the means of his conversion. The spot was Bethabara, a village, like Bethsaida, little known among the thousands of Israel, yet worthy of remembrance as the spiritual birth-place of Christ's beloved disciple. Here we have the means of John's decision for the Lord. It has been the means of salvation to many a sinner. It has been the guiding star of many a Christian. The prisoner in his dungeon, the sufferer on his bed of languishing, the awakened sinner in his moments of alarm, the dying saint amid the shadows of death; the man, the minister, the missionary, the martyr, in countless scenes of labour, and hardship, and persecution, have found grace by looking to Jesus. And, under the sacred impulse which these things are fitted to produce, we repeat the soul-saving words, "Behold the Lamb of God, bearing away the sin of the world."

## CHAPTER II.

### JOHN'S PREPARATION FOR THE APOSTLESHIP.

THE grand turning-point of John's life was his meeting with Jesus in Bethabara, beyond Jordan. Up to this time he had been quietly serving God according to the custom of his fathers. The earnest preaching of repentance by his distinguished relative had deepened his powers of reflection, and roused him from the formality, which is too common among even good men, in matters of religion. The call to repentance was a fine preparation for beholding the Lamb of God; and the first meeting of John with Jesus led to a complete change of character.

It does not require much to change the course of living water. There are some parts of our country so situated that a puff of wind will settle whether the rain of heaven will find its way to the eastern or the western ocean. In like manner, a breath of temptation, or a word of wisdom, may determine the course of human history. A light wind of wickedness may turn a young man from

the path of righteousness ; a gentle word of wisdom may guide his feet into the way of salvation. The word of John the Baptist to John the son of Zebedee, bidding him look to the Lamb of God, was gentle as a summer breeze, yet it settled the young man's future career. John learned to trust in Jesus for spiritual salvation, and decided to serve Him for ever.

After meeting with Jesus in Bethabara, John returned to the Lake of Galilee. There he resumed for a time the familiar labours of a fisherman. Christianity does not end our worldly occupations. If servants at the hour of conversion, we should continue in our service, and be faithful to our earthly masters. Serving God should never make us slothful in business. Indeed, a proper attention to worldly duty is a good means of preparing men for Christian work. If faithful in that which is least, they will also be faithful in much. No man is fully qualified for ministerial service in the Christian Church who has not had a few hard lessons in labour, application, diligence, patience, perseverance. We are called to endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ ; and that cannot be well done without learning the art by the practice of endurance. John had already been trained to the rough work of fishing upon the Sea of



Galilee. He was now sent back, in Divine providence, for a little more experience, that he might come forth all the better fitted for the heavy duties which would hereafter devolve upon him as a Christian apostle. Beyond question he would consult his parents, as every young man and maiden should do, about faith in Jesus Christ. He would acknowledge God as the chief Guide of his steps, and would thus reach a calm, prayer-formed resolution to follow the Lord Jesus fully.

#### JOHN'S CALL TO BE AN APOSTLE.

Jesus Christ had now begun His public ministry. The grand objects before Him were the saving of souls, and the founding of a Church which should embrace the world. In these grand objects He was pleased to employ the aid of human instrumentality. Angels might have been employed in this work, and are employed to do part of it in ministering to the welfare of Christians. Yet many parts of Christian work, vastly important in their nature and bearing, have been committed to the charge of human agents. Accordingly, Jesus took the natural steps of gathering round Himself a band of disciples, who might help in starting His

cause, and publishing His saving truth among all nations.

The steps which Jesus took to gather His disciples are characterised by Divine simplicity. It is the course of nature. If you wish to multiply grains of wheat, you cast one grain into fertile soil, and expect that it will produce thirty, or sixty, or a hundred fold. If you wish to increase the grape, or the apple, or the peach, you plant trees, watch them, water them, prune them, train them with incessant care, that they may yield their fruits in due season. These things are done with the simplicity of God. In like manner the seeds of Divine truth are sown in human hearts, to spread their living influence over the whole man; the trees of righteousness, as God is pleased to name His true people, are planted in the world with a view of spreading, until every wilderness become a fruitful field, and every fruitful field be counted for a forest.

Such is the beautiful method which Jesus took to collect men who should plant and extend His Church upon the earth. He sowed the seed of Divine truth in their hearts, and brought them completely under its quickening power. He planted these men, so pervaded with His living truth, like trees in His spiritual vineyard, and

meant them to multiply until they fill the face of the world with spiritual fruits. Andrew and Peter, and James and John, had all received the living truth of Christ into their souls; and now He calls them to occupy a foremost place in His Church.

The story is told like an unvarnished tale. It is like the words of nature, spoken by the heavenly orbs, which go forth into all the world. "Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him" (Matt. iv. 18-20). We can take in the whole picture at a glance. Here are two fishers in a little boat upon the Sea of Tiberias. They are casting their net into the sea, with the usual hope of finding provision for themselves and their families. A friend appears upon the shore whom they had seen some time ago in Bethabara, to whose words they had listened with profound attention, and in whose person they had found the Lord's promised Messiah. He now asks them to become His followers, and at once they comply with His request. The effect was like the effect produced upon Isaiah when he

heard the voice of the Lord God in the temple, and replied, "Here am I; send me," to preach conversion among the people of Israel (Isa. vi. 8-10).

The call given to John was precisely similar. Going along the shore a little way from the spot where He called Andrew and Simon, Jesus saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and He called them. Immediately they left the ship and their father, to follow their Saviour. Now, here, we should observe particularly the plain call and the prompt reply. John was called to be a follower of Christ. He had already given his faith to the Lord. He was now asked to give Him his life. To follow any teacher in ancient times was to give oneself entirely to his service. It was so with the followers of Socrates and Plato among the Greeks. It was equally so with the followers of any prophet among the Hebrews. The son of Zebedee had some experience of such following in becoming a disciple of John the Baptist. For a time he had left his home in Bethsaida, dwelt in the wilderness of Judea, shared the baptism of repentance on the banks of Jordan. And now, when Jesus called the young man to follow His steps, He wished him to do so not for a

time only, but for ever. This is manifest in the object of the call. "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." He was to enter upon higher work than any he had done in Bethsaida. Human souls were exposed to death in the great sea of wickedness, and the Saviour wished a band of followers, who would go forth with the Gospel net, to deliver men from eternal perdition. John, therefore, was called to the noble work of helping Jesus Christ to save the perishing.

The prompt reply which John gave to the Master is worthy of special notice. Every reply to God should be given promptly, even when He asks our complete devotion. No one can fail to approve or admire the conduct of Abraham, when the Lord asked him to leave the land of the Chaldees. At once the young believer left his country and his kindred and his father's house for a distant land. One ready "yes" in the service of God is worth a thousand doubts. And God rewarded Abraham very abundantly for his ready obedience. John's obedience to Jesus was characterised by corresponding promptness. He was required to leave the place of his birth, around which all his young affections were closely entwined. It would test his spirit not a little, as it tests every manly spirit not a little, to pass

away from the loved society of his father and mother. The very cords of daily occupation and neighbourly friendship would be difficult to break. Yet John faced all these things, like a true son of father Abraham. He left his youthful home, his beloved parents, his friendly companions, his fishing occupation, with boats and nets, and labour and profits, to follow after Jesus. And it was done immediately.

There are some important lessons here for every one who is bidden come to the Saviour, and follow Him fully. It may be difficult for us to give up some fine worldly prospect, or some pleasant enjoyment, or some very captivating companion. Our friendly attachment to our dearest friends may tend to weaken our religious fervour or retard our interest in Christian duty, or come between us and the means of heavenly grace. But here we learn how to treat such things when called to decide for Jesus, and consecrate our lives to His service. We read in history that when Julius Cæsar wished to win the city of Rome, he crossed the Rubicon, burned his boats, and went forward for nothing less than victory. In like manner, when we desire to win a place in the heavenly Jerusalem, we should forsake every earthly impediment, and follow our victorious Captain up to the glorious

citadel. Or, like John, we should leave the ship, or nets, or any kind of worldly entanglement, to do whatsoever the Saviour commands; and straight-way, without waiting, or doubting, or hesitating, or lingering, or looking behind for a moment, begin our march to the land of Immanuel.

#### JOHN'S PREPARATION FOR THE APOSTLESHIP.

The apostleship was the first and highest office in the Christian church. Among outward qualifications for the office, it was needful that a man should see the Lord upon the earth, and should receive his commission from the Lord's own lips. Among inward qualifications, he required the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the power of working miracles, and an enlightened fitness to preach the Gospel of Divine salvation. Most of these qualifications were God-given. The last of them, an enlightened fitness to preach the Gospel, depended, from the first, very largely upon human preparation. It was said by Horace, long ago, that a poet is born, not made; yet even a born poet requires the training of study and practice. In like manner, a preacher may be born, not made; yet a born preacher never excels in his exalted work without studious preparation.

The preparation of John for gospel preaching

was both gentle and gradual. He was trained with peculiar tenderness by the hand of Jesus. From a few sentences in the New Testament, which light up the soul of John and let us see his inner man, we learn that his nature was very sensitive, his feelings tender, his disposition modest and retiring; and, consequently, he required some moulding and hardening to prepare him for a prominent place in the Church. He was a man of excellent mind and excellent heart. Jesus took him as he was, and trained the best features of his inner life for the best forms of outward action. Indeed we see in Scripture different modes of treatment adopted with different people. Samuel began in childhood to learn the discharge of sacred duty in the tabernacle at Shiloh. Isaiah was set at once in the years of manhood to the work of prophecy. Jeremiah was sanctified from his birth to be a prophet. Ezekiel received his commission while he was a captive by the river of Chebar. Paul was a scholar at the date of his conversion, and was able at once to preach in Damascus the faith which he had come to destroy. It was different with John. He had no opportunity in Bethsaida of learning the languages and philosophy and literature, sacred and profane, with which Paul was familiar; and, accordingly, the great



Teacher led him through a course of careful preparation for the apostleship. It was a course in which he was taught the wisdom, and power, and love of Christ.

In learning the wisdom of Christ the apostolic student was led through a course of parables and a course of lectures. The parables were full of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. They started with the leading thought that Christ had come to bless the souls of men with spiritual life and fruitfulness. He was a sower, and the seed which He scattered broadcast among men was the word of salvation. That word was meant to root and grow and become fruitful, in the way of producing faith and love and purity and happiness upon the earth. These grand truths, set in different forms, tinted with many colours, applied to the several details of human life, are kept in view through all the parables. Jesus is the fountain, or the medium of every blessing which descends from heaven to earth; and all the means which He employs to enlighten men are employed for saving purposes.

The parables were also intended to show John how he should preach the Gospel. They were models of spiritual instruction. The young man required to know the full substance of God's saving message, and the best style of conveying it to the

human heart. No style is better than that which Jesus used in the parables. Common things are taken to illustrate the most sacred. The sower in the field, the hens at the cottage door, the meal upon the table, the labourers waiting for hire in the market, are pictures of heavenly doctrine which any mind may contemplate with intelligence. And in such a gospel of saving mercy, and with such models of gospel instruction, frequently presented during three years of following Jesus, John had one important branch of preparation for his Christian ministry.

In addition to the parables, John was favoured with a wonderful course of lectures. They are preserved in the Gospel which bears his name. Jesus had come to enlighten the world, and in giving that light He appears like the sun shining in his strength. He claims divinity. "I and My Father are one." He claims unity of action with God. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He shows a complete mastery over the subtlest and profoundest forms of spiritual truth, and completely indicates His mission to reveal God in all the width of His infinite perfection. These lectures made a deep impression upon John, and their far-reaching wisdom appears in many parts of his own teaching. He seems as if he were per-

petually looking at the amazing sentence in which Jesus brings the whole system of Christianity to a brilliant focus: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

In learning the power of Christ, John had the privilege of studying His miracles. These miracles were deeds of mercy and deeds of omnipotence. They all show our Lord's profound sympathy with suffering humanity. The wants of the poor, the pains of the afflicted, the tears of the mourners, the losses of the dead, appealed with peculiar force to His heart; and they never appealed in vain. With a word He commanded want and pain, and tears and death, to disappear; and His word was obeyed. He healed all manner of diseases; and in every deed of healing there was a manifestation of omnipotence. The power which performed the miracles of Jesus was almighty.

Now the miracles of Jesus were meant to teach as well as cure. They taught His power to save human souls from perishing. When John saw the deaf ear unstopped, the blind eye unsealed, the silent tongue unloosed, the lame foot made whole, the dead body favoured with new life, he learned that Christ can open the eye of our understanding,

attune our tongues to sing His praise, enable us to run with delight in the way of His commandment, raise us from the deepest grave of sin to a life of spiritual godliness.

Such a lesson on the saving power of Jesus is of vast use in preaching the Gospel. Men want to know if He is able to save their souls; and they want to know it in a tangible form. In the early days of Christianity this human want was very reasonable. Jesus stood like another man among His countrymen. They might be struck, as many of them were, with the wisdom of His teaching. "Never man spake like this Man." And when He spake of giving them eternal life, it was right to desire a specimen of His power. The power was shown in His miracles. He said so on one occasion. A company of unbelievers denied that He was able to forgive sins. He put the matter to a plain test, Whether is it easier to say, "Thy sins are forgiven," or to say to a paralytic, "Arise, and walk?" There is no difference. The person who can do the one can do the other. And that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, He bade the paralytic rise up in perfect health. There we have a key to the spiritual lesson on our Saviour's power, which is contained in all the parables. They show that He is

able to heal all our sinful diseases, and redeem our precious souls from destruction.

In learning the love of Jesus, John was highly favoured. That love was manifested in every word of wisdom, and in every deed of power. Indeed, John read the love of Christ very distinctly in His incarnation, His character, His labours, for the welfare of mankind. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us; and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins." For three years John lived in the glowing love which descends from the Sun of Righteousness.

During these years he was privileged to enjoy many tokens of Christ's personal affection. He was a bosom friend of Jesus. Along with Peter and James he was taken into the Saviour's confidence, shown marks of peculiar kindness, admitted to behold His divine glory, and to come as near as possible to a sight of His divine agony. John saw Jesus raise the daughter of Jairus from death, stand in brightness on the mount of transfiguration, enter the deep shadows of Gethsemane. In short, John was the Lord's beloved disciple, who rested on His bosom at the Last Supper, and to whom He committed the care of His widowed mother, when He was dying amidst the woes of crucifixion. The wisdom of Christ established

John in the faith of Christianity, the power of Christ inspired him with courage in every duty, the love of Christ completed his preparation for the work of an apostle.

And the gracious end of all John's training for the Christian apostleship was the good of human souls. He was endowed with wisdom, power, love, to make him successful in Gospel preaching. He was a son of thunder, because the light which flashed from his words was fitted to lighten the world. He was a son of peace, because the love which he diffused in every sermon was the love of God for the lost. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed, that we should be called His children." Are we, then, the children of God, constrained by love to be Christians? If not, let us remember the words of John about his life of Jesus. "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

## CHAPTER III.

### JOHN'S DEVOTION TO CHRIST.

CIRCUMSTANCES make character. The circumstances of a man's life have much to do in developing his bodily and mental energies. Danger produces strength. A man who is suddenly exposed to a violent death will struggle like a giant to save his life. He will do the same to save the life of others. Our life-boat men, who put off to a wreck amidst a raging storm, display an amount of power which is truly surprising. And in the development of mental energy, we all know that trial worketh patience, courage, perseverance, which appear to be more than human. Even women have been valiant in battle, and turned to flight armies of the aliens.

The incidents of life help to reveal a man's spirit and character. A fleecy cloud in the sky will show how the wind is blowing. A straw upon the surface of a quiet stream will show the course of its current. It is so with the winds or the currents of mankind. We learn by looking at the small events as well as the large ones of a

person's history, how to estimate many of his mental or moral qualities. Like mirrors or photographs, they reveal to the eye, with a flash of light, what cannot be written in prosy narrative. In this way we have to study human character in the Bible. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job;" yet he does not tell it particularly. We are simply informed at the end of disasters, which would have led most people to murmur very bitterly, that he simply said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Every reader of the Bible is impressed with David's courage. Yet we see that courage quite as plainly when he allowed Saul to escape, rather than kill him at a mean advantage, as when he went to battle with the giant Philistine. Looking to the little incidents of these and other men's lives, we learn the great things of their character.

In like manner, we learn the spirit and worth of John the Apostle. He says almost nothing directly about himself. Many of the incidents in his history are mentioned without his name. Yet the views which they give of his spiritual excellence are none the less real and trustworthy. The man is there within the veil of words, like many a good man of modern times within a veil of



modesty; and we have only to draw the veil to see a character which is worthy of all imitation. Such is our object in the present chapter. We shall take a few incidents in John's history to show his manly and Christian worth.

#### JOHN AT THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.

This incident is given in his Gospel (chap. xiii., 23-26). It was the night in which the Lord Jesus was betrayed. He had met with His disciples to observe the Jewish Passover. His soul was oppressed with the burden of human sin. His heart was touched with tender sympathy for His devoted followers. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end." At the close of supper, Jesus, in the full consciousness of infinite dignity, condescended to wash His disciples' feet. This event was followed by a conversation about His love to them, and their love to Him, which brought out a distinct reference to the traitor. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me." It was like a shell bursting amidst the little band. "The disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom He spake." The whole of them were struck dumb with astonishment.

Men are concerned to know how the disciples were seated at the moment around their Saviour. The fancy of Leonardo da Vinci in his famous fresco has done something to answer this question. His picture of the Last Supper shows how the disciples were arranged. There is no mistaking the bold face of Peter on the Master's right hand; the cunning face of Judas, with the bag, at some distance on the left; or the sweet loving face of him who rests upon the Master's bosom. This is the only one of whose exact place at the time we are quite certain. It was the disciple whom Jesus loved. All Bible authorities believe that disciple to be John. We have never seen it fairly questioned. The tale which follows is true to nature. Peter beckoned to John that he should ask Jesus about the traitor. All of them cried out in excitement, "Lord, is it I?" He that was lying on Jesus' breast whispered to Him, "Lord who is it?" Jesus gave a sign which led them all to see the traitor in Judas Iscariot. The Master had chosen twelve, and one of them turned out to be a devil.

Now this incident reveals two things concerning John. He believed in Jesus, and he loved Him with honest heart. We could not see a better picture of a confiding spirit. A child on his

mother's knee, with his head upon her loving heart; a wearied or feeble friend leaning upon another's breast is always expressive of quiet confidence. Nay, such leaning upon the bosom of father, or mother, or brother, or sister, in season of childhood or weakness, is a symbol of sincere affection. And looking at John resting on the bosom of Jesus, we see the confiding love of the Apostle's spirit; and see a feature of Christian character which is worthy of our constant imitation.

The incident now before us also reveals Christ's peculiar friendship for John. According to an old tradition, already mentioned, they were related by ties of kinship. John was a cousin, or a cousin's son of Jesus. Beyond question, his place on the Saviour's breast at the Last Supper, reveals something more than common friendship. He had won a tender place in the Saviour's love. Now, in this fact, we see a little of John's pleasing conduct and winsome disposition. We do not think it wrong to have special likings for special people. A man who conducts himself at all times with sterling uprightness is worthy of general respect. A woman who behaves to all around her with kindly generosity deserves the honour of public admiration. Even a child who is wise,

gentle, obedient, never fails to become what men call a favourite. It fully accords with our human nature to love the good better than the bad; the sweet better than the sour tempered; the obliging better than the selfish. Joseph was dear to the heart of Jacob, because Joseph was superior to all his brethren. In so far as a child, or a servant, or a neighbour deserves it, he is entitled to our special attention; and inasmuch as John received peculiar kindness from One who never erred, we are confident that he deserved to be called the disciple whom Jesus loved. Whoever wishes to be a favourite, or grow in favour with God and man, let him try to grow in wisdom and kindness, and justice and generosity.

#### JOHN AT THE CROSS OF JESUS.

We have a record of this incident in his nineteenth chapter (25-27). The people of Jerusalem had gathered in crowds to witness our Saviour's crucifixion. A public death always produces some popular excitement. There is a morbid wish to see a criminal executed which should never be encouraged. Men should keep as far as possible away from the scaffold. In the death of Jesus there was much to intensify public curiosity.

He had been a wonderful Teacher, and a still more wonderful Benefactor. Many a sufferer had been healed and many a sinner saved. Yet the Person who had done so much for men was condemned to die the death of a malefactor; and hence, it was no strange thing that people assembled in thousands to witness His crucifixion.

Among all these thousands we can only give the names of four Christian disciples. The rest had forsaken the Master, and had not returned from their flight. The four are mentioned with striking minuteness. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene; and the disciple whom He loved." Three Marys and John the Apostle appear beside the cross to behold their Saviour's death.

Now in John's station beside the cross we see distinct evidence of his courage. We are informed (John xviii. 15) that John was known to the High Priest. He was also known to others who hated Jesus with intense hatred. Their hatred extended towards His disciples, and exposed them to personal violence. It was the fear of such violence which led the disciples to leave Jesus in Gethsemane, and flee for safety. They could not face the multitude who had come out against

them with swords and staves ; and in a spirit of weakness, which cannot be excused, they left Jesus to His fate. But the spirit of John speedily revived. His heart was true to His Lord. And in spite of every danger, to which he was exposed among Priests or Pharisees who knew him by sight, he made his way to the cross and stood there with heroic devotion.

Standing by a friend in trial or adversity is one of our best proofs of stedfastness. It is easy to show attachment to a person who is strong, wealthy, and prosperous. There were plenty to cheer Daniel, with his gold chain about his neck, proclaimed to be the third ruler in Belshazzar's kingdom ; but it was different when Daniel was cast, like a felon, into the den of lions. There were thousands who bowed the knee to Joseph in Pharaoh's chariot ; there was none to do him honour in Pharaoh's dungeon. Even in our times, and possibly in our own experience, we see people who appear very stedfast to the prosperous become very unstedfast in seasons of adversity. In like manner, there were multitudes going before and following after Jesus with hosannas in the day of triumph who forsook Him on the day of crucifixion. Not so with John the Apostle. His love over-mastered every fear ; and, with a courage which would honour

the bravest soldier at a cannon's mouth, John stood before many enemies at the cross of Christ.

John's steadfastness to Jesus on the cross was accompanied by a beautiful example of ready obedience. The Lord looked down from the cross, as He now looks down from the throne, upon His devoted friends. "When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple standing by whom He loved, He said unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then said He to His disciple, Behold thy mother!" In these words we see first of all Christ's care for His mother, and His trust in John. Mary was now a widow, losing her best beloved Son. He could not leave her alone in the wide world; and, by committing her to the care of John, we learn that Jesus could trust him with the greatest treasure. And John accepted the charge with prompt obedience. The Master's wish was law. The charge of Mary was an infinite honour for any disciple to receive. "And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." His love was stirred, and like David he could say, what every one of us should try to say in the presence of our Saviour, "I will run in the way of Thy commandments, when Thou hast enlarged my heart."

## JOHN AT THE SEPULCHRE OF JESUS.

We pass now to the opening verses of chapter twentieth. There we learn that Christian hope was not dead. It was true that Christ had been slain and laid in the grave. But a grain of corn is not quickened except it die. There are many things in providence to show that God works through the gloom of death to the glory of life. All nature dies at the approach of winter. The leaves fall away from every twig. The flowers wither into dust. The plants disappear beneath the earth. Still there is in the power of nature a perpetual promise that the death of winter shall be followed by the life of spring. Depending upon that promise we stand beside the wintry sepulchre of leaf and flower, and plant with sure and certain hope of coming revival.

“ Yet soon reviving plants and flowers  
Anew shall deck the plain ;  
The woods shall hear the voice of Spring,  
And flourish green again.”

It was so with the Christian disciples at the death of Jesus. They had promise of a better resurrection. He had plainly foretold His crucifixion. He had promised repeatedly that He



would rise on the third day. In full accordance with God's work of nature, which brings life after death, Jesus assured His friends that His descent to the grave would be followed by a glorious immortality. There is no real discord between nature and revelation ; for at every point, from the least to the greatest, it is the same God that worketh all and in all.

Hope of coming good leads to inquiry about its arrival. We cannot say that the hopes of the early disciples were very strong ; still they came at the dawn of the third day to see the sepulchre. Apparently the disciples who came first were thinking only of prolonged interment. They brought spices to scatter around the grave. But when Mary Magdalene reached the spot, she found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre's door, and ran back to her friends with the amazing tidings. This brought Peter and John to the grave. They ran both together. John arrived first, being more nimble than his older friend ; yet, with characteristic timidity, he stopped to survey the cave before he entered. Peter, with his usual forwardness, went in to search the place. Then John followed, and was made sure of our Saviour's resurrection.

The chief features of John's character, which

appear in this incident, are modesty and caution. He was eager as Peter, or any disciple, to learn about the resurrection. He remembered the promise, looked for its fulfilment; yet on coming to inquire, he did so with praiseworthy propriety. It was not enough to hear the testimony of Mary that the body of Jesus had been removed, and had likely gone, as did the body of Elijah, to the upper world. Our Lord's resurrection was the greatest of His miracles. It is the chief cornerstone of Christianity. If Christ is not risen, our faith is vain. The world requires evidence on this point, which cannot be shaken. And hence the modesty and caution of John became a means of supplying clear proof of the miracle. The body had not been removed by the Roman guard, or the Jewish priests, for the linen clothes had been carefully removed and laid aside. The very napkin which bound the Saviour's head was folded in a place by itself. There was clear proof of calmness, self-possession, deliberation, in the rising Saviour. When John walked round the sepulchre to examine everything with the utmost care, he saw and believed that Christ had risen from the dead. And now on the testimony of John and Peter, and other competent authorities, we are called to believe for ourselves, as the means

of personal salvation, that He who died for our sins has risen again for our justification.

#### JOHN AT THE SEASIDE WITH JESUS.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus showed Himself to His disciples at the sea of Tiberias. (John xxi. 1.) There were seven present on the occasion; and among the seven we find "The sons of Zebedee." They had returned to their old occupation; most likely because their little purse was completely empty. At all events, Christianity always teaches diligence in business. Even the apostles had to labour for daily bread. And at this season of emergency, as at other seasons throughout their history, their own hands ministered to their necessities.

Simon Peter invited them to go a fishing on the sea of Tiberias. They went immediately, but that night they caught nothing. It is a precarious life, and all of us should sympathise most tenderly with the heavy losses sustained from year to year along our coasts. He who cared for the fisher disciples in other years, will provide, let us hope, through generous-hearted people, for the widows and children of fishermen who perish in the stormy waters.

At the close of the trying night in which the

disciples caught nothing, Jesus stood upon the shore. They knew Him not. He quietly asked about their wants, bade them cast their net on the right side of the ship, and at once they enclosed a multitude of fishes. Here was a surprise; and here was the point where the piety of John became prominent. He was first of the seven to recognise the Saviour. There were two means of doing so. Jesus had spoken in tones of kindness. It was the sweet familiar voice; marred in sound possibly by a howling wind, or a rippling wave upon the beach, and therefore not caught at once by the rest. But love quickens the sense of hearing. A mother can tell the voice of her child amidst a babel of other sounds. The damsel named Rhoda knew Peter's voice at the gate on the night of his escape from prison. A friend seldom mistakes the accents of a friend. And in this way, for one, John recognised that the person upon the shore was the Lord. He knew the familiar voice, especially its tone of kindness. It was like Him to say, "Children, have ye any meat," and to send them a full supply. They had all heard His kindly words of compassion for the multitudes, when they fainted with hunger in the wilderness, and when He supplied an abundant feast.

The other way in which John recognised the Lord was by His miracle of goodness. He fed the multitudes with loaves and fishes. He now provided a supply of fish, which was sufficient for His disciples. Here John saw the power and love of Jesus at work in the old fashion, as he had often done aforetime, with admiration; and, yielding to the force of full conviction, he said to Peter, "It is the Lord;" and he said so, because none but Jesus can so work for human advantage. In every enjoyment of the Lord's goodness or mercy, men should hail Him with sincere devotion, and praise Him for perpetual blessings.

There is another little word about John at the sea of Tiberias which we must not omit to notice. He watched with intense interest the Saviour's treatment of Peter; and would respond, as Peter did, to every question about Christian love. He rejoiced with brotherly joy over the restoration of Peter to sacred office, when Jesus said, "Feed My lambs, and feed My sheep." His heart was affected by the touching reference which Jesus made to the destiny of Peter. It would seem as if John had displayed some anxiety to know by what death he himself should glorify God; and simply learned that he must wait and work at the post of duty till Jesus came to take him home. The course of

every Christian life is in the Master's hand ; and every soul that runs the course with patience will receive an immortal crown. And now, in summing up, we learn that John was a man of faith and love to Jesus ; a man of steadfast courage and prompt obedience ; a man of true modesty and graceful caution ; a Christian who was willing to wait and work for the coming of Christ.



## CHAPTER IV.

### APOSTOLIC LABOURS.

BOLDNESS is a noble feature of human character. You expect it in a soldier, who is required, in the discharge of duty, to face death at a cannon's mouth. And no slight praise is given to courageous men who never waver in the severest struggle with a powerful enemy. You meet with courage, firm and true, in a patriot who seeks to reform the evils of his country. Reform always runs counter to some strong opinion. Vested interests, however wrongly obtained, are not easily destroyed. And a reformer requires a large amount of boldness in working out any kind of public improvement. It is still more required by Christians, in many of our struggles for truth and righteousness. Here we wrestle not merely with the rich and mighty and noble of this world; we wrestle with spiritual wickedness in high places. Such wrestling can only be successful among brave men, who never fail in courage till they bring forth judgment or justice unto victory.

Boldness is commonly and specially ascribed to Simon Peter. We are not sure that his boldness was the highest kind of courage. It was rather a kind of blunt forwardness, which led him by word or deed somewhat abruptly to carry out his convictions. Yet in preaching the Gospel of salvation amidst heavy opposition, he was never afflicted with cowardice. At the same time it is right to say, that all the other apostles displayed a fair amount of courage. Their courage failed before a multitude of foes in Gethsemane; but they soon rallied to their Captain's standard in Jerusalem. The revived courage of John was conspicuous at the crucifixion. He stood beside the cross, like a hero in a season of forlorn hope, and supplied just reason for the word of Luke in coupling the boldness of John with the boldness of Peter. His courage became growingly conspicuous throughout his apostolic life and labours. These were centred chiefly in Jerusalem and Ephesus.

#### JOHN IN JERUSALEM AND JUDEA.

He had a house in Jerusalem to which he took Mary on their departure from the cross. Their life together in the holy city was a pure example of maternal and filial piety. The love of Jesus



made them of one heart and soul. She saw in him an object of her Son's peculiar delight. He saw in her a mother whom Jesus had committed to his trust. Their conversation was taken up with Christ. They spoke of the glory of His kingdom, and talked of His power. Every success of His Gospel in the conversion of sinners, and every effort of His devoted followers to extend His cause, commanded their deepest sympathies. They lived, and prayed, and worked, and rejoiced together in the Lord Jesus. Many a time they sang the Magnificat with one voice—Our souls have magnified the Lord, and our spirits have rejoiced in God our Saviour. It was a happy home, the home of Mary and John, in the city of Jerusalem; just such a home as we should all desire to have upon the earth.

It is commonly believed that John continued in Jerusalem till the period of Mary's death. This sad event took place, according to Eusebius, in the year 48; or about fifteen years after the crucifixion. During these years John was busily occupied with his Gospel ministry.

We have very little information on the subject; but a few facts are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, which reveal the nature and extent of John's ministerial employment. It appears that

he was very much associated with Peter. This accords with Christ's first arrangement in the mission of His disciples. He sent them two and two into the cities and villages of Israel. Their company would help to cheer each other's heart; and their united testimony would be the more impressive. It is not difficult to see how Peter and John became colleagues in their first apostolic labours. They had been with Jesus in the mount and in the garden. They ran together to the sepulchre, and bore united testimony to their Master's resurrection. They had shared many favours in common, and now, when called to active work before the world, the two were for a time inseparable.

The first record of their intimacy and united labour for Christ is given in chapter 3rd of the Acts (iii. 1-12): "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer." Here they appear in the discharge of sacred duty; and particularly the duty of prayer to God. It was nine o'clock in the morning; and in this early attention to divine service, we have an example for all to imitate. Whatever be our morning hurry, let us not fail to look up and direct our prayers to the Lord.

The gate by which the two Apostles were about

to enter the temple was called Beautiful. It happened that a certain man, lame from birth, was carried daily to the Beautiful gate, that he might beg assistance from the temple worshippers. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction." Men always act in the spirit of divine worship when they show a disposition to help the poor or relieve the distressed. On seeing Peter and John the lame man asked an alms. Here was an opportunity for the Apostles to work in the name of Christ. They had neither silver nor gold at their disposal. Any little money they had made by recent fishing was spent, or needed to supply their daily wants. But they had something better than money. The Lord had empowered them to commend His Gospel of saving love by healing all manner of diseases. To heal the lame man in the presence of a crowd in the temple court was sure to excite attention, and open many hearts to hear the Word of Eternal Life. And hence the two Apostles did their best to improve the occasion.

Peter was the spokesman; but John had a full share of the virtue and the honour. Both the Apostles fastened their eyes upon the lame man. He was required to look at both, and through them

to their heavenly Master for coming blessing. "Look on us." The lame man did so, expecting to receive a copper or a silverling. Then Peter gave the word for himself and John to the helpless cripple: "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk." This was a surprise. The blessing of God for sinful men is always more than we anticipate. The palsied man, who was brought to Jesus on one occasion for health, was amazed to find that the first blessing which Jesus gave was the blessing of pardon. In coming to the temple or the church of God on any Sabbath, our motives may not be of the best description. Like the lame man, we may be looking for silver or golden benefits. Yet even at such times, when we expect little, or desire less of spiritual good, the Lord is ready to bless us with His salvation. In the name of Jesus, the spiritually lame may rise to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.

It was so with the cripple at the temple gate, whom Peter and John blessed in the name of Christ. Immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength; and rising up, he entered the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. The deed was done in the presence of many witnesses. All who saw the sight were filled with wonder and amazement. After his first outburst

of praise to God, the lame man took hold of Peter and John, most likely by the knees, to express his gratitude. And while he held the Apostles, all the people gathered round them in Solomon's porch, greatly wondering at the miracle which had been performed. This was the result which the Apostles most earnestly desired. They had healed the lame man to prepare the people for salvation. And taking advantage of public excitement, the heavenly messengers preached a powerful sermon, in which they assured the people that God had sent His Son Jesus to bless them, in turning away every one of them from his iniquities.

John next appears in company with Peter as a prisoner before the Jewish council. The priests and Sadducees came upon them while they were preaching Jesus and His resurrection to the people. The priests counted Him an impostor. The Sadducees did not believe in His resurrection, and, yielding to ignorant or cruel prejudice, they cast the Apostles into prison. Next day the prisoners were brought before a grand array of judges. Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and a host of civic dignitaries, filled the Jerusalem council chamber. The judgment was set, and the poor fishermen were brought to the bar. Many a

great trial, on which have hung the destinies of nations, has taken place before human tribunals. Yet never greater trial, in far-reaching effect, was held than that of Peter and John before the Jewish Sanhedrim. The salvation of many souls was hanging in the balance. Had Peter and John been that day condemned to die, their work of Gospel preaching would have been stopped at its beginning; and all the sinners, in many lands, whom they have helped to save, would have been left to perish.

How the two Apostles looked when placed before their judges we are not informed. The stern face of Peter might be somewhat subdued. The calm face of John might be slightly paled. There might be living fire in both their eyes; but neither of them, we fancy, would look very like a son of thunder. On being called for their defence, Peter, assisted by the Holy Spirit, according to the Saviour's promise of help in every time of need, delivered a short address. It would seem that John had spoken to the same effect. For it is distinctly said that the judges observed the boldness of John; noted his Galilean speech; saw that he was not distinguished for learning; yet were so struck with his intelligent reply, that they traced his knowledge as well as Peter's to the

teaching of Christ. "They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus."


Men cannot easily resist the force of truth. Like a ray of light from the sun, it will penetrate the deepest darkness. Like a stream of living water, it will make a channel through flinty rock. It was so in the experience of Jewish councillors. There was light in the speech of Peter which entered their dark minds; there was force in the eloquence of John which reached their flinty hearts. In plain terms, the two Apostles made a good defence. The lame man who had been healed was present to confirm the report of their miraculous power. There was great risk of all the people being converted to Christianity. Hence the council attempted to hush up the matter as quietly as possible. The prisoners had been removed while the judges had consulted; and, on being recalled, they were politely commanded not to teach any more in the name of Jesus.

Here, again, the boldness of John, as well as Peter, was manifested. They both answered with a posing question for the Jewish counsellors: "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." It was a manly reply. They

had God upon their side. Their message was truth. Their object was human salvation. And with God upon their side, and the saving of souls before their eye, they were fearless in the discharge of duty. Well might they return to their friends with happy hearts; unite in praise for their deliverance; and unite in prayer for further success.

We have now to think of John more directly engaged in his apostolic labours. The united prayer to which we have just referred was graciously answered. The place in which the Christians were assembled was shaken; they were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and they spake the Word of God with boldness. John was blessed among the rest with the Spirit's grace, as all of us may be in answer to earnest prayer, and devoted himself to Gospel preaching among his countrymen. For ten years, at least, he continued to make full proof of his ministry in the Holy City.

Speaking of the early church in Jerusalem, we have to understand that it was composed of different congregations. There was no large building in which the Christians assembled from week to week for divine worship. They began in an upper room; and for years their work was





carried on in obscure meeting-places. In this way we can see how there was plenty of occupation for several apostles, such as James, the brother of John, who was slain at an early date by the sword of Herod ; James, the brother of Jesus ; Peter also, and others, who occupied prominent places in the Jerusalem churches. Among these churches, possibly in several of them, John was fully employed. In fulfilling his course of labour, we have evidence that he rose to great respect and wide influence among his brethren. Paul tells us (Gal. ii. 9) that John was counted a pillar in the church. And we learn (Acts viii. 14) in another place, that he was sent with Peter, on one occasion, to visit the Christians who had believed the Gospel of Jesus in Samaria. We are accustomed to speak of Peter as the Apostle of the Circumcision, or the Apostle who was specially commissioned to preach among his Hebrew countrymen. He was only one of the apostles so commissioned at the first ; for John and James, as well as Cephas, were endowed by the grace of God to preach salvation among the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Gal. ii. 9.) The visit of John with Peter to the Christian converts in Samaria, was accompanied by important results. They preached the Gospel in many villages. They met

with the believers ; prayed for them ; laid hands on them ; and imparted the gift of the Holy Spirit. Having thus blessed the people, and supplied them with heavenly help for every duty, and for every trial, John returned with Peter to Jerusalem.

We thus catch sight of a position in the church to which every Christian may aspire. There is a beautiful promise in the Book of Revelation (iii. 13), which says : "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God." A useful member is always a pillar in the church. His constant attendance, his earnest prayers, his hearty gifts, his upright character, his unwearied well-doing, are better than any material pillar in supporting the sacred edifice ; and a useful member is sure to win the confidence and respect of all his brethren. An elder that rules well is worthy of double honour. A useful Christian is a blessing to many, and is counted blessed upon earth. And thus we learn that every one of us, by personal piety and public well-doing, should try to become a pillar, and a praise in the temple of our God !

#### JOHN IN EPHESUS AND ASIA MINOR.

The Apostle of the Gentiles was not forbidden

to preach among the Jews; indeed, Paul's first visit in entering any town was made to the Jewish synagogue. His prayer to God, and his labour too for all Israel, were that they might be saved. In like manner, the Apostles of the Circumcision were not confined to the Hebrews. Peter travelled as far as Babylon after Jews of the Dispersion. James wrote specially to the twelve tribes scattered abroad; yet both Peter and James exerted themselves to promote Gentile salvation. It was so with John, the son of Zebedee. He continued to labour in Jerusalem or Judea till the death of Paul. This took place about the year 65 or 66. He was slain by a headsman's axe, a few miles beyond the walls of Rome, and ascended to receive his crown of righteousness. Soon after his death tidings were brought to the churches in Jerusalem, that the church in Ephesus was lapsing into dangerous heresy, and required special oversight to prevent serious mischief. Ephesus was of old a city of great importance. It was one of the chief seats of ancient philosophy. The Gnostics, with their subtle theories about all things, human and divine, were ever active in propounding their favourite dogmas. The city was much given to idolatry. "Great was Diana of the Ephesians." The temple of Diana and her

sensuous worship had wide influence among the people; and not a few Christians had begun to waver in the faith of Christianity. Now, among all the surviving apostles there was none better fitted than John to counteract the subtle philosophy of Gnosticism, or the delusive worship of Diana. And with the full consent, most likely by direct appointment of the Jerusalem churches, he went to labour in Asia Minor.

The seat of his ministry was Ephesus, but his work extended to all the surrounding district. He was not far from Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea; and from the way in which he writes to these churches, he seems to have been personally acquainted with their circumstances. A man of his loving spirit, ever wishful to glorify his Master, would do his best in every place to further the Gospel.

During the period of his labours in these portions of Asia he was banished by Domitian, one of the Roman emperors, to the isle of Patmos. It is a small rugged spot in the Egean Sea, some twenty miles in circumference, and was distinguished for nothing but sterility and solitude. There John was employed by the Spirit of God to write his wonderful Book of Revelation. We often find in divine providence that the cruel

plans of men are overruled to subserve the benevolent purposes of God. John Bunyan was sent to Bedford jail that his faithful preaching might be for ever silenced. But in the solitude of prison he wrote a book which has been blessed to guide many a Christian pilgrim from perdition to paradise. In like manner, the banishment of John to Patmos, by giving time for his apostolic writings, became a blessing to the world.

There is a tradition recorded by Tertullian, and accepted by Jerome and others, that John was taken to Rome by Domitian, cast into a caldron of boiling oil, from which he escaped by a miracle, and was in consequence doomed to banishment. Be that as it may, after the death of Domitian, he was released from exile by the Emperor Nerva, and returned to Ephesus. There he continued to preach salvation, defend the Christian faith, comfort the hearts of his disciples, superintend the welfare of surrounding Christians, and prosecute his apostolic writing until the close of life.

Two anecdotes are recorded of John which finely illustrate his firm boldness and faithful love. On one occasion, according to Polycarp, he found himself in the same bath with a heretic named Cerinthus, and left the place immediately lest the roof should fall and crush them both to

death. Clemens of Alexandria tells a story, which he believes to be genuine, of the Apostle John. On his return from Patmos to Ephesus he visited the neighbouring district to organize churches. In a city near Ephesus he met a promising young man whom he led to Jesus, and there committed to the care of a Christian minister. The young man did well for a time, and then fell into serious wickedness. Some time after John returned to enquire for his young friend. The minister replied with heavy heart, that the young convert had joined a band of robbers, and was away with them to the mountains. John went to the spot where the robbers were encamped. An outguard seized him for a prisoner: he made no attempt to escape; and simply asked for their captain. The captain was John's son in the faith. On seeing the old man he fled. The old man, now fourscore years and ten, could not follow, and called him to stop. "I will lay down my life for you, as Jesus died for us all. Only return to your Saviour." It was enough; the young prodigal came back in tears of penitence, was restored to the church, and became an eminent example of Christian devotion. The last words which John addressed to Christians were meant for every age, as the legacy of Christ's beloved disciple: "Little child-

ren, love one another." And he said, almost with dying breath, "It is the Lord's command." Love to Him, and love to all the brethren, contain the sum of Christian duty.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

ACCORDING to the voice of all antiquity, the Gospel according to John was written in the city of Ephesus. There is good reason to believe that the book was written chiefly for readers beyond the bounds of Palestine. We have a parenthetical clause in chapter fourth (v. 9), to say that the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. It is mentioned in chapter fifth (v. 2), that "there is at Jerusalem, by the sheep-market, a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches." These and other explanatory notes (Conf. ii. 6, etc.) seem quite unnecessary for people who were familiar with the Holy Land. And looking to the language and style of the book, we learn that it was written in a form of Greek which was commonly used in Asia Minor.

The date of John's Gospel should be placed near the end of the first century, or somewhere about the year 95 or 96. It was last of the four



histories of Jesus which are contained in the New Testament. The other three are supposed to exist, and John sets himself to produce a supplementary work, in which the higher teaching of Jesus is presented with due prominence. A few historic facts contained in the earlier Gospels are narrated, chiefly to show the incidental basis on which the spiritual discourses of Jesus were founded. All the new facts contained in John's history completely harmonise with the view of Christ which is given by Matthew, Mark, and Luke; while most of these facts present a more exalted conception of our Saviour's excellence.

The book was written with a twofold object, which may be described as immediate and remote, or special and general. Its immediate or special object was to counteract the subtle and erroneous philosophy of Gnosticism. The Gnostics in the days of John had begun to blend their ancient theories about the Creator of matter, whom they supposed to be an inferior deity, with the Christian doctrine of our Lord's divinity. The result of their philosophising was a subtle heresy, degrading to Christ, which was spreading throughout the churches of Asia Minor. And John's special object in his writing was to counteract this heresy, by presenting Jesus,

through His works and words, in all the dignity of a divine Saviour.

The remote or general object of John's Gospel is to set forth Jesus Christ as a perfect Saviour for all mankind. His own account of the book, in its bearing upon the world, is summed up in the last verse of chapter twentieth: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through His name." There, in little space, we see the nature, plan, object, and result of the Gospel according to John the Apostle.

#### JOHN'S TESTIMONY TO CHRIST'S MESSIAHSHIP.

Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah. The Messiah of the Old Testament, and the Christ of the New, is the same person. In the first chapter of his work John bears witness to the Messiah. He tells of two enquiring men who were led to believe in Jesus as the Saviour of their souls. One of these was Andrew, the son of Jonas. At an early date after his conversion, he said to his brother Simon, "We have found the Messiah." The heart of every thoughtful man in Israel was expecting His

arrival. It was distinctly promised in the Old Bible; and as soon as Andrew found a person who could meet his spiritual wants, he believed that the promise had been fulfilled. Looking to Jesus, the enquiring soul saw Him to be the Messiah-Saviour.

This testimony was repeated with great emphasis by Philip to Nathanael. Philip had gone with Andrew and Peter to follow Jesus. They all found Him able to save their immortal spirits. And Philip, meeting with Nathanael on the following day, thus told him about the Christ: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (i. 45).

We have an indirect witness to the same truth in Nicodemus declaring his conviction that Jesus was a teacher come from God. The man had been studying the miracles of Christ. He had doubtless compared these miracles with such promises as those recorded by Isaiah (chaps. xxxv., xlii., etc.), and had come most logically to the conclusion that Jesus was a heaven-sent Messenger, possessed of divine power to work for human welfare.

Not less striking was the impression produced upon the woman and the people of Samaria by

the teaching of Jesus. They learned His deep knowledge of human character, His complete hold of God, and His power of bringing God to the human heart with spiritual salvation. The woman of Samaria felt the force of these truths when she said to the men of her city, "Come, see a man which told me all things ever I did: is not this the Christ?" The people of Samaria, after listening to Jesus, answered the question of their neighbour, by saying, "We have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (chap. iv. 29-42). Thus John testifies to the Messiahship of Jesus by the mouth of many witnesses.

#### JOHN'S PROOFS OF CHRIST'S DIVINITY.

He wrote to show that Jesus is the Son of God. This expression, Son of God, was understood by John to signify equality with the Father (chap. v. 17, 18). The first proof which John gives of Christ's divinity is the work of creation: "All things were made by Him." Here we have an exercise of power which belongs to God alone. No creature can make itself. Nothing cannot generate something. The mind which planned all things is wonderful in counsel. The hand

that made all things is excellent in working. And on learning that Jesus possessed the mind to plan, and the hand to make all things, we are crucifying reason by refusing to believe in His divinity.

The next proof which John gives of our Lord's divinity is His power of dealing with spiritual doctrine. This thought is put in its highest form when Jesus is set forth as the full revealer of God's Fatherhood (chap. i. 18). "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, hath declared Him." Jesus claims a complete knowledge of God (John vii. 29); and in His conversation with Nicodemus He affirms that His knowledge of heavenly things is boundless (John iii. 12). The power of Jesus to deal with any revelations of spiritual truth is wonderfully manifested throughout His discourses. From the declaration of divine love which appears in God's giving His best beloved Son for the life of a sinful world, through all the details of light for men in any darkness, mercy for men in any sinfulness, power to deliver men from the deepest evils of spiritual death, we have indications of wisdom in Christ's teaching which is infinitely more than human.

In very plain terms John asserts Christ's

equality with God. All men are taught to honour the Son, even as they honour the Father (John v. 23). "The Son and the Father are one" (John x. 30). They are alike able to keep the souls of men in perfect safety. They wrought with united action in every favour that Jesus bestowed upon the people. The glory of every miracle was the glory of God in the highest. The whole course of divine providence is recognised as the joint production of Jehovah and Jesus. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John v. 17), was an early claim of Jesus to divine co-operation which led the Jews to charge Him with blasphemy. And near the close of His public life, in the last of His spiritual discourses, He pointed to His works as a reason for believing that the Father and Son are the same in substance, power, and glory. (John xiv. 11.)

We are taught in different parts of John's Gospel that Jesus possesses divine attributes, and is entitled to divine exaltation. He knows all things. His light and wisdom is able to fill the world. He is qualified to judge the secrets of every human heart; and is, in the widest sense of the word, omniscient. Not less strikingly are we taught the doctrine of His omnipotence. He changes water into wine, sickness into health,

impotence into power, death into life. He even claimed power to lay down His life and take it again ; so that the sadness of His crucifixion is only a shadow through which we pass to the glory of a resurrection, which reveals the Lord Jesus to be the Lord God Almighty. In one passage (John xii. 39-41) our Apostle refers to a time when Isaiah saw the King of Heaven in the full brightness of royal splendour, and tells us that in that light Isaiah saw the glory of Christ. And in Isaiah's vision of our Saviour's glory, we have a foregleam of the higher glory, which we behold in Jesus at the right hand of Heavenly Majesty. Thus by the work of creation, the revelation of His Father, the performance of miracle, the possession of divine attributes, the exaltation to heavenly glory, John supplies infallible proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

#### JOHN'S CLAIM FOR HUMAN FAITH IN CHRIST.

The Gospel was written to draw out faith in His divinity, and faith in His offered salvation. If Christ is the Son of God, He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. Viewed in these lights, the question of faith in Jesus becomes vastly important to every human

soul. On what grounds does John wish us to believe his Master's divinity, or his Master's power to save? He appeals to His miracles. The miracle of creation is put in the foreground. (Conf. chap. i.) Looking to all that we require to save our souls from sinful misery, or restore our souls to holy happiness, we are apt to think that no one is sufficient for these things. It was so in old time, when men supposed their spiritual calamities were hidden from the Lord. The remedy to which old preachers pointed for spiritual depression was God's work of creation. Men were taught to think of our fair earth brought out of chaos, or our spangled heavens commanded to shine out of nothing, and thereby learn the power of God to remove all the evils of humanity. (Isa. xl. 26-28.) And on the same principle John leads us at the opening of his Gospel to contemplate the creating power of Christ. If He is able to make human bodies out of dust, and human souls out of breath, He is able to renew our fallen nature after the image of God, in wisdom and righteousness. We are very apt, however, to lose ourselves among general principles, or in their general application. We want to know if the mighty power, which Christ displays among the wide works of creation can be applied to our particular



calamities. Are we left to live or die beneath the laws of nature? Or can the God of nature do anything to help us in our sinful extremities? That question is answered satisfactorily by the lesser or particular miracles of Christ. He who made our body out of dust can deliver our body out of disease. He who formed our souls by the breath of His mouth can reform our souls by the grace of His Spirit. His miracles show the presence of God; and therefore His words of wisdom, or promises of love, or offers of mercy, should be counted worthy of all acceptance. After reading the story of any miracles of Jesus, as in the case of the blind man who enjoyed the miracle of restored sight, the question may be put to every sinner, Dost thou believe in the Son of God? Dost thou trust in His power to save thee from destruction?

We have another reason for faith in Christ presented by the sublimity of His doctrine. Never man spake with such spiritual acuteness, or such far-reaching authority. The wisdom of men is like a rushlight beside the Sun of Righteousness. In the teaching of Jesus Christ we are lifted far above the range of human philosophy. His revelation of God's character is God-like. His accounts of God's ways to men is replete with

infinite benevolence. He does not put off time like earthly sages in seeking after the origin of evil; he rather shows how evil is to be assailed and conquered. He does not discuss, like a lawyer or a casuist, the possibility of human regeneration; He offers by the help of His Spirit to make us holy as God is holy; perfect as God is perfect. There is no uncertain sound about moral conduct, or about the way to immortal happiness. "This is the work of God, that ye believe." He that believeth on Jesus, though he were dead, yet shall he live. The moral lessons which Christ gives in John's Gospel to every Christian are summed up in making it our meat and drink to do the will of our Heavenly Father. The end to which we are pointed as the reward of doing our Father's will is a home in His heavenly mansions. Such is the sublime doctrine of divine truth and human duty which Christ teaches in the discourses preserved in John's writings; and looking at the sublimity of our Saviour's teaching, we may justly accept it with honest faith. Here we have the heaven-born sentence surrounded by the brightest beams of spiritual effulgence: "God so loved the world, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

John is careful to point out in his history of

Christ the fulfilment of Old Testament Scripture. The New Testament was intended to absorb the Old, and outshine it, as the sun outshines the morning stars of heaven. Hence the importance of showing in Jesus the fulfilment of divine promises. The law is a schoolmaster, but the promises are angels in bringing us to Christ. Among the promises we learn the place of our Saviour's birth, the form of His incarnate appearance, the wisdom He would manifest, the works He would perform; and accordingly the angel promises are often assembled round Jesus like the heavenly hosts on the plains of Bethlehem to sing—"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will to men." We are frequently told by our Apostle of the promises being fulfilled. It was so when the Son of Man was to be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. It was so when Jesus presented heavenly bread instead of earthly manna to meet our spiritual wants. It was so when Jesus offered heavenly water to meet our spiritual thirst. At every point of any importance in the Saviour's life or death, John was careful to show that the Scriptures had been fulfilled. And thus he expected men to rise from faith in the promise written to faith in the promise realised. As surely as we believe

the Word which tells of a coming Saviour, we should believe in the Person who has brought us salvation,

And John's crowning reason for human faith is contained in our Lord's resurrection. He died for our sins, and rose again according to the Scriptures. The story of the resurrection is told with great beauty in chapter twentieth. We see the anxiety of our Lord's disciples, and their care that every whisper about His resurrection should be fully verified. There is the witness of human eyes which saw the empty place where the Lord lay. There is the witness of angels who rolled away the stone, and sat in the sepulchre to say that He had risen. We have even the benefit of a doubting man testing every statement with rigid severity. The women must have been mistaken. He would not accept the word of Peter and John. Somehow they had been deluded, as sceptics affirm that religion is all delusion. In short, the doubting disciple would be satisfied with nothing less than a touch of Christ's person before he would believe in the resurrection. The favour was granted. He put his finger into the print of the nails; his hand upon the mark of the spear employed in the crucifixion; and then his doubt gave way to faith. "My Lord and my God."

The resurrection was a reality. And belief in the resurrection, throughout all ages, is to be a means of spiritual blessing. Blessed are they who have not seen as Thomas did, and yet have believed. And now, putting all these reasons together which we find in Christ's wonderful works, His sublime teaching, His fulfilment of Divine promises, His resurrection from the dead to prove the finish of His mission, we should at once believe in His power to bless our souls with eternal salvation.

JOHN'S ASSURANCE OF LIFE FOR EVERY BELIEVER  
IN CHRIST.

Believing, we have life through His name. Whosoever believeth on Jesus shall not perish. John makes no exception here, and the grounds of his assurance are given very plainly throughout the Gospel. Our Saviour said to God concerning His people, "Of all Thou hast given Me I will lose nothing, but raise it up at the last day." He also said, "Neither shall any pluck them out of My hand. My Father which gave them Me is greater than all; and none shall be able to pluck them out of My Father's hand." Here we have the full power of divinity pledged for our protection. We may suppose the greatest of human

foes, with the subtlest force of evil, attempting to snatch a Christian soul from safety; yet the attempt will fail, for none can pluck them from the hand of Christ. We may suppose the most cunning of Satanic enemies doing their utmost to prevent our salvation. Still we are safe in the everlasting arms. The promise is all comprehensive. "None" is the word. None in the heavens above, or the earth beneath, or the regions under the earth. It is the word which Paul expands so happily in his Epistle to the Romans. "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And nothing can exceed the tender sweetness of the assurance which fell from our Saviour's lips on the night of His betrayal: "I go to prepare a place for you; and will come again to receive you to Myself, that where I am ye may be also."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE THREE EPISTLES OF JOHN.

JOHN'S three General Epistles are filled with the spirit of wisdom and love. His thoughts often reach the highest point of spiritual sublimity. His wishes for Christian welfare, which animate all his writings, reveal the very heart of God.

We do not stay to discuss a host of difficult questions which have been raised about the authorship, date, style, object, or designation of these catholic Epistles. Most of these questions have now been settled with some approach to harmony among Bible scholars. All the distinguished writers of early times ascribe the First Epistle to John, the son of Zebedee. The Second and Third Epistles were not generally accepted till near the end of the second century. Their admission to the canon of Scripture was opposed chiefly because of their short, fragmentary character. But their style and object are so like the style and object of John's other writings, that all serious objections to his authorship have been

overcome. The three Epistles are now regarded, and we think justly regarded, as the inspired work of Christ's beloved disciple.

The dates of their composition cannot be fixed, yet there is good reason for placing them somewhat late in the Apostle's life. He writes like an old man for readers whom he kindly calls little children. The books contain the mature thoughts of a venerable Christian; and hence we are disposed to put the date of their composition near the close of John's earthly career. The First Epistle was written particularly for true Christians, or believers in Christ Jesus, who were scattered throughout the provinces of Asia Minor. These Christians were tossed to and fro by many winds of doctrine. They had to contend with stern blasts of Oriental philosophy, or subtle currents of science falsely so called. And John tried to guard them against erroneous thought, by guiding them to the fountain of all truthfulness—"We show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us by His Son Jesus Christ." The Second and Third Epistles were written to individuals, like friendly notes, and were intended to bring Christian truths home to the hearts of persons in whom the Apostle was specially interested. On these accounts the books deserve to be called



General Epistles, because they are fitted to benefit Christian souls of every age and every nation.

Very probably the Epistles were written in the city of Ephesus, and written after the date of John's Gospel. The opening sentence of the First Epistle speaks of seeing and handling the Word of Life. This seems to imply that the persons to whom the Apostle now wrote had read the history and discourses of Christ which he had compiled for the Churches. The comprehensive object for which the Epistles were prepared is given in chap. v. 13: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life; and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." It is the same glorious object as that for which John wrote his Gospel: "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (chap. xx. 31). The end is worthy of man's highest powers. John seeks to confirm believers in the faith of Christ, constrain them to follow righteousness, and prepare them for immortal happiness. These results are sought by stating and expanding, with much variety of aphoristic sentiment, the following general principles: the manifestation of God's light and love

through Jesus Christ; the practical bearing of God's righteousness on Christian character; and the power of God's Son to secure for Christians the blessing of eternal life.

#### GOD'S LIGHT AND LOVE IN JESUS CHRIST.

"We declare unto you," says John, "that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (chap. i. 7). The light of God is expressive of intellectual and moral perfection. His wisdom is unbounded. There is nothing beyond the range of His knowledge. The Psalmist takes himself as an illustration of God's omniscience: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me; Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thoughts afar off." These words apply to every creature throughout the universe. And the wisdom of God is commensurate with His knowledge. They are both infinite. Hence the intellectual perfection of God is figured by the word Light. Just as the light of heaven reveals all hidden things, and enables us to view them with intelligence; so the wisdom of God reveals, or is able to reveal, all that is mysterious and wonderful in Himself, in His works, in His mercy, or in His salvation, to human understanding.

In a similar way, the light of God is expressive of moral perfection. There is no dark spot in His character. We speak of deeds of sin as deeds of darkness; we speak of darkness covering the earth, to describe the moral effect of wickedness upon mankind. It has left a shadow, deep as night, upon every nation; it has left a mark upon every sinful soul, like the mark of murder upon Cain, or the mark of soot upon a snow-white garment. But there is nothing of this kind on the moral character of God. "In Him is no darkness at all;" He dwells in light which is inaccessible; and the light of His moral perfection is full of glory.

Now, John turns this view of God to happy account in warning Christians against every form of iniquity: "He that hateth his brother is in darkness." He that loveth the world overmuch is blind to its deformities. And hence the Apostle warns us, with all the earnestness of spiritual affection, and all the force of heavenly wisdom, not to walk in darkness, because the darkness of sin leads by a dreary path to the pit of death. The works of darkness in time will be followed by the blackness of darkness for ever. Just as men fear the darkness of night on a stormy sea, and turn eastward to behold the beams of dawning

day, so should sinful souls turn their eyes to God for the light which shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

Most beautifully does John reveal the doctrine of God's love. David speaks of God's omniscience as too high for him to reach. Still more was the discovery of God's love beyond human attainment. Let us suppose an angel hand beginning to write on a clear sky, in golden letters, an account of our Almighty Creator. He writes, "God is," and calls upon mankind to supply another word. Some might be disposed to say, God is power; others might reply, God is wisdom. But, taking all the writings of human history for our guide, we venture to think that no human sage would have told the angel to write, God is love. It was done by the beloved John. He learned his Master's heart so well, viewed Him as His Father's image so fully, that he was enabled, by His Spirit, to reveal the glorious doctrine of Divine love for our sinful world. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The gift of Jesus, to death upon the cross, is at once the manifestation and the measure of God's affection for human souls. And, accordingly, for the express purpose of constraining our souls to seek

salvation in our Father's bosom, John invites us to behold, in the sacrifice of Christ, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.

Such a lesson on divine love should move the hearts of men to every form of philanthropy. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we should also love one another." "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God." "He that loveth not, knoweth not God." "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." From these sentences we learn that love should be the animating principle, or the absorbing power, or the comprehensive work of Christian life. Parents should love their children, and children should love their parents. Brothers should care for their sisters, and sisters should respect their brothers. Christian brethren should dwell together in unity. All of us, whether friends or neighbours, should be kindly affectioned one to another. The world is our home, and every man and child in it should be counted blood relations. Like sunheat going forth from the end of heaven, and sweeping with glowing circuit around the whole earth, so the heart love of Christians should go forth in ever widening circles till it embrace all mankind. Well does the venerable Apostle John say, with fatherly tender-

ness, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue ; but in deed and in truth."

THE PRACTICAL BEARING OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUS-  
NESS.

It is put comprehensively by John in these words, "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." We are frequently taught throughout the Sacred Volume that God is just in all His ways: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" All the principles of divine government which are laid down in the Bible, or which appear in the course of providence, bear witness to God's uprightness. His love to sinful men in the gift of Jesus Christ is intended to spread a halo of glory around His justice. Christ suffered to declare the righteousness of God in such a form that He might appear just in the very act of justifying the ungodly.

Now this doctrine is placed in the forefront of John's teaching on God's uprightness. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Men are accustomed to magnify the mercy, or grace, or love of God in the blessing of

forgiveness. They are right in doing so. God is rich in mercy, and ready to forgive. We have forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. The great love wherewith He loved us appears most conspicuously in blotting out all our iniquities. Yet John teaches that the forgiveness of our sins is one way of knowing that God is righteous. His justice unites with His love in the gift of pardon; His truth blends with His grace in cleansing away our iniquity. We have something like this in nature. All men can see the care, the kindness, the goodness of God, in the gift of fruitful seasons. But the fruits of every season have something to say about God's justice and faithfulness. These fruits depend upon human labour, and come as God's just reward for man's industry. These fruits depend upon an old promise, written in the Bible, and wrapt up in the laws of nature, that while the earth remaineth we shall have seedtime and harvest. Every fruitful season, therefore, is a witness to God's faithfulness. Just so in the forgiveness of our iniquity. God asks us to confess our sin and pray for mercy, because confession and prayer are right and dutiful. These are the seed sowings to which God has attached the benefit of pardon. He has also promised, as plainly as the promise of seed-

time and harvest, that our cry for mercy shall be fully answered. Here are the same principles of justice and truth which appear in nature, allied with care, and kindness, and goodness, now appearing in redemption, allied with mercy, and grace, and love in the pardon of our transgressions. Let every sinful soul take courage, because we have really a fivefold cord of justice, and truth, and mercy, and grace, and love, drawing us to God for salvation. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

He does so to declare, or let us know His righteousness. We have the same lesson very strikingly presented in the fact, that our Advocate with the Father is Jesus Christ the Righteous. It would not be wrong to say, that Jesus pleads our cause for love. Standing with His golden censer beside the golden altar to intercede with God, we can fancy the heart of Jesus glowing with sympathetic affection for human souls. But here, as in the case of Aaron, the high-priest intercessor of ancient Israel, we are taught to think of Jesus wearing a holy crown. His will asks for nothing wrong. His intercession is founded on His sufferings. These sufferings are sufficient to atone for all our iniquities. And hence, on every principle of



justice, the Father hears Him always in His intercession for transgressors. Indeed, it is worthy of remark, that in Christ's intercessory prayer for His disciples, recorded in the Gospel (John xvii.), the only epithet which He applies to God is the word "righteous." He does not appeal to His Father's mercy or grace or compassion. He says, "Father, O righteous Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, to behold My glory."

Now, the practical bearing of these things is, that God's righteousness should constrain us to be righteous in all our behaviour. His righteous will contains the rule; His righteous character presents for imitation, the model of human conduct. All sin should die beneath the light of His countenance. Hence John teaches very pointedly (iii. 7), that every man that doeth righteousness is conformed to our Father's image. Indeed, the grand object of Jesus Christ in His death upon the cross, whether we view it as a sacrifice of justice, or a sacrifice of love, is to make an end of wickedness. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." These works are set out in sharp contrast to the will of God. They appear in Cain's murder of his brother Abel. They appear in every form of selfish cruelty or reck-

less misconduct which abounds throughout the world. And instead of devilish feelings in human hearts, or devilish deeds in human behaviour, Jesus wishes to implant the heavenly influence of love to God. "And this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments."

#### CHRIST'S POWER TO BESTOW ETERNAL LIFE.

John occupies much of his Epistles in proving that Jesus is a divine Saviour. (1 John iv. 34.) He frequently calls Him the Son of God. He condemns, in severest language, every tendency to deny His Sonship. We have already had occasion to say that John understood the Sonship of Christ to imply His divinity. He is one with His Father; the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Not less severely does John condemn every soul who doubts that Jesus is a perfect Saviour. "Who is a liar, but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ?" This is strong language; but John was so fully convinced, on the best of evidence, that the Son of God had come to save the lost, that he had no patience with sceptics or unbelievers. He had seen Jesus walk upon the sea, control its tempests, or command its treasures; he had seen Him cure every form of bodily disease, and subdue the power of death; he had

felt the quickening grace of Jesus delivering his sinful soul from the curse of perdition, and knew that such grace had wrought effectually in the salvation of others ; and therefore he looked upon unbelief as a foul example of intellectual perversity. You would think any man a liar who would deny the speed of lightning, or the noise of thunder, or the warmth of sunshine, or the usefulness of daily bread. The Gospel was as true to John's mind as any object of touch or sight ; and hence he counted every unbeliever false as Peter was when he denied the Lord with oaths and cursings. "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father."

The divinity of Christ enables Him to secure eternal life for His people. He gives the title to heaven with the blessing of pardon. He prepares for heaven by helping us to conquer all iniquity. We are born again to be heirs of a holy inheritance. It is common in old age for men to go back upon the lessons of their youth. They remember the events of early life far better than the events of yesterday. And this tendency of human nature is turned to fine account when old men supply the young on every side with the instructive parts of their early history. We see all this in the aged Apostle while writing his Epistles.

One of the earliest lessons which he learned from Jesus was the doctrine of regeneration : "Ye must be born again ;" or born from above. Hence John speaks continually to his readers of being born of God. "Everyone that doeth righteousness is born of Him." "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is God-born. And taking the new birth as the starting point of Christian life, we are shown how to conquer evil, and prepare for a holy immortality. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world : and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Thus we are led step by step along the heavenly path, reading as we go the glorious record, "That God hath given to us eternal life, and that life is in His Son."

The practical results of these vital doctrines of Christ's Divinity and Messiahship are brought out with singular beauty in the Second and Third Epistles. They are personal in their appeals, and personal in their application. The elect lady and her children were loved in the truth, and loved for their attachment to the Saviour. They are exhorted to beware of false teachers who might lead them away from the path of safety ; and they are exhorted to walk in love, as the way to eternal happiness. Not less impressively is the

duty of stedfastness presented to the well-beloved Gaius. The name was common in Asia Minor ; but whether this was Gaius of Derbe, or Gaius, Paul's host, and of the whole Church, we are not informed. John's well-beloved Gaius had been stedfast hitherto. He seemed to have been one of John's converts ; for to him the words are applied : " I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." He is warned very earnestly to beware of Diotrephes, who loved pre-eminence : " Pride goeth before a fall." And the man who proudly wishes on all occasions to occupy the seat of eminence will often be compelled with shame to take the lowest room. A better model is submitted for the imitation of Gaius in the person of Demetrius, who had " a good report of all men, and of the truth itself," and in the true record of John the Apostle. By following the stedfast Demetrius, the well-beloved Gaius, and every Christian, will enjoy the grace which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Such is a general view of John's three Epistles. The style is proverbial through every chapter. In no part of Scripture have we more of divine wisdom condensed into human words ; and, like the words of Jesus, they end with a benediction of peace.

## PART II.



### REVELATION OF FUTURE EVENTS.

**G**



## CHAPTER I.

### FRIENDLY COUNSELS.

REVELATION is full of mystery. It opens out things which are spiritual, heavenly, divine, like priests withdrawing the temple veil to open the Holy of Holies for human inspection. And men cannot easily understand how God should reveal His hidden truths to any mind, and endow him with special authority or power to enlighten the world.

The revelation of Jesus Christ for human salvation is profoundly mysterious. His name shall be called Wonderful. And whether we look to His person, or ministry, or suffering, or death, or exaltation, we see much that passes all understanding.

The Book of Revelation, contained at the end of our Bible, is in many pages a book of mysteries. Its visions, symbols, history, prophecy, are set forth with a profusion of imagery which is really bewildering. We are lost in maze, dazzled with lightning, overawed with thunder, charmed with music, and lifted on angel wings to the heaven of



heavens. We are led from the rocks of Patmos, where we sympathise with a brother in tribulation, to the throne of God, and taught to sing with angels, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

John's revelation has tried the faith, skill, patience, studious perseverance of Christian expositors in all ages. Most of these expositors have attempted to analyse the book, or give a special meaning to all its phrases. This has been useful in many ways, but it has had one unhappy result. Not a few thoughtful people have come to regard the Revelation as a book of fragments, visionary in their nature, and uncertain in their application. Some expositors have given a good synoptical or general view of the book; yet, after doing so, have gone into details with a minuteness which mars a clear conception of the whole work. We are disposed to think that a general view of the work should be first taken and kept prominent, because it is amply sufficient for all practical purposes. Any study of detail should rather help to elucidate than obscure leading principles. Much of the imagery in John's writing is only intended to illustrate or adorn his spiritual lessons. It was so with the teaching of Jesus Christ. In reading many of His parables,

which reveal heavenly truth by earthly means, we have to guard against minute analysis. The unmerciful servant, or the man who fell among thieves, is best explained without tedious comment, or fanciful allegory, like that in which Origen indulged. Indeed, the book before us is called the Revelation of Jesus Christ (i. 1), and may be counted His greatest parable. He gives a general view of the whole work (i. 1) in the words: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." The things seen, are mentioned in Chapter First; the things which are, supply a historic basis for the spiritual instruction which is here presented; the things which shall be hereafter, cover the progress and final triumph of Christianity.

#### AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND DESIGN OF THE BOOK.

We adopt the generally received opinion that the Book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John. We are in favour of Patmos, as the place where the visions of the book were unfolded, and substantially recorded. We follow the distinguished scholars who fix the date of composition about the year 96; and, while not doubting that

the writings of John had special lessons for Christians in Asia Minor, we believe that the book was intended for the whole Christian Church. In the Epistles to the Seven Congregations of Asia, all the words and promises of Christ are of general application. In the wide range of its prophecy, overlapping all years and all kingdoms, we see a book which is meant for Christians throughout the world. Although John seems to write for early ages, he really writes for all ages, of Christianity.

The glory of Christ is a fitting introduction to the whole Apocalypse. His appearance is magnificent. It bursts upon the eye of John like a flash of heavenly light. "He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." In the quiet of a Sabbath morn, amidst a rocky solitude, he heard a voice, not human but divine. On looking round he saw a Person, whose head and hairs were white as snow; whose eyes were like a flame of fire; whose feet resembled burning brass; and His voice as the music of many waters. The position of the glorious Person whom John beheld was really in the midst of Christian Churches. The seven candlesticks which stood around were Church lights, which He had kindled. He was like the sun amidst the planets. The seven candlesticks

were the Churches of Asia Minor. And thus the Saviour still appears amidst His people, always ready to bless and do them good. His power over the Church is complete. He holds the means and ministers of mercy, like stars in His right hand, to benefit with angel care the heirs of salvation. The seven stars are the angels or ministers of the Churches. And best of all we learn, in this exalted view of Jesus, that His love to the Church is everlasting. "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" (most truly); "and have the keys of hell and of death." "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, saith the Lord."

#### FRIENDLY COUNSELS FOR THE CHURCH.

These counsels are presented in letters to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor. Christ's name is Counsellor; and at the outset of His revelation-counsels, He teaches all Christians to continue in their first love. The heart of a young Christian clings to Jesus with peculiar tenderness. His claims to our love are felt to be all powerful. His life given for our life, His abounding mercy in

the pardon of sin, His powerful grace to help in every time of need, constrain every new convert to love Him with glowing fervour. It is like our young attachment to a bosom friend, or our heart response in early life to a parent's love, and seems to fill our spirit with ethereal flame. The love of Christ constrains us to love Him with all our strength.

Such love is the chief motive power in producing conformity to Christ. It moulds us to His image, or makes us submissive to His authority. A cold bar of iron will break before it bends. And we require the love of Jesus up to white heat before we bow aright to His will, or make His law the rule of our conduct. The Church of Ephesus was distinguished during its early history for work, labour, patience, zeal, discrimination, perseverance. They could not bear the deeds of evil men. They tested some false teachers, and found them liars. But, in an evil hour, their love to Jesus began to fail. "They left their first love." As a consequence, their character completely changed. And with the view of preventing eternal ruin, they were called to repentance and reformation. (ii. 6.)

Christ's counsel for Christians to continue in their first love is enforced in His letter to the

Church of Smyrna. He knew their works and trials. He wished them to be faithful, even unto death ; and, to secure fidelity, He told them of coming tribulation. The devil would cast some of them into prison. They should suffer persecution, for the express purpose of making them cling more closely to their Saviour. It was said of God's ancient people, that in their affliction they would seek Him early. A tree roots itself more firmly after the shaking of a tempest ; a vine entwines its tendrils more closely around its supports when a mighty wind is threatening its destruction. And, in like manner, a true Christian roots himself or herself more deeply in the Saviour's love, or winds the tendrils of sincere affection more closely around His arms, in times of serious trouble. "No affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless, afterwards, it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

The importance of keeping our first love to Jesus up to a state of glowing heat cannot be over-estimated. Do not think that first love is cold, because it ceases to sparkle. We have seen a bar of iron, coming from a furnace, emitting many sparks. In that condition it was not quite ready for the blacksmith's work. He had to shake the sparks away, and then he could shape

the iron to serve his purpose. In like manner the sparks of first Christian love require to be shaken off, before we are in the best condition to serve every purpose of our heavenly Master. Still the fire requires to burn. The warm love is to be continued. We are not to lose heart when the sparks disappear. But all through life we should keep ourselves in the love of God, and in patient waiting for Jesus Christ. At His coming, the blessed promise to the Smyrna Church will be enjoyed by every Christian, "I will give thee a crown of life."

Our Saviour next counsels the Churches to live above the world. There is a strong tendency, even among good men, to be worldly-minded. Temptations are numerous and powerful. We are all exposed to the influence of public opinion. That opinion is never very steadfast, or settled, in sacred things. The winds of doctrine are very like the winds of nature. We find among weather forecasts a north signal, and a south signal, to say that heavy winds may be expected from the north and south respectively. We also find another signal, to say that dangerous winds may be expected in rapid succession from different quarters. It is very much the same with the changing currents of human thought. We have the cold

northern blasts of atheism, or the feeble southern breezes of unbelief, or the dangerous winds of philosophic doubt, and scientific scepticism, and reckless speculation about Bible teaching, blowing very quickly from every point of the compass. And, in such circumstances, we follow the weakness of human doubt, to the annoyance of self, instead of being strong in faith, to the glory of God.

It is another step in a wrong direction for Christians to look with lenient eye upon surrounding wickedness. The human heart is prone to sympathy. We cannot contemplate want or woe of any kind, without some feeling of compassion. Even when want is the offspring of waste, and woe is the outcome of disgraceful dissipation, we look with tender feeling upon the sufferer. Such tender feeling is apt to rest upon the sin as well as upon the sinner. We don't discriminate between the mischief and the man. And, looking with merciful eye upon the man, we come to look with lenient or favourable eye upon the misconduct. The result is, that sin becomes impudent. Instead of hiding its head with shame, it stalks abroad throughout the world, comparatively free from the condemnation it deserves. Our Saviour counsels different things



when He says we "should have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." And the last step in Christian yielding to the world appears in the practice of iniquity. Doubt of what is right leads to the doing of what is wrong. Thinking or smiling at sin commonly ends in sinfulness. In fact, doubting is often the parent of damnation. A man who takes a serpent to his bosom is sure of being stung to death; and a man who would avoid the deadly sting of wickedness should keep as far away from it as possible.

These are the chief lessons given to the Churches of Pergamos and Thyatira. They had much goodness in their character. The men of Pergamos had been steadfast. The men of Thyatira were distinguished for charity, service, faith, patience. Yet they had to some extent adopted doubtful opinions (vi. 14), encouraged the practice of evil (ii. 20), given way to the force of temptation (ii. 22), and become sinfully conformed to the world. He whose eyes are like to a flame of fire had seen the whole of their iniquities. And, waving His sharp sword with two edges before their soul to enforce His counsels, He calls them to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, and set their affections not on things upon the

earth, but on things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.

Our Lord also wishes His Churches to guard against formality in religion. The Church of Sardis had a name to live, while it was dead. It is not difficult to get a name for great piety. A fair profession, a plausible tongue, an outward attention to sacred duty, a few gifts to the poor or the perishing, will bring out a high opinion of a man's Christian excellence. Our Lord Himself speaks of whited sepulchres, whose outer parts were very beautiful, but whose inner parts were full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. He meant the Pharisees of his day. No class of men were ever more successful in getting a name to live. They prayed in the streets. They gave alms with the sound of a trumpet. They sat in high places of the synagogue. They were most punctilious about temple rites and ceremonies. Many thought they were perfect, yet when Jesus drew the veil of their formality, or opened their whited sepulchres, they were shown to be nothing but hypocrites. They had a name to live and were dead.

There have been risks of religious formality in every age. It appeared in Samaria very early, with the false profession of Simon Magus; it

appeared in Asia Minor within fifty years of our Saviour's death; it has been repeated in many ways throughout the events of monastic history. The monks had often a name for living piety, when they were dead in wickedness. And the evil may be found in the records of modern churches. Men of high profession are not always men of high principle. Men who talk most sometimes do least. They have a form of godliness, and deny its power. From such the apostle Paul advises Christians with earnestness to turn away. They are not safe companions. Their example should never be followed. And our Lord here repeats the counsel of Paul for the benefit of all Christians.

He does so particularly by showing the benefit of consistent spiritual activity. The Church of Sardis is called to be watchful, and strong, and sincere; the few who had not defiled their garments were promised a place among heavenly worthies (iii. 4). And the Church of Philadelphia is commended as an example of honest godliness. They are not mentioned in flattering terms, or set up as an example of spiritual perfection. They have a little strength; they have kept the word of Jesus; they have not denied His name. False preachers and false professors had failed to shake their

Christianity. Observe these points. There is nothing here beyond the reach of common people. The weakest among us has a little strength; the doubting still keep by the word of Christ. With all our failings or faults we have not denied the name of Jesus. And now we have the promises which Jesus gave to the Christians in Philadelphia for our encouragement. "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation." We have only to hold fast, and no man shall take our crown. "Him that overcometh, will I make a pillar in the temple of my God."

And now we have a counsel from Christ on the blessings of decision. How long halt ye between two opinions? The question was put to sinners long ago on the top of Mount Carmel. And it was accompanied by a very solemn alternative. If Jehovah be God, then follow Him; but if Baal, then follow Baal. Men cannot do both. It is impossible to serve God and mammon. He that is not with Jesus is against Him. There is no sitting between two stools which we may call sin and holiness; no standing with one foot in the mire, and another upon the rock; no union of hell and heaven in human character. Indeed, there are few things which Jesus condemns in stronger

terms than a want of decision. "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" There is work in the Lord's vineyard to which you have been kindly invited. There is fruit in the vineyard dropping from the tree of life, of which you may eat and live for ever. There is reward at the end of the day sufficient to crown every Christian worker with immortal happiness. And our Saviour has strong reason to complain of any soul who hangs about the world and refuses to work in our Father's vineyard.

His complaint takes a serious form in the letter to Laodicea. The professing Christians there were lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, and He was offended with their lukewarmness. So deep was His offence that He threatened to cast them off unless they quickly repented. Like most of lukewarm undecided people, the Laodiceans had a good opinion of themselves. They thought they were rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing. It was a sad mistake. They were really wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Yet even in such a low condition, sinners are not beyond the blessing of deciding for Christ. He counsels every one of us to buy of Him gold tried in the fire, that we may be rich, and white raiment that we may be

clothed, and eye-salve to cure our spiritual blindness. Aye, it is to undecided souls that Jesus addresses the delightful Gospel: "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me." He really desires most earnestly that every doubting sinner should become decided; every drooping Christian should be revived, every active Christian should conquer in every conflict; and, to sum up all the blessings of decision, He gives a glorious promise, which is fitted to sustain our courage through every battle with spiritual enemies, "Him that overcometh will I give to sit with Me in My throne." "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."



## CHAPTER II.

### COMING STRUGGLES.

CHRIST'S glorious appearance in Patmos was a fitting introduction to His gracious counsels for the Church. His wisdom, power, and love so brilliantly manifested, enable Him to speak with far-reaching influence among human souls. His place among the Churches reveals a constant desire to promote their welfare. His presence will be continued with His people through every change of time, and raise them at last from death to immortality.

Following the Saviour's counsels presented in the Seven Epistles to the Asiatic Churches, we have a prediction of severe struggles for Christians in near and remote periods of coming history. These struggles are written in a prophetic roll, sealed with seven seals, and are revealed by the Lamb of God breaking the seals, and opening out sheet after sheet for our inspection.

As an introduction to this important work of opening the seven seals, we have another glorious

view of Christ. John was admitted by an open door to behold the plains of heaven. He was in the Spirit, and was raised in vision above the rocks of Patmos to a place beside the heavenly throne. The person who sits upon the throne is most bright and beautiful to contemplate. A rainbow spreads around Him, in sight like unto an emerald, reflecting, like the seven colours of light, His sevenfold perfection. He who fills the exalted seat is God the Father in all His glory. His Son is there, amidst the throne, like a Lamb which had been slain. His Spirit is there represented by seven lamps of fire, burning before the throne. The whole scene reveals Jehovah, all powerful and all gracious to sustain the courage of His people through every earthly struggle. Nothing is too hard for the Lord to accomplish. No weapon formed against His Church shall prosper; and every tongue that riseth against her in judgment He will condemn.

Around Jehovah, we see the whole creation, represented by four living creatures, who watch His movements for Christian welfare with intense delight; we have redemption in the four and twenty elders, whose ransomed souls are ever occupied with heavenly adoration; and we have special mention of angelic hosts, showing profound



sympathy in every Christian struggle; and ministering singly or unitedly to the progress of Christianity.

There is something grandly impressive about the praises given to Jehovah. They are the highest of all choral services. The living creatures cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." The four and twenty elders respond, that the Creator is worthy to receive glory and honour and power. And the voice of many angels unites with the elders and living creatures, to the number of ten thousand times ten thousand, in singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive wisdom, and power, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

John's second glorious vision of God was intended to cheer the early Church in the prospect of severe struggles, which were rapidly approaching, and also intended to cheer Christians of all ages in every struggle for truth and righteousness. We labour, or fight, or suffer, beneath the watchful eye of Father, Son, and Spirit; and amidst the loving sympathy of heavenly hosts who will celebrate every triumph with the grand doxology, "Blessing and honour, and glory and power, be unto Him who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."

The Church's severe struggles, unfolded from the sealed roll of prophecy, may be summed up in the following terms :—Aggressive work, Strong opposition, Exhausting adversity, Searching judgment, ending in Final repose.

### AGGRESSIVE WORK FOR THE CHURCH.

Christian work is always aggressive. Duty is to be done ; evil is to be opposed ; good is to be realized. And none of these things can be accomplished without strenuous exertion. Whatsoever our hands find to do, should be done with all our might. Aggressive work, making inroads upon sin by the conversion of sinners, is the only way to complete success.

The Gospel, which the Church is commissioned to publish upon earth, is a combination of light and love. It is meant to chase away human darkness, and counteract human cruelty. Men have sometimes shown a senseless obstinacy in resisting the advance of light. The scientific lights of astronomy, chemistry, engineering, have had to contend with many obstacles. It has been the same with artificial lights. Only by the dominating power of work have men come to enjoy so largely the benefits of gas, or come to see,

even partially, the benefits of electricity. We can readily understand that persevering labour is required in diffusing gas light throughout a town. Pipes must be laid from street to street, from house to house, from room to room. In many cases, such as in the city of Rome, the work of gas lighting was long delayed by stupid opposition. And no little effort was required to make the light shine into the darkness. Just so with the aggressive work of Christianity. The Gospel is light which Christians have to diffuse by continuous labour from land to land, and town to town, and street to street, and house to house, till every eye is enlightened. And Gospel love always goes with Gospel light, to change the dark places of the earth, whose habitations are full of horrid cruelty, into bright places, whose homes are full of spiritual happiness.

The truths of Christianity are endowed with kingly dignity. They are destined to reign among human thoughts and human systems of thought throughout the world. Christ is a King. To this end was He born upon earth; and His Gospel is commissioned to conquer every kingdom. There is a point in Gospel truth which gives it a peculiar power of reaching the sinful heart. It is like an arrow from a bow winged by

a master hand, and sent straight to the mark. You see how it brought Peter to his knees beside Gennesaret (Luke v. 8), and a whole crowd of sinners in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, to cry for salvation. And its direct power of reaching the soul is not lessened. It is able now by producing the pain of deep conviction to make anyone of us cry, "What must I do to be saved?" And here we discover how the Gospel acquires the influence of royal command. Its Author is King of kings. On His head are many crowns. And hence, His truth is destined to subdue all nations.

Such things are all to be expected in the aggressive work of Christianity. When the Lamb opened the first seal, John saw a white horse, whose rider had a bow in His hand; and a crown was given unto Him, and He went forth conquering and to conquer. The rider here is the King of Salvation, leading His people forth to subdue the world. The white horse is His Church, bearing light and love to bless mankind. His bow and crown suggest the means and the right of coming triumph. He will not fail nor be discouraged, and His people should not fail nor be discouraged in their aggressive work, till He bring forth judgment unto victory. The vision of the first seal reveals a glorious answer to the Psalmist's prayer, "Gird



Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most Mighty ; and in Thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness ; and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies, whereby the people fall under Thee. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom."

#### STRONG OPPOSITION FOR THE CHURCH.

Christianity in its grand object is peace on earth and goodwill to men. Christ's spiritual empire is an empire of peace ; but peace must often be preceded by battle. There are certain evils in the human body which cannot be removed without violent means. You require the painful probe or the cutting lancet to remove an abscess, before you can have the pleasure of perfect health. It is much the same with the body politic. Violence prepares for gentleness. War, with its confused noise of battle, and garments rolled in blood, is sometimes the rugged pathway to peace. The wars of Joshua were needful to remove the Canaanites from a land which they had cursed, and secure the settlement of Israel in Palestine. The warlike years of David prepared his land for

the quiet years of Solomon. And such things have been common throughout the history of the world, or the history of Christianity.

Every season of war among nations has been more or less a season of struggle for the Church. It is impossible for Christians to pursue their aggressive work undisturbed when their kingdom is involved in conflict. The spiritual gives place to the patriotic. In seasons of strife the special operations of the Church for the saving of souls are to some extent suspended or neglected. The wars of men excite far more interest for the time than the wars of the Lord. And in all seasons of national warfare the Church is called to a peculiar struggle with surrounding wickedness.

Such a struggle is represented by the red horse, which appeared under the second seal. His rider was endowed with power to take peace from the earth, that men should kill one another; and there was given unto him a great sword. It is a melancholy fact that human history has been so much a history of war. Lust, passion, pride, desire for dominion, have ruled as with a rod of iron the movements of nations. Men have killed one another by millions. And their bloody work has been a terrible barrier against the progress of Christianity. The Church has required her utmost

strength, not only in early years of persecution, but throughout all ages, to wave her banner of peace over the world.

The red horse of war is also symbolic of other strong opposition to which the Church has been incessantly exposed. "Think not," said Jesus, on one occasion, "that I am come to send peace on earth; I am not come to send peace on earth, but a sword" (Matt. x. 34). He refers to the variance that should arise between man and man about the claims of His Gospel, or the truths of revealed religion. A conflict of opinion is usually the worst of all conflicts for producing feelings of excitement or bitterness. In its best aspects, a conflict of religious opinion is a struggle in which men feel they are contending for the highest of all realities. It is God against atheism, spirit against materialism, faith against unbelief, piety against wickedness, happiness against present and eternal misery. Such themes cannot be wisely touched with a light hand, or settled without gigantic exertion. Accordingly, we learn from history that the Church has always had to contend earnestly for heavenly truth. There were scoffers in the days of Peter, who questioned the existence of God; there were apostates, like Julian, at a later date, who denied the power of Christ; there

were doubters in the dark ages, who maintained the eternity of matter; there were Deists in last century, who supposed that God paid no attention to His creatures. We hear of Atheists in our own day, who wish us to ignore every conception of any Divinity. Such opinions may allow us to believe in materialism, but they leave us without faith in spirit, and without prospect of immortal happiness in a spiritual world.

Now, in every form of contending earnestly for truth against error, holiness against iniquity, Christian faith against human unbelief, we are following the red horse and his Rider to spiritual battle. The great sword with which we fight is Reason. The great umpire in religious contention is Revelation. "The Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword." And using well the sharp sword of reason, assisted with the sharper sword of revelation, in all our struggles for God and spirit, and faith and salvation, we are sure of final victory.

#### EXHAUSTING ADVERSITY FOR THE CHURCH.

War is very commonly followed by famine and pestilence. It suspends the common operations of husbandry. The prophet Joel (chap. iii. 10) called



upon men at one time to prepare for war, by beating their ploughshares into swords and their pruning-hooks into spears. This means that the work of ploughing, and tilling, and reaping would be suspended. An army in the field may consume or waste provisions, but it can do nothing for their production. It is only when the sword has been beaten to the ploughshare, and the spear into pruning-hooks—as we expect they will all be, under the blessed influence of Christianity—that men pay becoming attention to the arts of industry. Meantime, while the lands are unploughed, and the furrows unsown, and the harvest unreaped, and the stores of former years spent in warfare, there is risk of famine for the whole kingdom.

Famine seldom visits a land without some stroke of pestilence. Want generates disease of many kinds. The soldier on the field is exposed to fever, and ague, and cholera. The shepherd on the moor in a season of scarcity is liable to countless maladies. And people over town and country must share in the common calamity. Such evils are vividly pictured by the black horse with his balances; and the pale horse with his rider Death. The balances show that provisions must be weighed out most carefully in time of famine. There may be one loaf of wheaten bread for a penny, or three

loaves of barley bread for a penny ; but luxuries in the shape of oil and wine are out of the question. They are not to be hurt or consumed. And the deadly effects of pestilence are appalling to contemplate : a fourth part of the earth must die, and sink into the grave.

Now, it is a painful fact that seasons of famine and pestilence, or dull trade, and prevailing disease, have always an exhausting effect upon the Church. Christians have a share in every human adversity. If times are hard, we feel the pinch ; if want prevails, our means are crippled. If the labour of the olive fail, and the fields yield no meat ; if the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, our resources of well-doing are diminished. If the pale horse, with his rider Death, is smiting old and young with pestilence, or consigning the best of active Christians to the tomb, we cannot escape the heavy consequences. But spiritual famine, or spiritual pestilence is more terrible for the Church ; and the Church has to struggle with these evils in every generation. Yet even in exhausting adversity let us not despond ; because "all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to His purpose."

## SEARCHING JUDGMENTS FOR THE CHURCH.

Judgment has often fallen upon the house of God. The seed of the serpent, like tares among wheat, is always producing mischief for the Seed of the Woman. Before the days of John in Patmos, Christians had been severely persecuted. His brother James had fallen by the sword of Herod. Peter had to flee from Jerusalem. Many were scattered from their homes to the mountains. Paul had been stoned in Lystra, and beheaded in Rome. Thousands had been doomed to the lions by bloody Nero. Such evils have tracked the Church through all history. Yet all persecution is unjust; and its victims may appeal to the God of justice for recompense. Hence we find that under the fifth seal, the souls who were slain for the Word of God appeal to Him for vengeance upon their tormentors. Vengeance is not always cruelty. The best revenge for Christian persecution is the triumph of Christian truth. We have an example in the island of Erromanga. Within the memory of living men, John Williams was slain upon its shores by the club of a barbarian. Yet, instead of seeking the murderer's death, other missionaries were sent with the Gospel of peace; and the very man who slew the first missionary has been con-

verted to the Saviour. Such was the blessed revenge promised to the souls of the persecuted. Themselves were clad in white robes, and bidden rest in hope of the world's salvation (vi. 11).

Still the judgments of God for the world and the Church are to be most searching. Another seal was opened. All nature was convulsed. The earth quaked; the stars fell; the firmament was rolled together; the mountains were removed; and men of all ranks, especially the highest, were brought to their knees before the Lord. The great day of His wrath had come; and they were unable to stand.

Such is God's searching judgment for the world. His judgment for the Church will be both searching and satisfactory. His angels were ready to hurt the wicked earth; but nothing was done till His servants were sealed in their foreheads. The saved from Judah's land are represented by an hundred and forty and four thousand. The saved from other lands are represented by a great multitude, which no man can number. And here we have a blessed hope to cheer the Church in all her struggles. We are apt, in drooping moments, to fear that few will be saved. Our statistics show that Christians are still in the minority. The great majority of men are on the side of Satan. But the day of happy change is rapidly approach-

ing ; and at the last our numbers will be countless upon the plains of heaven. Nor is the sight to be only the glory of numbers. The ransomed of the Lord will be clad in white robes, with palms in their hands, and shall sing with happy hearts their choral song of triumph : " Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

#### FINAL REPOSE FOR THE CHURCH.

After the great tribulation of Christians, during which they are washed and made white in their Saviour's blood, they appear before the throne of God to serve Him day and night in His temple. The struggles of earth are completely over. " They hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither doth the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of water ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." And now, at the opening of the seventh seal, there is silence, or stillness, or repose in heaven, for the space of half an hour. Another series of lessons was in store for the Church. Seven angels were preparing to sound seven trumpets of warning. But, meanwhile, there is pause for a little space to admire the rest that remains for the people of God.

## CHAPTER III.

### FAITHFUL WARNINGS.

CHRIST is our Advocate with the Father. He prayed much for the Church during His life upon the earth. At many important seasons, we read of His communion with God. Special prayer was offered at the ordination of His Apostles. His transfiguration took place after He had gone into a mountain apart to pray. His prayer at that time was a preparation for talking with Moses and Elias about the decease to be accomplished at Jerusalem. Near the close of His public ministry, we have a wonderful specimen of His intercession, in which He pleads for Himself, His Apostles, and His Church throughout the world.

Christ's prayers for His people are continued in heaven: "He ever liveth to make intercession for us in the presence of God." And, in full accord with His earthly practice, we may expect Him to intercede for His Church, in seasons of peculiar trial. We are informed that, when Satan

was preparing to sift the disciples like wheat, Jesus prayed for Peter, that his faith might not fail. And there is reason to believe that Jesus, in the heavenly world, still prays for His people's stability in every season of coming affliction. He knows the end from the beginning; and takes care that, in the end of every conflict, His Church will be completely victorious.

Many trials were before the Christians when John wrote the Book of Revelation. They had to wrestle not merely with flesh and blood, nor with the temptations of trade and pleasure, but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places. In the views of coming trial of a special kind, and as a prelude to their revelation by the Apostle John, we are shown a picture of Jesus, in His glorious work of intercession. He appears in priestly attitude, with a golden censer at the golden altar, to offer the incense of many prayers before the heavenly throne. And in this glorious work of intercession, we see His foreknowledge of human history, and His profound desire for Christian safety. Like David, in a season of trouble, Jesus prayed in the prospect of future dangers: O God, "Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance" (Ps. xxviii. 9).

Christ's intercession in heaven is not intended

to prevent earthly trials. These trials are indispensable to correct the Church's faults, and bring the world to salvation. After pleading for Christian safety, the angel intercessor filled His censer with fire, and cast it upon the earth. There followed "voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake." These things are symbolic of the commotion, and strife, and sufferings, and sorrows of approaching history. And the "seven angels who now stood forth to sound their seven trumpets" were heralds of coming tribulation, employed to warn the Church against every danger, and be the means of her constant preservation. If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who can prepare aright for battle? But the trumpet angels give no uncertain sound, in calling Christians to battle for the Lord of Hosts, against all iniquity.

The first and second trumpets sound a warning against undue fondness for earthly pursuits. The "first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood." Hail is commonly a symbol of God's displeasure; and is sent for warning or correction in righteousness. Thus we are told in Exodus ix. 23, "The Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt." We are further told in Psalm lxxviii. 48, "He gave their cattle also to the



hail." In later years of Hebrew history, when God was provoked to punish their iniquities, He said, "I smote you with hail in all the labours of your hands." In the Book of Job, xxxviii. 22, 23, the Lord speaks of "treasures of hail, which He has reserved for the time of trouble." The great army of Assyria was beaten down with hailstones. (Isa. xxx. 30, 31.) So that we may justly regard the hail which followed the first trumpet sound, as an emblem of sin, and reproof, and warning, for the Church or the world.

There also followed the first trumpet "fire mingled with blood." Lightning is always a symbol of destruction. In the present instance the lightning was mingled with blood, which we take to signify rain of a blood-like, or reddish colour, produced by the fire which was flashing through the heavens. There are stories in America, of red coloured hail and rain; there are also stories among the Pyrenees, and Alps, and Appenines, of red coloured snow, which give a verisimilitude to this revelation figure, of "fire mingled with blood." (*See*. Barnes on Rev. viii. 7.) And these things were regarded by common people as predictive of serious calamities for mankind. Like falling stars, or meteors, they meant showers of mischief for the nations.

The hail and fire which John saw were cast upon the earth, and their effect was most disastrous. A "third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was destroyed." Such language seems to indicate that the labours of farming and husbandry would be severely tried. Wherever the trouble fell, and whatsoever shape it took, there would be distress among the rural population.

A similar calamity is predicted by the second trumpet. "The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was cast into the sea." A mountain burning with fire is a volcano. Its power to destroy was fearfully manifested about the year 70 A.D., by the ruin which Vesuvius wrought upon Pompeii or Herculaneum. And whatever be the particular agent of human ill, represented by the burning mountain, its effects will be terribly injurious. The third part of the sea is to become blood; the third part of living creatures in the sea are to die; and the third part of ships are to be destroyed."

These words have led some writers to regard the burning mountain as a furious nation, scouring the waters of the earth with the weapons of naval warfare, or, more generally, to regard the burning

mountain as representing the ruinous effects of strife upon all the arts of peaceful industry. The precise application of the figure is a secondary matter. It is enough that under the first and second trumpets the Church receives most solemn warning against undue fondness for earthly pursuits. The business of agriculture will be smitten in all its departments with hail, or fire, or tempest. The trees will fail to yield their fruit. The green herb will wither into dust. The flocks will die for want of pasture. The people will see little before them, except the struggles and sorrows of prevailing desolation. It will be similar through every branch of trade and commerce. To have no fruit on the tree, and no grass on the field, to have our ships rendered useless or destroyed, means a cessation of import and export, a diminution of employment for the active, and a season of limited provision for the community. Such things as famine and dull trade have been common in the course of human history. The world has been solemnly warned against worldliness. And Christians have been called in a thousand forms to think of God more than mammon, the Creator more than the creature, and prefer salvation of their souls to the highest of earthly possessions.

The third and fourth trumpets sound a warning

against worldly pleasure and ambition. A burning star now falls from heaven. The fall of meteors never fails to arrest human attention. They assume different colours, but are commonly clear as a shining lamp. Their fall is frequent at the beginning of winter, when the last sweet flowers of summer are gone, and we are approaching the gloom of winter desolation. The falling star which followed the third trumpet resembled a flaming torch, and smote the rivers and fountains of waters. Water is one of our finest blessings, and ministers largely to human enjoyment. "Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures." Such is David's way of describing the outcome of God's goodness in providing for our earthly happiness. But men are prone to abuse the goodness of God. We change the river of His pleasure into our own; and, in the indulgence of foolish tastes, or greedy appetites, or sensual passions, we pursue pleasure with unlawful eagerness. Now, this indulgence of carnal desire may be compared to a river on which we sail, or a stream from which we drink with peculiar delight. Men grow so fond of earthly pleasure that they prefer it even in life to the joys of heaven.

It is an effective way of correcting a wrong

taste for any sweet to make it bitter. A child will cease to love sugar if he find it mingled with aloes. The finest cup of earthly joy will lose its relish when we reach its dregs of misery. And dregs of misery are a frequent result of extravagant pleasures. The gay life of the prodigal ended in the low life of a drudge. The loud laugh of a drunkard, during the reeling hours of night, is followed by the quiet wail of morning repentance. The rivers or fountains of pleasant waters are smitten by a falling star, and completely changed. Its name is Wormwood, which is a universal symbol of bitterness. And the wormwood spoils a large proportion of sinful indulgences. A third part of the waters were affected. "Many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter." Here we have a solemn warning for every pleasure-seeker to beware of bitter disappointment.

The fourth trumpet was followed by an eclipse. A third part of the sun, moon, and stars were darkened. These heavenly bodies may be taken to represent the high objects of human ambition. It is right to look upward with soaring spirit, so long as we reserve the highest place in our soaring spirit for the Lord. He is the King of souls, and should be kept upon the throne of our affections.

But men are apt to leave the light of the Creator for the light of the creature. They worship sun, moon, and stars of fame, or power, or riches, or literature, or science, or philosophy. These things are very lofty, but they cannot have the seat of God. No idol shall usurp His place, or mount into His throne. And whenever the Church or the Christians of any age begin to look with sinful ambition to any material or intellectual possession, they come within the range of God's determination to abolish all idolatry. "The idols He will utterly abolish." And all the lights of sinful ambition, whether sun, or moon, or stars, are doomed to the darkness of perpetual eclipse.

The Church is further warned against the influence of Satanic temptation. Previous angels had done their duty. Previous trumpets had given no uncertain sound. But sinful men are prone to indifference. They learn to sleep among the trumpets, like soldiers on a battlefield, amidst the roar of cannon or the crash of arms. Accordingly, we have another angel flying through the midst of heaven, between the fourth and fifth trumpets, to deepen the powers of warning, by announcing three woes to which the inhabitants of the earth will be exposed unless they repent of their wickedness.

The first woe is a woe for men who yield themselves completely to the devil. His temptations come in many forms, and with terrible power. They are like the sting of a scorpion when it striketh a man. We meet them in scenes of business, where we are tempted to dishonesty; or scenes of repose, where we are tempted to dissipation; or scenes of feasting, where men run to shameful excess; or scenes of social intercourse, where the young especially are caught in the snares of wickedness. The temptations of Satan tend to darken the intellect, or confuse our judgment of sacred things, like smoke ascending from the bottomless pit. They also tend to pervert or destroy the souls of men, like locusts devouring every green thing in days of summer. These temptation locusts are under the command of King Apollyon, or King Destroyer; and, moving through the earth under his control, they inflict mischief and misery in all directions. The shapes assumed by locusts of temptation are truly devilish. At one time they are like horses prepared for battle against all godliness; at another time their heads are covered with gold, to attract the ambitious; at another time they wear the faces of men; yet all through their movements we see power and purpose to inflict the worst of

deadly injury. "In those days men shall seek death, but shall not find it." Only one thing remains for our encouragement in this terrific warring against Satanic temptation. The locusts are not allowed to hurt men who have the seal of God in their foreheads. There is our mark of safety. Christians are sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. The Spirit is freely promised to us all. Ask, and it shall be given. If ye, being evil, give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give you the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit's seal in your foreheads, or the Spirit's grace in your hearts, or the Spirit's protection in all your movements, you cannot fail to improve this warning of God against all the wiles of Satan. Let the Church fear the woe of yielding to temptation, and she is sure to conquer every enemy.

#### CHRISTIANS ARE WARNED AGAINST THE WOE OF STRIFE.

One of the greatest evils to which the Church could be exposed, and has been exposed, in the course of history, is the evil of internal contention. At a very early date we hear within her walls the loud noise of controversy. The Divinity of



our Saviour was assailed by the Arians ; and the work of saving souls was suspended for the work of defending our Saviour's dignity. The Holy Spirit's procession from the Son of God was denied with a fierceness which ultimately led to the division of Christians into the Greek and Roman Churches. Long and bitter strife was maintained in the Pelagian controversy, the Socinian controversy, the Arminian controversy, the Protestant controversy ; and during all seasons of strife, the proper work of Christianity has been seriously hindered. It is no part of our business, in the whole Church, or in any congregation, to bite and devour one another. And, wherever Christians have yielded to the spirit of contention in tearing one another to pieces, the result has been serious disaster. In saying these things we do not mean to decry all investigation or all discussion. No man is infallible. We cannot see all truth at a single glance, or state every form of subtle doctrine, without liability to mistake. Hence we need the help of other eyes to investigate or see all round many subjects ; and we need the help of keen discussion to guard against erroneous teaching. Our views of truth, however, should always be stated in love ; and the bitterness of acrimonious controversy should be avoided by the

Church as much as possible. It is a woe from which we should ever pray to be delivered.

The Church should also guard against the spirit of external strife. War is not the best of Christian work. Our highest mission is a mission of peace. And the Church should always appear as a peacemaker among the wars of our world. Such is the warning of another woe trumpet. The sixth angel sounded, and the evils of war were spread out for public inspection. "Loose the four angels which are bound on the great river Euphrates, and let them go to slay the third part of man." The carnage through which men have passed in the course of time is dreadful. The miseries of the carnage have covered nations with the shadow of death; churches too have been draped in mourning. And all Christians should learn to pray for peace on earth and goodwill to men.

The woe of war will not escape the woes of judgment. And we are cheered by the glorious prospect that an angel shall place his foot upon sea and land to stay the deadly work of armies and navies, and announce the glorious proclamation that warlike time shall be no longer. He who spake a word of peace to the raging sea of Galilee will then speak a corresponding word of peace to

the raging sea of nations ; and suddenly there will be a great calm.

And now we have a warning against neglecting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. John tells us (x. 7) that in the days of the voice of the seventh angel the mystery of God shall be finished. His introduction to the seventh trumpet is very magnificent. He gets a book to eat which tastes like honey, and proves bitter to his heart. It is a book of prophecy for many peoples. In that prophecy we see God's complete knowledge of His spiritual temple, and the mighty agents, human and material, by which His temple work is to be accomplished. The nations may prevail against the Church for a season, but God's two witnesses of light and love will ultimately prevail among the nations. There will be famine and distress ; there will be suffering and death ; there will be the quiver of an earthquake, or a soul quake, to make men glorify the God of heaven ; and then the last trumpet warning will be given to save men from the woe of perdition.

It is a curious warning. The second woe is past ; the third woe comes quickly ; and the seventh angel sounded with a trump that shook the universe. There were voices in heaven saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the

kingdoms of our God, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." The meaning of this trumpet is manifest. It is the full triumph of Christianity. Its beginning among the nations was very obscure. Daniel compares it to a little stone, cut from a mountain side, which grew in magnitude till it filled the earth. The Church in the days of John the Apostle had only commenced to evangelize the world. It had little power in Palestine, not much in Asia Minor, still less in Greece, least of all comparatively in the Roman empire. Its progress in other nations has been more rapid during the advance of time, although not so much as Christians can desire; but now, as we look forward to the close of every struggle, we learn that every kingdom of our sinful world shall be converted to the Saviour. The dark continent of Africa shall yet shine with the light of God; the snows of Greenland shall glow with His love; the plains of India, so luxuriant with other fruits, shall yield the blessed fruits of salvation. Every system of science, and philosophy, and worship falsely so-called, shall give place to Christianity. All kings shall serve King Jesus; and on His head shall the crown of every kingdom flourish throughout eternity.

Now where is the woe or the warning of the

seventh angel? It is here. Beware of missing a place among the saved. Let none of us be shut out when men are coming from the east and the west, and the north and the south, to sit down in the Kingdom of God. Let us rather prepare to sing with the four and twenty elders: "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty . . . . because Thou hast taken to Thee Thy great power and hast reigned."



## CHAPTER IV.

### HEAVENLY MESSAGES.

EVERY Christian delights in the prospective triumphs of Christianity., The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. It is the third woe of the angel trumpets, because the success of Christ will clothe His enemies with shame. Their sinister operations against the Lord's Anointed will be exposed, defeated, overruled; and heavenly spirits of every rank will rejoice to contemplate the glory of God's dominion in our ransomed world.

Following this vision of Christ's triumphant Church we have a picture of heavenly opposition to earthly wickedness. The heavenly opposition is led by Michael, the archangel. He is followed by a host of angel spirits, who excel in wisdom, strength, zeal for the Lord. Earthly evil is represented by a dragon, a serpent, a leopard, a bear, a lion. These creatures are symbols of the power, and cunning, and cruelty, and domination of wickedness over human souls. But angel influ-

ence, under the help of Christ, is sufficient to secure final victory. The angels mean to overcome by the blood of the Lamb. No combination of brute force shall prevail to destroy souls whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Every Satanic accuser of Christians will be cast down; and heavenly voices will begin to sing, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ."

The great struggle of the Church, even with angel assistance, against earthly wickedness, will be prolonged and severe. There will be conflict, more or less, in every age. Sin is like a beast with seven heads and ten horns; upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. Such a creature cannot be easily destroyed. If one head is smitten to the dust, it will raise another. Evil thoughts and evil deeds vary from season to season. Error is infinite. Iniquities are more numerous than the hairs upon our heads. These evils make war with the saints from generation to generation; yet there is wisdom and power enough among the saints, supplied by their Lord, to win eventually the kingdom and dominion under the whole heaven.

John's revelation of heavenly opposition to earthly wickedness (chaps. xii. and xiii.) is fol-

lowed by another splendid view of Christ: "I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads." The beloved disciple always delights to honour his beloved Master. Here, as formerly, a glorious vision of Christ introduces another section of apocalyptic teaching for the Churches. In this instance, our instruction is supplied by a few missionary angels, who are sent forth with important messages for the world. These angels proclaim mercy for sinners, death for sin, and judgment for the whole earth.

#### A MESSAGE OF MERCY FOR MANKIND.

The favoured Apostle saw another angel flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell upon the earth (xiv. 6). This other angel, whom John saw, is mentioned next to Michael, the leader of heavenly hosts (xii. 7). By linking the two angels together so closely, we are taught that God's opposition to man's iniquity is always accompanied and strikingly manifested by His Gospel of Mercy. All that is done to conquer Satan, and destroy the deadly force of sin, is done



through means of repentance and forgiveness. The Law of Sinai in the earthly wilderness leads us to the love of Sion in the heavenly Paradise. Our hardest struggle against evil in the soul or in the world should be maintained under the Captain of Salvation.

The Gospel of our Bible is glad tidings of mercy for sinners. It is called everlasting, because its offers are unbounded, and its blessings unfailing. Like Jesus Christ Himself, it is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." This changeless character of the Gospel adapts it to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. In every climate it is at home, unscorched by sunshine, and unstiffened by frost. Upon the glowing plains of India, or the icy shores of Greenland, it is always ready to diffuse spiritual blessing, like the pure river of living water which flows from the eternal throne. The everlasting Gospel is truly immortal. It cannot die. Its life is hid with Christ in God. Men have plunged it beneath the waves of sin, but it has risen again to the surface, unstained by the filthy water; they have cast it into the fire of criticism, but it has come unsinged from the hottest furnace; they have tried to cut it up into a thousand pieces, yet the pieces have come together, like steel fragments,

under the cohesive power of heavenly loadstone, and still maintain their everlasting unity. Every view of Gospel life in its duration, or its sameness, is extraordinary. Neither history, nor humanity, nor nature supplies an exact parallel to its continued existence. It is not a child of man, but a child of God, and is like Him in that feature of His character in which He is always the same, and His years have no end.

In the message of the angel, His everlasting Gospel calls upon men with loud or earnest voice to fear and glorify the Lord: "The hour of His judgment is come." We have reason to fear His judgment of our conduct. At the best, our conduct is not perfect; at the worst, it is disgraceful and ruinous. Take even an average view of human sin, and you cannot fail to see its danger. It never leads to happiness; it often leads to uneasiness, anxiety, and alarm. These things naturally create inquiry. A man who has looked at his sin can hardly fail to ask, "What must I do to be saved? Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord?" Such fear of God's judgment is the beginning of spiritual life, because it prepares an anxious soul for the Gospel of Faith in Jesus Christ, as a blessing which is worthy of all acceptance. The fear of God, as the Judge of

sin, should constrain every reasonable man to trust in our heaven-sent Saviour.

Salvation, then, raises the fear of God to a higher level. It becomes the fear of giving offence by any failure in the discharge of duty, or any violation of righteous commands. Such fear springs from gratitude and love. We are grateful to God for His unspeakable gift of saving mercy. "We love Him, because He first loved us." And the love thus produced becomes a motive power in our regeneration. It constrains or impels us to glorify God, by forsaking sin and following after righteousness.

Accordingly, the Gospel message never fails to point out the blessing of serving God. "Worship Him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Worship includes the devotion of our whole life. We worship our Maker in songs of thankfulness, our Saviour in prayer for mercy, our Preserver by looking to His wisdom for guidance. But worship is more than the praise, and prayer, and studies of the Christian Church. We should also worship God by bringing Christian principle to regulate the spirit, and temper, and tendency of our daily behaviour. "Whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God." That is

complete worship. And in rendering such worship we are taught to expect unbounded blessings. "In the keeping of His commandments there is great reward." The resources of Him who made the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water, will be opened for our advantage. The heavens will send down their sun and rain and dew; the earth will bring forth her fruits in their seasons; the abundance of the sea shall minister to the Church's welfare; and the fountains of water shall become a river to make glad the City of our God for ever. The Gospel is an everlasting message of blessing for the souls of men.

#### THE FUTURE DOWNFALL OF WICKEDNESS.

There followed another angel, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city; because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (xiv. 8). The Babylon of Revelation appears for the first time in the verse we have now quoted. In chapters seventeenth and eighteenth, we have a further account of that great city, with her character, her misdeeds, and her mischief upon the earth. It does not accord with our object on the present occasion to discuss

the question, Whether Babylon should be taken to represent the Church of Rome, or the baneful influence of Popery among the nations? It is enough to regard the word Babylon as an emblem of everything false in doctrine and sinful in practice, to which the souls of men have been devoted, or will be devoted, in the course of history. Babylon of old, in the years of Nebuchadnezzar, was a great transgressor. Her science was astrology; her philosophy was soothsaying; her worship was idolatry; her feasting was licentiousness. And because of her terrible wickedness she was doomed to destruction. The same evil character appears more or less conspicuously in the Babylon of Revelation. She is a mystery of iniquity; a mother of abominations; a mart of dishonest merchandise; a centre of spiritual tyranny; a sink of dissipation, whose votaries are defiled with all uncleanness. And, looking at the picture thus drawn by the sacred penman, we are not over-stating the evil of mystic Babylon, by taking her to represent every erroneous doctrine and every sinful deed which have marred the beauty, or retarded the progress of Christianity.

The evils of heresy and immorality have prevailed more or less in all churches and among all people. Babylon makes all nations drink of her

wine. We read in the Book of Proverbs that "wine is a mocker: strong drink is raging." It is so in the experience of every poor drunkard. Every hope of lasting happiness which he places in strong drink proves a mockery, a delusion, a snare; and every pang of woe that wrings the heart, every stain of disgrace which darkens the character, every trace of ruin that wastes the home of a drunkard, should make him regard drunkenness as a deadly enemy. Now there is something like the mockery of excessive drinking in the influence of false doctrine or foolish conduct among Christians. "They who err from the faith pierce themselves through with many sorrows." And all nations or churches, who drink the wine of Babylon, must expect its fearful consequences.

Those consequences are set forth in no mincing language. The Babylon of heresy, or the Babylon of iniquity, is doomed to perish. Any system that becomes a habitation of devils, or a hold of foul spirits, or a cage of every unclean bird, deserves to fall. It cannot stand in God's judgment, and will be driven away like chaff before the wind. Isaiah's account of desolation for old Babylon will be realized in the Babylon of Revelation. "The wild beasts of the islands shall cry in the desolate houses, and dragons

in their pleasant palaces; her days shall not be prolonged" (Isaiah xiii. 19-22.)

The destruction of wickedness is minutely described by a third missionary angel. He cried with a loud voice, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation." We are often taught that in the infliction of judgment God repays men with their own coin. He gives compensation in kind; or measure for measure. The wine of Babylon's immorality is to be followed by the wine of God's wrath; the cup of her pleasure with the cup of His indignation. And whatever mingling of joy and sorrow there may be in the present world, there will be no mixture to dull the pains of future punishment, or modify the mischief of damnable heresy. Indeed, the prospect is one of complete destruction for all the power of wickedness. It will sink to a pit of fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of destruction, when sin is brought to a perpetual end, shall ascend up for ever and ever.

Yet even in these terrible messages about the coming downfall of wickedness, whether it exalt

itself in the temple of God or the temples of men, we have a word of hope for the penitent and the saved. John heard a voice from heaven at the hour of Babylon's fall, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." These words are meant for the ears of every sinner. Be not partakers of sin. It is a call to repentance; and every pain or plague of sin which you have felt or feared should constrain you to flee from endless misery. And the call to come out of Babylon, or come away from erroneous teaching or sinful conduct, is specially intended for every Christian. "Come out of her, my people." It is not a place for you to occupy. The children of a king should not dwell in the dungeon of rebellion. There is no safety for honest men in a den of thieves. In complying with the call of God to leave every den of wickedness and every dungeon of rebellion, we shall receive unspeakable benefits. "Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." They will die like men in the course of nature; they will live like angels in the glories of heaven. John heard another voice from heaven bidding him write the destiny of saints beyond the stroke of death. "Blessed are the



dead who die in the Lord from henceforth : yea, saith the Spirit, they rest from their labours ; and their works do follow them." The lesson which shines with immortal beauty out of these words is unmistakable : " Whether we live, let us live to the Lord ; whether we die, let us die to the Lord ; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's for ever."

#### THE FINAL JUDGMENT OF THE EARTH.

Our Lord teaches very plainly that angels will have important work to do in our world's judgment. In expounding His parable of the tares, He speaks of the world's end as a harvest in which the reapers are the angels. Their business is to gather the wheat into the heavenly garner, and bind the tares together for the burning. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels ; and they shall gather together all things that offend and them that do iniquity, and consign them to perdition.

Such is the view of angel-work in the day of judgment which John gives by direction of Jesus in the Book of Revelation. " Behold, He cometh with clouds." Among these clouds He will appear sitting on a throne of glory. It is called a white

throne, to symbolise the purity of Him who dwells in perfect light. All heaven regards Him with veneration. He is the centre of all power. God has given Him authority to execute judgment. And while John was gazing with wonder upon the whole scene, he saw an angel come out of the temple, saying to Him that sat on the cloud, "Thrust in thy sickle, and reap : for the harvest of the earth is ripe." The first part of judgment is very clearly indicated in different parts of Holy Scripture. We are told in Paul's writings to the Thessalonians, that the dead in Christ shall rise first from the tomb. We learn from our Lord's own lips that He will begin the work of judgment by a blessing for the righteous. (Matt. xxv. 31, etc.) Before Him shall be gathered all nations. The righteous will be placed on His right, the wicked on His left; and, turning to the righteous, He will give them blessed welcome to the heavenly kingdom, because, under the influence of His faith and love, their lives had been filled with heavenly benevolence. The harvest of the earth was ripe in the golden sheaves which the great Sower had produced from the good seed of His Gospel. And having received the Judge's approval, the golden sheaves, after due obeisance to their Lord, ascend to the glories of life eternal.

A most painful word has yet to be spoken by the missionary angels. The tares have to be gathered from the field. Our Lord in His account of the judgment deals with the wicked after the righteous. They had done nothing in His service. If bidden come for mercy, they had refused ; if told of great salvation, they had used it with neglect. Instead of trusting to the cross of Christ, they had crucified Him afresh. Instead of following His works of welldoing for the hungry, and the naked, and the sick, and the dying, they had preferred a life of self-indulgence or reckless iniquity. And now their sentence is, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Such is John's revelation of coming judgment. After the earth had been reaped of the righteous, he saw a mighty angel come out of the temple, with a sharp sickle in his hand. He was ready for work ; and another angel, who had power over fire, appeared to give the word of command, "Thrust in thy sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth ; for her grapes are fully ripe." We take these earthly grapes to be, what one of the prophets calls, the clusters of a strange vine unto God, or, what another calls grapes of Sodom and clusters of Gomorrah. They are con-

signed to the winepress of God's wrath; and the blood of these grapes is spread three or four feet deep over a space of two thousand miles, to picture the awful doom of the wicked. Well may sinners in Zion be afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrites in the prospect of coming judgment. Who can stand before the Lamb in the great day of His wrath? Only they who trust in Him for salvation."



## CHAPTER V.

### SEVERE TRIALS.

REPETITION of warnings, by means of correction and instruction for the Christian Church, has been common in God's providence. "He has given line upon line, and precept upon precept." One woe is followed by a second; the second by a third, different in form, yet substantially the same, in strong expressions of God's displeasure against iniquity.

There are several points of resemblance between the seven trumpets and the seven vials of Revelation. They relate to different periods of Christian history; but, in both periods, the work of God is done by the ministry of angels. The trumpet angels give warnings to the Church by showing some terrible evils which would be sent to reprove some glaring forms of human transgression; the vial angels reveal a series of trials for the Church, inflicted directly upon Christians, to show the ruinous effect of Christian delinquency. In the times of the vial angels judgment will begin with

the house of God, or fall heavily upon His own mistaken people. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." The chastisement is fully deserved, yet its object is most benevolent, in preparing the afflicted Church "afterwards to yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

The evils to be inflicted upon men by the vial angels are called the seven last plagues. They will come nearer to the end of the world than any previous portion of Revelation prophecy. In the messages sent from heaven by the missionary angels, whose work is detailed in chapter xvi., we have a distinct account of final judgment. The ripe wheat of salvation will be gathered to the heavenly garner; the grapes of sin will be crushed in the wine-press of Divine wrath; and the last plagues of the vial angels will be sent to prepare men for their last account with God.

It is possible to group the trials and the lessons of the vial angels under three general heads. The diseases of the mind, like diseases of the body, require different sorts of treatment to produce perfect health. A good physician will prescribe irritant, soothing, or tonic medicines, according to circumstances; and, on the same principle, we have angel after angel sent to employ different methods, even under the seven last plagues, to

prepare mankind for judgment. Their trust in earthly things, and their disposition to trifle with heavenly things, will be smitten with many stripes, that by these stripes their spiritual diseases may be completely healed.

The introduction to coming trials for the Church is another exalted view of Christ. John saw a sea of glass mingled with fire. Upon the fiery, glassy sea there stood a shining company of triumphant Christians. They had been victorious over every enemy; they had been supplied with heavenly harps; and now they unite their highest powers to sing the Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb, "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints." Christ Jesus is the King of Saints; and He is thus presented with glorious majesty, to cheer His people in every duty, and deliver them at last out of all tribulation. Seven plagues from the vial angels will ruin many a system of human heresy and human wickedness; but the King of Saints will take care that nations will come to worship God when His judgments are made manifest. "Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?" He that hath an ear, let him hear what the vial angels say unto the Churches.

## SEVERE TRIALS FOR OVER-TRUST IN EARTHLY THINGS.

Most of us trust overmuch in health, trade, pleasure. All people admire a strong frame and a vigorous mind. So far there is nothing wrong. The blessing of health is most precious. But men are apt to presume upon the continuance of health, and use it like an endless possession. We hear some people boasting proudly of their iron muscles, strong arms, massy limbs, robust constitution, and apparently coming to the conclusion that they can defy all manner of disease. Like monarchs of all they survey, they are disposed to adapt the old kingly salutation, and say, "O self, live for ever!" Now, the first vial angel comes to humble men in their pride of health. "He poured out his vial upon the earth, and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon men who had the mark of the beast. We take the mark of the beast to include everything which exalts itself against the knowledge of God or His worship. The Beast itself may be and is one great system of iniquity. But the mark of the beast in false doctrine and foul conduct appears in all directions. And it is possible to find neglect of God in sanitary movements or sanitary expectations. Such



movements are unspeakably valuable, and cannot fail to have a beneficial effect upon public health. The death-rate is sure to fall in a town where every street or every house is distinguished for cleanliness. But no sanitary movement on our sinful earth will ever abolish death. If men expect to do so, they are exalting themselves, or their sanitary movements, against God, who can easily send a "noisome and grievous sore" of a new description to smite their presumption. Or it may be an old disease revived. The Greek word "sore" of the first vial is the "boil" which appeared among the plagues of Egypt. In all ages forgetful and presumptuous men will be taught to feel that they depend for health upon the Lord God Almighty. The mark of the beast will not save men from trouble, as the mark of the blood saved the firstborn of Israel from the destroying angel on the night before the Exodus.

Trade is another thing in which men trust over-much. The benefits of trade are fully recognised in all nations. Business is the great means of personal and public prosperity. It is to a large extent a matter of exchange: money is exchanged for work, and work for money. The productions of one country are exchanged for the productions of another; and in the daily use of skill, energy,

talent, perseverance, men find a golden way to riches. This is trade; and, because it has so much to do with human wealth, it acquires a wrong dominion over the human soul. We act as if man was made only to be diligent in earthly business.

One great means of trading is the sea. It is a medium of traffic from shore to shore, or from kingdom to kingdom; and nothing tells more severely upon international trade than a great marine calamity. Now, the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea, and it became blood, and every living creature died. The sounding of the second trumpet changed a third part of the sea into blood. Here the lesson is repeated in a wider form. Men who trust to uncertain trade, or uncertain riches, are taught that the whole of them are at God's mercy. A storm may sink a fleet of merchantmen. A naval war among a few nations may sprinkle the blood of living men over all the oceans. There may be sorrow on the sea; and sorrow on the sea always means a heavy blow for trading communities.

Men also delight in earthly pleasure. They believe it to be fleeting; yet they trust it, as if it stood fast like the mountains. In many cases pleasure is pursued with intense eagerness. Health,

strength, trade, wealth, are made the ministers or the means of earthly enjoyment. Such enjoyment commonly leads to the neglect of spiritual duty. Any material body coming between the earth and the sun will produce an eclipse. And when any earthly object comes between the soul and God there is an eclipse of spiritual light. This is markedly so with sensual pleasure. It darkens our vision of heavenly things; and, like the darkness of idolatry, it is doomed to perish. At best it is short-lived; and people who live in pleasure live in a very precarious possession.

This is manifest under the third trial for mankind. The third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters. These waters are symbols of pleasures, and in a moment they are corrupted and spoiled. Rivers and fountains of delight are changed into blood, or changed into rivers and fountains of death. The Lord sitteth upon the waters, and when men use the good things of earth entirely for self-indulgence, He carries them away as a flood.

In all these trials we learn that the justice of God will be fully recognised. The angel of the waters, which supply health, and trade, and pleasure, proclaims that God is right in punishing the wicked for their misdeeds. It accords with the

Song of Moses, the servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb, "Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints." Men who shed the blood of saints and prophets receive blood to drink instead. It is done to them as they did to others; they get what they gave. And, in response to the angel of the waters, another cried out of the heavenly altar, "Even so, Lord God Almighty; true and righteous are Thy judgments."

#### SEVERE TRIALS FOR HERO-WORSHIP.

There is a strong tendency in every mind to look with high respect upon the distinguished possessors of learning, or talent, or genius. The power of intellect is like the power of a king. The possessor of talent or genius is like Joseph among his brethren. Their sheaves make obeisance to his sheaf. Their lights bow themselves before his light. It is well in every sense that men should set a high value upon mental or spiritual greatness. Yet it is possible that our respect for human greatness may be overdone, and react with serious mischief upon ourselves. The soul of man should never be a slave. Any disposition to worship the souls of others may leave our spirits in a state of slavery. Even the best of

great men are a little exacting; and we seldom bow at their shadow without being brought to feel that there is something unpleasant or oppressive in their substance.

Hero-worship is a fault or weakness of every age. The dark centuries worshipped the learned schoolmen. The last century unduly magnified the talent of English Deists. The present century has bent largely to the genius of scepticism. A conspicuous display of erudition, even on the side of infidelity, commands a ready display of admiration. And such weakness is sharply reproved in the Book of Revelation. The fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun. At the sounding of the fourth trumpet, there was an eclipse, and a third part of the sun was darkened. At the outpouring of the fourth vial the force of the sun was intensified. Power was given unto him to scorch men with fire; and his scorching influence led them to blaspheme the name of God, and refuse to give Him glory. Let us take the sun here to represent the burning influence of learned infidelity. There have been sun-worshippers in many lands; there have been worshippers of learned infidelity in all lands. And the increase of the sun's scorching power is very like the increasing mischief of infidel thought in some periods of human history. During such

periods, men, left to themselves, blaspheme the name of God, and repent not of their wickedness. They go on in their evil path till the scorching fire of evil genius is exhausted, and they discover that the flame of infidelity will land them in the blackness of infernal darkness.

Closely connected with undue respect for human intellect is undue respect for human authority. It is a plausible device, by which thinking for ourselves is made easy. At many points it is identical with superstition; and in all circumstances it helps to relieve men of perplexity, by giving them an umpire among conflicting opinions. It is true that every concentration of wisdom commands respect; and every decision, on any subject, which comes from a real centre of wisdom, should be accepted with due submission. Yet in doing so there is danger of mistake. To escape the vortex of Charybdis men run against the rocks of Scylla. Leaving the whirlpool of conflicting opinions, they dash upon the rock where a fallible priest is endowed with infallible authority. In this way they surrender their souls to spiritual bondage.

To correct this evil, the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast. The seat of the beast is the centre of his power; and we

take it to represent any centre of human power which presumes to restrain the rights of private judgment, or dictate in matters of Christian conscience and Divine revelation. Such presumption is found in all men, all societies, all churches. Man "dressed in a little brief authority" plays many fantastic tricks. And the worst of it is, that some people regard such tricks with wonderful toleration. Not so with God. He corrects every wrong use of authority, and every wrong submission to authority, by smiting the seat of the beast. The results of the fifth vial are similar to the results of the fourth. There was an increase of power for the beast. His kingdom was darkened; and for a season the souls of men were afflicted with deeds of darkness. It is so with assaults upon any centre of tyranny. When the men of Israel went to Rehoboam for the relaxation of tyrannic power, he replied, "My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." And when the dark kingdom of the beast was smitten, there was an increase of trouble, which led men to blaspheme the God of heaven, and continue in their wickedness. Nothing could be more painful to contemplate. Our trials should bring us to God. They are schoolmasters who should bring us to Christ for salvation. A man

who turns away from God, and refuses to repent in time of trial, is wronging his own soul. "All that hate God love death" (Prov. viii. 36).

Another object of human veneration is antiquity. Every old thing is good. Old coins, old china, old paintings, old ruins, old buildings, old customs, are regarded with a kind of adoration. It is the same with old stores of knowledge. Every specimen of human lore which is covered with the mould of antiquity is held up like the ancient idol of a heathen temple for public devotion. Now the river Euphrates suggests a host of ancient things which have been treated with much respect. The learning of Persia, the wealth of Assyria, the glory of Babylon, the beauty of Paradise, are brought up by the very name. Old systems of thought which long prevailed, or yet prevail, in Oriental nations, centre around the river Euphrates. These systems of thought have had their influence in all history, and have been opposed to the coming of King Jesus. But their opposition will come to an end. The sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates, and all its opposition to Christianity was soon subdued. Unclean spirits from the mouth of the dragon, and the beast, and the false prophet, with all their infernal machinations, were brought to battle with the



Almighty, and completely vanquished. He came on them as a thief, slew them in a place called Armageddon, or Destruction, like the mountain of Megiddo, where the old Canaanites were slain with a terrible slaughter. Yet, even here we have a happy promise, "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb." Thus God hangs over every dark cloud His rainbow of mercy.

#### SEVERE TRIALS FOR SPIRITUAL INDIFFERENCE.

The world and the Church are often afflicted with a spirit of slumber. In the days of Zechariah all the earth was sitting still and at rest. It is so in our day. Many professing Christians are fast asleep; and there is reason to fear that the Churches will give way more and more to spiritual slumbers, until they are startled by the voice of the archangel, or the trump of God.

In the quiet hours of night men are sometimes rudely awaked. A flash of lightning opens the sleeping eye, a peal of thunder unstops the heavy ear, a quivering earthquake produces intense alarm. Indeed, the whole providence of God is full of startling events. Cities fall from their dignity, thrones are overturned, nations are destroyed. We

look in vain for the ancient dignity of Heliopolis, or the golden throne of Solomon, or the powerful dominion of Alexander. Even particular churches pass through wonderful transformation in the course of ages. The Christians of Ephesus and Smyrna and Sardis, the Churches of Galatia and Cappadocia, even the Churches of Palestine, can only tell of departed glory. Such events mean an extensive change in human history and human character. They also mean that God employs the lightning, the thunder, the earthquake, the downfall of cities, the revolution of empires, the vicissitudes of churches, to secure the final success of His people. All things work together for good to them that love God. And this general lesson is strikingly given by the seventh vial angel. He poured out his vial into the air. And there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven from the throne, saying, "It is done." The last plague was sent forth on its grand commission to remove iniquity and prepare the souls of men for eternal holiness. In two chapters of Revelation (xvii., xviii.) we see evil after evil corrected. The beast goes to perdition, lofty Babylon is brought low, ungodly merchandise is swept from the earth, slavery is abolished for ever, extravagance disappears from human feasting, human souls are raised to a full


conception of spiritual duty and spiritual happiness; and, at the end of all these events, we see the universe assemble to celebrate the restored sovereignty of Jehovah. "After these things," says John the Apostle, "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God." Salvation is the first and highest note in every heavenly song; and it should be the first and highest blessing in our earthly pursuit. More than we seek the good of time, in its fairest and fullest and most enduring aspects, let us seek the saving of our immortal souls. Then we shall stand beside God's throne to survey the destruction of every evil, and sing that His judgments are true and righteous; then shall we respond to the royal voice which calls for praise to God from every servant; and then shall we listen, with thrilling sympathy, as John did, to a volume of sound like the voice of many waters, or the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

## CHAPTER VI.

### FINAL TRIUMPH.

CHRISTIANITY is a grand conflict with wickedness. "The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil." His works are most injurious to the souls of men ; and the Church's labour for their destruction appears in every part of Christian history. No evil has been spared ; sinful thought, feeling, speech, conduct, have been assailed with determined opposition. The axe laid to the root of the tree, in the days of Christ's forerunner, has been kept at work, and many trees, not yielding good fruit, have been hewn down and cast into the fire.

The Church's conflict with evil has been conducted throughout the ages with varying success. At times, particular sins have risen like a flowing tide. "The enemy has come in like a flood." We have had different waves of infidelity, and different waves of ungodliness ; yet Christianity, through the Spirit of God, has struggled success-



fully against every tide, and kept her head above the swelling waters.

Successful struggles in the past create a hope of future success. Every triumph gained over doubt, or infidelity, or wickedness, contains a prediction of other triumphs. The more we gain, the more we expect, because every gain is an increase of strength; and our Bible has given us the full assurance of Divine promise that our struggles to conquer evil will not be vain in the Lord. Every weapon which He employs bears, like an old English war-ship, the name of Victory.

This comprehensive view of Christian effort to destroy iniquity is well given by John in the Book of Revelation. At the very outset, the Church is told what she is to do, and what she is to accomplish. Her severe struggles with sin are distinctly revealed. She is faithfully warned against every enemy. Messages are sent from heaven by missionary angels, to assist the Christians in every duty, and prepare them for eternal reward. Trials will come upon the Church in the form of plagues, poured out by angel hand, to purge away her dross, and make her shine with holy beauty, like silver purified in a furnace. And then we are shown what to expect amidst the glories of final triumph.

John's picture of final triumph for the Church

begins with the Captain of Salvation. He is seated on the white Gospel-charger, on which He rode forth at the beginning of His holy warfare, conquering and to conquer. (Rev. vi. 2.) His eyes resemble flashing fire. His efforts for human welfare are faithful and true. His name is the Word of God. On His head there is a circle of many crowns. He controls the armies of creation. They count Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And looking to the glorious result of all His work for God and men, the universe is invited to rejoice in His eternal victory. Leaving the martial figure for a moment, John says, "The marriage of the Lamb is come;" and we are invited to behold King Jesus, as the daughters of Zion were invited to behold King Solomon, with the crown where-with he was crowned in the day of his espousals, and the day of the gladness of his heart.

The final triumph of Christ includes the final triumph of His Church. He and His people are one. We are workers together with God. We follow Jesus, like part of Himself, to fight beneath His cross. We expect to wear a crown with Jesus in His heavenly throne. And in John's Revelation of coming glory, we see a palm of victory for every Christian. Among final triumphs

## SIN IS SUBDUED AND CHRISTIANITY PROSPERS.

We still avoid minute exposition, and keep to a synoptic view of John's writings. The temptation is strong to discuss the Millennarian question. This question has been unduly magnified, chiefly by an attempt, on the part of learned divines, to give literal force to the parabolic language of Revelation. We believe in a Millennium, in the sense of believing that Christ will reign, or that Christianity will have spiritual dominion upon the earth, for a thousand years. The years may be indefinite. It is so with nearly all the numbers employed in the Apocalypse. A thousand and six hundred furlongs, in chap. xiv. 20, is a general expression. One hundred and forty and four thousand sealed men only represent, in a comprehensive way, the souls to be saved from the land of Israel. Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, around the throne, are explained to mean a great multitude which no man can number. (Cf. Rev. v. 11 and vii. 9.) God's way of counting is very different from ours. One day is with Him as a thousand years. And looking at the thousand years, or Millennium of Christ's reign upon the earth, we may fairly take them to mean an indefinite period of coming history.

During that period we are taught to expect a general cessation of wickedness throughout the world. The great dragon, the old serpent, the devil and Satan, are to be bound in chains. Satan especially is to be cast into the bottomless pit, shut up and sealed, that he may deceive the nations no more for a lengthened season. Such language can hardly be mistaken. Sin is very much the result of Satanic deception. The serpent beguiled our first parents in the garden. The devil attempted to beguile our Saviour in the wilderness. Beguilement is the essence of temptation. Men are led to a wrong conception of wickedness. The young imagine that sowing wild oats will produce good grain. The lover of sensual pleasure pursues it in the mistaken hope of lasting happiness. The dishonest, after escaping detection once or twice, begin to look for perpetual concealment. Delusion is a besetting weakness among drunkards. They forget a host of miseries, and fancy they can indulge their false appetites a little more without risk of serious harm. All sinners are bewitched, like the foolish Galatians, not to obey the truth of God. And when we are told that Satan shall no more deceive the nations for a thousand years, we expect to see a strong restraint upon his powers of temptation.



The result of restrained temptation will be less iniquity. Remove the cause, and the effect will cease. We are promised a time when sin will hide its head for shame, and the miseries of sin will come to a perpetual end. In times of prevailing evil men are proud of their misconduct. Vice is fashionable. Our young people think it manly, genteel, noble, to indulge a little wrong-doing. They learn that iniquity is common among the wealthy, the respectable, the aristocratic portions of a community, and like the great men of Judea in the days of David and Solomon, they delight to follow after wickedness. All these things will disappear from society when the devil is chained and kept from deceiving the nations. Public opinion on the glory of sin will be completely altered. Falsehood will no more be counted cleverness, nor dishonesty smartness, nor cursing manliness, nor crime in any sense honourable. The disgrace of sin will be publicly recognised. Men will seek true exaltation in the practice of righteousness. And every nation will be a delightful land before the Lord of Hosts.

The delightsomeness will be produced by the spread of Christianity. When all temptation is suspended, the Church of Christ will prosper. Christians will be earnest and active. Many

will run to and fro for the increase of knowledge. The Gospel will be fully preached; the Bible freely circulated; the means of heavenly mercy pressed upon the attention of every sinner; the Spirit of the Lord poured out from on high to make every wilderness a fruitful field. Sinners will be converted in every quarter; nations will be born in a day; and the nations of the saved will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

John says he saw the souls of them that were slain for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God restored to life. He speaks of this revival as the first resurrection. By so doing he seems to teach that Christ's dominion during the Millennium will be a dominion of souls. Whether temporal or not His reign will certainly be spiritual. This is its highest glory. Life from death in sin is immensely better than life from death in any material grave. It is the chief resurrection for any man to covet. And however much we desire to have our bodies raised from dust at the Last Day, we should desire still more to have our souls raised on this present day from death in wickedness. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God

and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (xx. 6).

SIN IS REVIVED AND SPEEDY JUDGMENT FOLLOWS.

"When the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison." His deliverance will be followed by a supreme effort in his favourite work of temptation. It was a bold deed to assail our first parents in the garden of Eden. They were unweakened by any evil, and surrounded by every earthly blessing which could bind their hearts to God. But they were alone; and their solitude was an advantage to the enemy. He took the advantage with consummate skill, and his daring effort was only too successful. There will be something more daring in his last effort to tempt mankind. He will go forth to deceive the nations, which are in the four quarters of the earth. It is at the close of the Millennium. The nations will then be almost or altogether Christians. Their numbers will increase their strength. One benefit of church union among God's people is united resistance to our great adversary. An army is easily conquered, if taken company by company, or man by man. An army completely united under a skilful captain can

defy the shock of a mighty enemy. So with the Church of Christ. Its united hosts should be invincible. And the boldness of Satan's assault upon the Church, at a period when it embraces the world, is nothing short of spiritual madness.

The madness is characterised by devilish method. There is no lack of courage. He gives battle to the Christians, although their number is as the sand of the sea. "His own legions, however, are more numerous. They compass the camp of the saints, and the beloved city." You can fancy the siege. Company after company of demons is drawn out at every coign of vantage. Their artillery is fitly placed. A weapon of destruction is directed against every dwelling in the beloved city. No waggon can enter with supplies of food. No man can pass out for safety. The camp of the saints is like the town of Sedan, or the city of Paris in 1870, surrounded by the Germans. It seems a moment of complete triumph for the devil over the saints, as in the day when Sodom was in his power. But once more God sends fire from heaven to devour His adversaries. His lightnings lighten the world. The effect upon Satan and his legions, in their last effort to damage the Church, or deceive mankind, is most destructive. The desolator is made desolate. The victor is

overthrown. He is cast into a lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet are, to endure eternal torment. Satan's grand attempt to revive iniquity at the end of millennial years will be a miserable failure.

The failure of Satan is followed by speedy judgment. After these things John saw a vision of the last assize. A great white throne appeared in the skies. He that sat upon it was most brilliant and majestic to behold. Before His face the earth and the heaven fled away. Nothing was seen but the brightness of God. It is always so in the presence of superior light. A candle is dimmed in the flare of gas ; the gas is dimmed in the lightning power of electricity. The morning stars become invisible behind the rising sun. And in this sense the heavens and the earth fled away from the sight of John, when he saw the shining glory of Jesus on His white throne of judgment.

Another sight took the eye of John, in which every man is profoundly interested. He saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. It was a vast assembly, including all tribes and peoples and tongues and nations ; including every variety of human character, every feeling of intense fear, every form of lofty expectation. And now, as we think of the immense crowd, let us try to fancy the

place which we must occupy. Every one of us will be there as a spectator of the scene, a sharer of the wonder, a party at the bar of judgment, a receiver of eternal sentence. As distinctly as if we stood alone before the Judge, He will pronounce our name, with curses or blessings on our head.

The cursings or the blessings will depend upon our place in the Lamb's Book of Life. More books than one will be opened. The Book of Law will lie before the Judge, and there He will see what we deserve for countless acts of disobedience. The Book of Love will lie before Him, and there He will read whether the goodness of God has led us to repentance, or the Gospel of mercy has constrained us to seek forgiveness, or the blessings of saving grace have become our personal possession. The Book of Memory will be opened for our inspection; and in the Book of Memory we will find the testimony of reason, judgment, conscience, ready, like faithful witnesses, to confirm the record of God's remembrance. In addition to these books, the Book of Life will be opened, in which the name of every spirit is written who will receive the Judge's welcome. The blessing is in the Book of Life, which contains our title to the heavenly kingdom.

John's glance at the resurrection is rapid and

comprehensive. The sea and earth gave up their dead. From the lowest depths of ocean, where men repose beneath the raging billows; from the lonely resting-place in thick forest or open desert, where murdered bodies have been hidden beneath the earth; from the quiet churchyard in the smiling valley, or the little God's Acre on the mountain side, or the large city cemetery where dust has mingled with kindred dust in scores or thousands for many generations, all will rise to appear at the bar of Jesus, and be judged every man according to his works.

The works of faith in Jesus are the way to eternal reward. Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish. We are looking to a time when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth shall be consigned to exhausting flame. But amidst all that vanishes in the terrible day of judgment the word of the Lord will endure for ever. His promise is clear as the sun, that every soul that believes on Jesus shall be written in the Book of Life; and when that Book is opened before the white throne, the men who are written there shall go away into life everlasting.

THE CHURCH WILL BE COMPLETE IN GLORY AND  
HAPPINESS.

It is not possible by any vision, with all the help of sanctified imagination, to form a full conception of the Church triumphant. John tells us that he saw a new heaven and a new earth, which, according to divine promise, will be full of righteousness. He also tells us that he saw the New Jerusalem coming down from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. He goes on to say that he heard a great voice from heaven, saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people." It is a glorious view of the heavenly home to which the Church will come at the close of every work, and trouble, and battle, for the Lord of Hosts. There will be rest instead of weariness, joy instead of trouble, peace instead of battle; God will dwell with the saved, and the saved will dwell with God for ever.

The glory of the heavenly home is depicted in no common language. It has been well said that dreams cannot picture a world so fair. We can only take the grandest things of earth spread over its whole surface or hidden in its deep stores, bring them together, look at their magnificence,



and conclude that heaven is infinitely superior. The holy city is substantial in every foundation ; it is garnished with all manner of precious stones ; its structure is convenient for every happy purpose ; its walls can never be destroyed ; its gates are never shut ; its streets are purest gold ; its glory is all divine. Within the city there is everything to charm the eye, and please the heart, and exalt the mind, and satisfy the spirit. And yet, after doing our utmost to realize every blessing which such language is able to express, we have to remember the sacred words of the Apostle Paul, " Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has laid up for them that love Him."

Two things are specially marked in the Church's future happiness. It will never be disturbed, and never darkened. There will be no more curse. The finest of our earthly homes is not secure from the assaults of evil. Death can enter into our palaces, sorrow can dim the brightest eye, crying can be heard in the grandest apartments, pain can reach us on our beds of down ; groans and sighs and tears are no strangers in earthly dwellings. Such things are part of the curse. But in heaven the Church is beyond every curse. It has conquered sin. And He who gives the victory

gives the assurance that every trace of sin will be effaced. There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, nor groans, nor sighs, nor tears; for "God shall wipe away all tears from the eye."

And the happiness of heaven will never be darkened. There will be no night there; no shadow of misery; nothing to suggest the possibility of darkness. Isaiah anticipates the revelation of John in the beautiful prophecy regarding the victorious Church, "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." Indeed, night in heaven is impossible, because it is filled with the glory of God and the happiness of Jesus Christ.

Thus in surveying the closing chapters of Revelation, "the eye of hope is directed forward beyond the reign of sin to see a thousand years of uninterrupted prosperity for the Church, then the swift destruction of a mighty enemy, and then all the rest is left to joyful anticipation. When the clouds are chased from the sky, the sun shines forth in all His glory." And when the clouds of judgment have passed away, the glories of the saved shine forth in the beauty of perfect happiness.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CLOSING LESSONS OF REVELATION.

CHRIST'S connection with the Apocalypse is manifest throughout the Book. It is not so much the work of John the Divine, as it is the work of his heavenly Master. Baumgarten regards the Acts of the Apostles as a continuation of our Lord's gospel ministry. He pursues in heaven His work for the good of men which He commenced during His life upon the earth. And Luke's narrative of apostolic labour is substantially a narrative of Christ's labour for the conversion of Jews and Gentiles.

We take a similar view of the Book of Revelation. It is emphatically the Revelation of Jesus Christ, made through His servant John, among the rocks of Patmos, as the law was given by Moses among the rocks of Sinai. In this Book we have Christ's parabolic style of teaching in its highest form. All things in nature and providence are made figures of spiritual truth. The earth, the sea, the air, the clouds, the light, the sun, the

stars, are made teachers of everlasting doctrine, and are employed with mysterious power to instruct the souls of all nations.

John's Revelation touches upon all history, in narrative or prediction, from the beginning to the end of Christianity. The Church learns, labours, struggles, improves, increases, conquers every enemy, until at last it is made perfect in glory. And then, when all is finished, Jesus is for evermore exalted.

The Book of Revelation closes with a fine view of our Lord's wonderful Person: "I am the root and the offspring of David." There is a union here of God and man. In no sense can Christ be the root of David except as the Author of his existence, or the giver of his official dignity. He made him a man and a king. We cannot doubt that God is the Creator of David, as He is the Creator of all things. He gives the life which is contained in any root. And, looking to Jesus as the root of David's life, we are looking to nothing less than our Saviour's Divinity.

We are not left in any perplexity about the Giver of David's official dignity. The Lord sent Samuel to select him from among the sons of Jesse, anoint him to kingly office, and assure him of a seat upon the throne of Israel. The

honour did not come in a day. Young David had a very chequered career; yet God guarded him like a peculiar treasure, and raised him to rule the Hebrew nation. If ever man was indebted to God for any blessing, the son of Jesse was indebted to God for the crown of Palestine. And to speak of Jesus as the root of David's kingship, is to speak of Jesus as a Divine Person.

The offspring of David must be human. We cannot give the word another signification. It cannot be rightly applied to a successor in office; and therefore nothing remains for us but to accept the true humanity of Christ, and believe Him to be God and man in one glorious Person. Astronomers tell us that some stars are composed of twin bodies. They are really two, though they appear to be one. In like manner the root and the offspring of David will always shine before the universe like one bright and morning star.

This view of our Lord's person is fitly followed by a few earnest calls to salvation: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Here we have, first of all, the heavenly Agent and the earthly instruments of Gospel preaching. The heavenly agent is the Holy

Spirit. He holds forth the things of Christ for the acceptance of human souls. The Father's love is a fountain of life, to which He bids us come. The Son's mediation is a stream of life, to which we are also invited. And, in the moment that any sinner is disposed to comply with the Spirit's invitation, He gives power to accept the offered blessing.

At the same time the duty of the Church, with the duty of every Gospel hearer, is plainly expressed. The bride says, Come. The bride is the Church; and she is constituted, with all her means of diffusing spiritual wisdom, for the express purpose of bringing sinners to their Saviour. Her ministers, sermons, ordinances of every kind, should be always calling upon sinners to come. Like Moses, to a brother in his time, we should say to every brother in our time, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." And the duty of bringing sinners to Jesus is solemnly laid upon every one who knows the joyful sound of salvation. "Let him that heareth say, Come." The instant that a man understands the way of life, he should publish it to all the perishing. Thus, as a fitting consummation to all the spiritual revelations of the Sacred Volume, we

are shown the Spirit of the Lord, the Church of the Saviour, the hearer of the Gospel, united in the blessed work of publishing salvation.

And no doubt is left about the persons for whom the blessings of salvation are intended. "Let him that is athirst come." Men are commonly panting and pushing after something good. They are never satisfied with the present; there is always a little more of earthly comfort, or earthly riches, or earthly honours, which they are anxious to reach. Even when the spiritual and the heavenly are not fully recognised, or possibly understood, there is a craving in the human soul after something above the present which is very like the craving of thirst for cooling water. And to every man, whether panting after earthly or heavenly good, the call is given: Come to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And lest there be any fear in the mind of any sinner that the word thirst, or any other specific word in the Bible, does not exactly meet his case, or lest any one should be disposed to think he is not included, the call is put in the most general terms: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The appeal is made directly to the man. The decision is left to our own will. As Jesus said to the impotent man at the pool of

Bethesda, He says to us all, "Wilt thou be made whole?" He takes no account of particular faults or weaknesses; He makes no exception on the ground of sins often repeated and greatly aggravated. He points to the stream of life flowing like a river from the throne of heaven, and bids us drink with perfect freedom.

The sufficiency of Holy Scripture for every saving purpose is now distinctly stated. In our Lord's parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus we find the rich man in the place of torment desiring a special message for his sinful brethren. He seemed to think that a departed spirit going back to his native country would lead any multitude of sinners to repentance. It was a mistake; for, in reply to the rich man, Abraham said, with Divine authority, "If sinners believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rose from the dead." The same doctrine is repeated at the close of our Bible. "It is finished." No more is needed to expose the danger of sin, or the deceitfulness of Satan, or the doom of impenitence. No more is needed to show the power of Christ, or the beauty of salvation, or the blessings of holiness, or the attractions of heaven. Nothing can be taken away from the great principles of moral and spiritual duty which



the Book contains. Bible addition, or Bible subtraction, is forbidden by a threat of terrible consequences: "If any man add to the words of prophecy, God shall smite him with the plagues which are written in this book. If any man take away from the words of the book, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy city."

#### THE PROMISED COMING OF JESUS.

"He who testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly." It is the time of the end. We have been shown the future Church made perfect through suffering; and now it only remains that the Church made perfect through doing and suffering should be exalted to glory.

At such a point the speedy coming of Jesus is a most natural announcement. He comes to exalt His people. It is the subject of frequent promise: "I go to prepare a place for you;" "I will come again, and receive you to Myself." They who have followed Christ upon earth shall sit with Him at His Father's right hand: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life;" "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me." And now, when we are told at the

close of Revelation that Jesus is coming quickly, we see in His hand a host of crowns for His ransomed followers. There is royal honour, as well as royal happiness, in the words, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

And Christ's coming at the end of all will be followed by universal empire for the Godhead. Every sin will then be vanquished; every enemy will then be subdued. Apollyon will no more go forth to destroy the nations. If not constrained to acknowledge the power of Christ, he will be doomed to endless perdition. Such is the consummation which Paul had in view when telling our Saviour's power over death, and the prospects of a glorious resurrection: "Then cometh the end, when He shall have put down all rule, authority, power, and shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in all." It is like the beloved John to acquiesce so heartily in his Master's words, "Surely I come quickly: Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### JOHN'S CHARACTER AND DEATH.

THE Christian character of John is one of the finest which is depicted upon the sacred page. He was a man of love. There was nothing offensive to any one in his word or spirit. He was brother-like to all his brethren. Even a burst of indignation against a village of cold-hearted Samaritans was a proof of strong affection for Christ. And his strong affection for Christ was always conspicuous. His faith was unwavering, his courage was constant, his obedience was prompt, his disposition was modest; and on all occasions, he was willing to wait or work, as occasion required, for his Master's glory. The best proof of his winsome character appears in his Master's love. He was emphatically the disciple whom Jesus loved, and, beyond all others, his character was an imitation of Christ.

An able writer sums up the chief points of John's personal character nearly in the following terms:—"He was distinguished not only by

marks of the peculiar regard and confidence of his Master, but by a bold and unwavering attachment to His cause. Antiquity attributes to him great liveliness of temper, and high personal attractions; traits of character which may well account for his being so much beloved. It is objected by some, that John was specially inclined to harshness and selfishness. He forbade a person to cast out devils in the name of Jesus, because he was not a professed disciple. (Mark ix. 38.) He wished a seat of honour in the Messiah's expected kingdom. (Mark x. 35-37.) We see little here to prove that John was either harsh or selfish. But admitting the fact of youthful imperfection in the early years of his discipleship, we know that the quality of love, meekness, and humility, afterwards became conspicuous in his character. His temperament was ardent and devoted. On more than one occasion we find him foremost in action, and fearless in danger." Comparing him with Peter, or any other apostle, we know none whose faith and love and steadfastness, viewed all round, more completely realises the figure of Christ's peculiar people, zealous of good works.

The literary character of John was of a high order. He did not possess the refined and profound scholarship of Paul. The schools of

Bethsaida were not equal to the schools of Tarsus. He had few, if any, opportunities of studying the models of Greek thought or Roman eloquence. The Greek in which he spake and wrote was not his native tongue. And no one will venture to say that his writing will bear a favourable comparison with the classic writings of antiquity. Indeed, it is doubtful if Homer, or Herodotus, or Demosthenes, or Xenophon, could have read, or would have cared to read, what they would have called the barbarous Greek of the New Testament. It would have sounded like the *patois* of Jersey in the ears of a Parisian, or the dialect of Yorkshire in the ears of educated English society.

Yet, notwithstanding these things, the style of John's writing is clear, incisive, and sometimes touchingly eloquent. His narrative is unmistakable. He makes you see the feast of Cana, or the feeding of five thousand, or the oarsmen upon the lake "toiling in rowing" against opposing winds, or the company of disciples, with their beloved Master, around the first communion table, or the awful scene of the Saviour's crucifixion. Dealing with sin in the general Epistles his words cut to the very heart of transgressors. A man that hates his brother walketh in darkness. A man who loves the world cannot love God. Wilful unbelief is

falsehood. "Who is a liar, but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ?" We have eloquence that should touch every heart in the exclamation—"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" And we do not know that any writer has ever come nearer the highest point of sublimity than John has done in the doxologies of heavenly worship. What soul will not respond to the exalted anthem, "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."

In recording the discourses of Christ, John displays a singular power of handling spiritual truth. He does the work of an amanuensis, but he does it with a clear understanding of what he writes, and he does it in a way to secure the intelligence of every reader. The necessity of being born again is irresistible. The bread of heaven is brought near to all the hungry. There is living water for every one that thirsteth. And no stricken heart can fail to find comfort in our Lord's parting words to His disciples: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Peace I leave with you. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The prophetic insight of John, or his power of writing prophecy, is not surpassed by any among the ancients. Here, especially, we see a peculiar talent of dealing with spiritual imagery. The heavens above, the earth beneath, the waters under the earth, are his obedient servants. He stands at the open door of heaven, and makes every rank of living creatures do something in the praise of God; he roams over earth and sea to find means of setting the deepest of divine things before the eyes of humanity; he takes the key of death and hell from the hand of Jesus, to open the wonders of resurrection and the secrets of judgment; he draws the veil of all future things, and bids us view them in the light of eternity. The prophetic writings of John embrace the Gospel sweetness of Isaiah, the daring denunciations of Jeremiah, the mysterious imagery of Ezekiel; and, rising above them in full conception of the spiritual work committed to his trust, he reveals the wisdom, and the grace, and the glory of Jesus Christ. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy;" and John gives that testimony in a style which has not been exactly paralleled in the history of mankind.

The closing years of John's life were remarkable for peacefulness. Like the Apostle of the Gentiles,

whose labours he followed in Asia Minor, he had "fought a good fight." Bold as a lion before the Jewish council, firm as a rock in the midst of surging crowds, he had earnestly contended for the faith of the Gospel. It would be a trial for his tender heart to see his brother James killed by the sword of Herod. The martyrdom of Paul and Peter, and all his fellow apostles, would be a severe test of his steadfastness. He stood last of the honoured band, not because they had all forsaken him, but because they had all passed away through much tribulation to the kingdom. His own tribulations were excessive, though his tribulation in Patmos had been wonderfully overruled for the Church's welfare. And whether we think of John contending with Gnostic heretics, or wrestling with spiritual wickedness, or doing battle with rulers of worldly darkness, or waging war with sinners that he might win them to salvation, we see him enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

The evening of his life was quietly spent in the city of Ephesus. Living beyond the age of fourscore years and ten, his natural force was much abated. According to Jerome, he was an hundred years old; according to Suidas, he was an hundred and twenty. Yet to the last he was



at his loved employ. After his power of preaching failed, and his power of conversation became feeble, he saluted every Christian assembly, great or small, with the patriarchal greeting: "Little children, love one another." It was the salutation of peace with which Jesus bade him enter every house in the work of pastoral visitation. It was a benediction of peace, which, in the spirit of the new commandment, he left behind him for the world. With words of love upon his lips, John died, in the city of Ephesus, full of years, full of usefulness, full of honours, and went to rest from his labours among the blessed dead who die in the Lord.









