

The Seven Letters, or A Divine Church History

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The Divine Introduction

CHAPTER II.

THE DIVINE

INTRODUCTION.

Let us, then, in self-distrust, and yet in confidence in the goodness of our Saviour-God address ourselves to our book. The introductory verses read very literally:

"Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show to His bondmen what things must take place shortly, and he signified it by sending His angel, to His bondrnan John, who testified the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ; whatsoever things he saw. Blessed he that reads, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written in it; for the time is near."

Note carefully the first words.

The book is not simple inspired, as is all Scripture, but it is a direct Revelation. This is a most important distinction - "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" but all Scripture is not a revelation from God. When poor Job moans his awful perplexities, we get no word of revelation; quite the contrary, we see how sad is man's case until a gracious God does intervene. So when the wisest man that ever lived, utters his groan of "Vanity," he expresses the utter inadequacy of the highest unaided wisdom apart from revelation. But all is inspired. All is under the control of the Spirit of God. And he is dull indeed who does not adore the tender, thoughtful love that has permitted man in his best, and in his wisest, to tell out fearlessly those profound

questions to which God alone can ever provide an - answer. Inspiration here shows the need of Revelation. We are now to listen to Revelation itself. God telling us what could be known in no other way. But mark it is a "Revelation of Jesus Christ," that is a revelation belonging to Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is not here the object of the revelation; but the owner of it, for God has given it to Him. Wonderful, startling words! Let earlier Scriptures throw their light tipon them.

Did He not say, when once before in a smaller sphere He was about to judge: "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?" (Gen. xviii:7.) If not from His "friend," how much less from His Son? And again, "Surely, the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth it to His servants, the prophets." So surely now to this one perfect "Servant, the Prophet," Jesus, God is going to reveal what He is about to do.

Oh, that we knew Him better. For beautiful is He in whatever light we see Him, whether with veiled face and unshod foot, we adoringly bow before His incomprehensible Divinity; or whether we draw closer to Him, in the loving reverential intimacy of His holy Humanity with its self-assumed limitations. And it is most clearly in this latter aspect that He is seen here; and the light of another Scripture must again throw its holy ray on these words that we may enter into their significance a little, for here is the first key of the book.

You remember that strange word in that Gospel of the perfect Servant (Mark xiii:32): "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, NEITHER THE SON, but the Father." Do we not then see here something on which this perfect Servant

(for in this character is He presented to us in this gospel) needed a revelation? What was this? It was the hour of the Father's counsels as to the earth being brought into effect and its rule being put into His own hands.

Perfect, perfect man! He will put away from Himself here all divine prescience, and in absolute submission, and self-imposed limitation, await in patience God's time for receiving that kingdom His own have denied Him - on this He now receives a revelation.

This is so important a point that I desire to emphasize it a little by repetition, especially as I am not aware of its having been made use of by commentators generally. It is well for us thankfully to recognize that, as with every book in the Bible, our gracious God hangs up the key to all its treasure-rooms at its very entrance, so to speak, in the first few verses; and this should save us from some very common mistakes. For instance, in view of these words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him," we may be quite sure that THE CHURCH is not the main subject of the book. This "mystery" had, at this time, been made known by revelation (Eph. iii:3) many years before to another servant, Paul, who, in proclaiming it, had "filled full the word of God," by which I understand that there is nothing of the "exceeding riches of His grace," and of the "manifold wisdom of God" that is - not fully told out by that wondrous mystery: the Church. And yet God's ways in time needed further light thrown on them. Paul's ministry left much as to the government of the earth unrevealed; and as to this, the scroll of God's counsels had yet to be opened, and His purposes brought into effect; and this could not be, as long as He was calling

out a people to share His beloved Son's place in the heavens. It is quite true, too, that we may expect to see the Church, as having the very closest place to her Lord in the wide sphere of His government; and, as being His House, in responsibility on the earth, to find that government first exercised there in the earlier chapters (cf. i Pet. iv:17); whilst, at the close, our eyes may be cheered by a sight of the Bride, The Lamb's Wife, still clothed with all the fresh beauties of her bridal attractions; and so, as the unfaded and unfading object of Divine delight, entering Eternity. It is a blessed and precious final view of her. But whilst the Spouse of the King has a place in the Kingdom, and a most important and exalted one, we must not confound that place with the Kingdom itself. Our book gives a revelation as to this larger sphere.

It is the Kingdom, then, that we have before us; the government of God over this earth that has revolted from Him; and which here we shall see brought back. It is a theme that, in some circles of saints, hardly has its due place. They are so entranced with the beauties of grace to themselves; so delighted with their own place and portion that they fail to take a wider view and enter into the thoughts of God. There is, however, a sublime Drama of the Ages being played out (if I may be permitted an expression that may seem unworthy) with its good and evil forces in awful strife; and this book sees and reveals the last comprehensive Acts in this Drama, and closes with a new creation - earth and heaven so close together as to be one, and that one tied with chords of willing subjection and devotion to the Throne of a well-known, and, we may say, blessed be His name, a well-loved God.

Jesus, as the Servant of God, is alone the Mediator through whom this can be. God will now tell his Servant what He is about to do through Him; and He, the blessed Lover of our race, will not keep the revelation to Himself; but at once send it to His servants, by the hand of His servant John (note how everything is on the lower level of service, instead of sonship) in order that they may serve with clear intelligence as to the future; with no baseless hopes on the one hand, and with no baseless depression on the other. So that whilst they may see the storm clouds of judgment rapidly gathering, they may not be discouraged, but look beyond to a day of a thousand years of "clear shining after rain" (i Sam. xxiii: 21). And if this blessed millennial day, too, closes again in still more furious storms, and more awful judgments, still further may the servant's eye pierce, to that still brighter day, that is never to be darkened with cloud, nor even shadowed by any falling twilight, but is the Eternal Sabbath of God.

We must not pass by any characteristic word unnoticed, and there is one in this first verse that calls for this. He signified it by His angel. This is very striking. We have not been accustomed to anything like this in the New Testament scriptures, where all communications between the Lord Jesus and His people have been direct, and with personal intimacy. It is, however, exactly in accord with His ways in government, as told us in the scriptures of the Old Testament. There, constantly, does "the Angel of the Lord" appear to His servants; yet before this Angel departs, is the eye often opened, and we hear a startled cry of poor nature uttering its alarm at the discovery of the Lord Himself in that Angel (Judges Xlii:22).

So here we too may see with John, when he turned, no inferior angel, but the Lord Himself; only in a majesty that demands reverent adoration, rather than the holy and blessed familiarity of old. It is the same Person, but we are in other scenes, and find Him in another aspect and character, in conformity therewith. He is here the divinely accredited representative of God's government; and, as such, His claims begin instantly with those nearest to Him - with you and me, dear reader, and the recognition of this must precede true profit from this Book. We shall find every word in perfect conformity with this, nor shall we be left in the least in doubt as to the claims of the Book on Conscience or on the Heart. Note how quickly it lays title to being "The Word of God." Of no other complete book has such a formal claim been made. As already said, all have been inspired, but not all have been pure revelation. Paul did not preface all he wrote with "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord" (i Thess. iv), and this must necessarily give another character to what immediately follows, putting it on the same level as the "Thus saith the Lord" of the prophets of old. All here is thus "The Word of God."

But it is also "the Testimony of Jesus." Will not this appeal to our heart's affections, and bid us listen? Here is our Lord Himself testifying; shall we need more inducement than to know that we are about to listen to Him? And yet we have something more than a promised special blessing to him that even reads, but a gracious hand is beckoning to us to advance still further, and to "hear," that is, to meditate, to let the word enter deeply into our beings, and not resting satisfied with merely an external acquaintance with the - letter; but to understand it, as this word "hear" ever implies. B-ut still

further on this pathway is there a blessing for them that "keep," that is, who obey, and govern their lives practically by it. Nor must we dissever these three. That "reading" only is blessed which leads to "hearing," and this to practical "keeping." Only it is to encourage us to begin with reading, even though we may not at first be able to hear, or understand, at all. Let us only be willing to put into practice all we do learn, and all shall eventually become clear.

But this brings us to what with many will be the first difficulty: "for the time is at hands." Nearly 2,000 weary years have passed, and yet all the words of the prophecy have certainly not been fulfilled. Nor is the difficulty lessened by noting that the same form of words exactly occurs at the very end, "Seal not the words of the prophecy of this book - the time is at hand"; but this at once turns our minds to the strongly contrasted command to the other beloved man who wrote a similar word of prophecy in the Old Testament. "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, even to the time of the end." In the one case the book is to be left open; "the time near"; in the other sealed up, for the time was still afar. Clearly in the former case the thread of time on which, as it were, the events that are here seen strung begins to unwind at once, and we shall surely see this. There is nothing to come between in the former - much in the latter. Nor do the words we are considering at all necessitate the immediate fulfilment of all the words. They do, however (what the Lord ever seeks) put us in the attitude of immediate and constant expectancy and watchfulness. Oh, look at time with God; "long" will not be long then; any more than it will be when we do actually look back at it from eternity.

The Greeting and Response

CHAPTER III.

THE GREETING AND

RESPONSE.

Contrast with the greetings in the epistles—The divine Name here—Shaddai, Jehovah, Father—The seven Spirits: why seven?—Is. xi—Hidden beauties—"from Jesus Christ"—three-fold beauty, awakening a corresponding three-fold response—Who sings this: the Jew or the Church?—The Enoch-warning, "He cometh!"—This our testimony to the world; not the rapture—The divine "Amen."

(V. 4-6). "The Greeting,"

which reads literally:

"John to the seven assemblies which are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from Who Is, and Who Was and Who [is] to Come; and from the seven Spirits which [are] before His Throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the First-born from among the dead, and the ruler of the Kings of the earth.

"To Him Who loves us, and washed us from our sins in His blood, and made us a Kingdom, priests to God and His Father: to Him the glory and the might to the ages of the ages. Amen."

How full of significance is this greeting in its strong contrast to that in all the epistles we have hitherto read. In the first place we note that it is neither to one specific assembly, nor to the assembly as a whole scattered all

over the earth. It picks out just seven assemblies, all of which are in Asia. But the number seven has in itself the idea of unity, inasmuch as it is the well-known number of completeness or perfection. Surely, then, this number is selected to give us, in some sort, a picture or view of the Church as a whole. There are other assemblies or churches, in Asia, that are here omitted, as Colosse. Clearly, then, there was a divine intent in selecting seven; and not only are we justified in recognizing this, but are really compelled to do so. Every one, who has read the book at all, must have noted how strangely it has everywhere marked on it this number of completeness. It is everywhere; and the closer one's study of it, the more this fact is discerned. Not only is it prominent on seals, trumpets, vials, etc., but even certain words again and again occur in it exactly seven times in a way that can only be accounted for by design. Is it not to tell us that God's written revelation to man is completed by this Book? That, in it, He has completed all that He has to say to us in this way, till we are at Home with Himself? The seven churches then will give us a complete view of the One Church in seven different conditions.

Asia is of course not the continent we know by that name, nor even Asia-Minor; but only a province in the extreme west of this, bordering on the Aegean Sea. We have the old familiar greeting of grace and peace; but no longer are these from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ; but from Him Who Is, Who Was, Who is to Come - and this is too significant to pass without attention. We not be satisfied with reading. We must seek to hear.

When

Moses was sent to the captive Israelites, he desired to know what to say to those who should ask who sent him. The answer was, "I am that I am." "I am," "the ever existing One," hath sent thee. And again in Ex. vi we get, "I am Jehovah. And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the Name of God-Almighty (El Shaddai), but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them." But does not this look like a contradiction? Not known by the name Jehovah to Abraham! Did not Abraham repeatedly build an altar to Jehovah (Gen. xii: 8), and call upon the name of Jehovah (Gen. xii:8)? So Isaac (Gen. xxvi:2 and Jacob (Gen. xxxii:9), and yet God was not known to them by His Name Jehovah! How can this be accounted for? It is a difficulty, and infidelity seizes on it with delight. But Wisdom's children ever justify her, and they wait, confident not merely of an explanation, but of a profound truth and blessing in that explanation. We only truly know what we use, and we only use what meets our present need. Abraham in one sense clearly knew God as Jehovah, and built altars to Him, yet he entered not into what that Name meant for him. He did not walk with, rest upon Him, revealed in the character expressed by the name Jehovah. It was but an external acquaintance with the Name; not a knowledge with power. But God had revealed Himself to him as El Shaddai. The One able to do anything and everything, and Abraham thus "walked with God," and God tried him, to see how he had learned this first lesson, that He was teaching man. Abraham had learned it by heart, for he counted that God was able even to raise Isaac from the dead. He knew God as El Shaddai. But Israel in Egypt needs to learn another lessons They are the children of the patriarchs, and yet are they in

bondage. Does God live? Is He, and Is He faithful to His promises? The Name "Jehovah" answers this, and it is under this Name Israel shall finally be saved and brought into blessing, and she shall sing, "For His mercy endureth forever" when at last she has learned that Name by heart, as she shall in a day soon to come; for it is in this character God meets her need; and let us repeat we only truly know what meets felt need. Is it not ever so? Surely nothing can be in one sense more simple than the gospel of our salvation.

Yet none understand it, but those who, since it is adapted to their felt needs, take it in, and use it. They that received the seed on good ground alone understands the word, as Matt. Xiii:23 tells us.

For the poor believer now, with no external deliverance; no literally divided sea, or stricken rock; no. constant evidence to the very senses, of His care, in clothes never wearing old and foot never weary - what does he need? To know Him in a closer, sweeter character than ever. To cry no shadow of doubt or show of distance: "Father," and that is how we learn Him now by the Son's gracious teaching (Matt. xi). But of Father you will not find so used in this Book from beginning to end. How can this possibly be accounted for, except that it has a different character altogether?

Evidently, then nothing can be more profoundly and suggestive than this Name coming 'Who Is, Who was, Who Is to Come.' Will it not catch the ear of Israel on earth? At least will it not suggest even to us this further truth that is, as the earth with its government is the primary theme of the book, the children of the fathers, to whom were the promises, will be the medium by

which that government is to be displayed ? Surely this is harmonious with all preceding Scripture. God tells out His grace by the church in heaven; His government by Israel on the earth. Thus, when that book, written within and without, that tells of God's purposes as to the earth to be brought into effect, is to be opened, how does the Only Worthy One present Himself? As "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah; the Root of David."

But not here do we so see Him; for the greeting goes on "from the Seven Spirits which are before the Throne. We know perfectly well that this language must not be taken literally as though there were actually Seven Persons; for the Third Person of the Trinity is One; yet just as the seven churches express the seven characters of the one church, so the seven Spirits are the seven complete characters of the One Spirit, and this strongly confirms our view of the unity of the seven churches. You remember that we get something very like this in Is. xi: 2, "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom, and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and of fear of the Lord." Here, as in the One Lampstand with its seven lamps, we get first the main shaft in "the Spirit of the Lord," and then the three pairs of branches on either side, in the various characters. It is no longer Unity that is the prominent idea, as it is today, when "by One Spirit are we all baptised into one body"- "and have been all made to drink into One Spirit," i Cor. xii:ii but the activities of the Spirit in sevenfold, or complete, energy.

By looking a little closer at that lovely antitype of the Lampstand, we shall only see, as always the case with His work, finished beauties. There are clearly three pairs, but each pair has its own peculiar sphere in

harmony with the threefold relationship of man by his tripartite being. We may call them personal or self-ward, earthward, Godward.

The first pair, 'Wisdom and understanding'- the personal qualities of the Lord. What He ever is in Himself irrespective of any other relationship.

The second pair,

"Counsel and might." Evidently, from the first word, this pair has others in the same sphere as Himself, in view, whilst the second word suggests power to carry out what He knows of right in this scene. It is the earth to which men are in relationship by the soul.

Third,

"Knowledge and the fear of Jehovah" clearly speaks of a relationship with Him who is above, the word of knowledge being that always used for the knowledge of God. It is the relationship of the Spirit with God. Body, soul and spirit all absolutely controlled by the Spirit of Jehovah.

But now comes another greeting "from Jesus Christ" in threefold beauty. First as the "Faithful Witness;" so shall we see Him later in His letter to Laodicea. Next as "the first born of the dead." And finally as "The prince of the Kings of the earth."

It tells out the whole blessed story. He was here as the one only faithful witness amid the lapsed testimony of Israel. Aye, but in this devil-ruled world, the witness is only the martyr, and, as such, He was slain. But all carries out God's counsels. He is the first of the dead to be raised, and He shall yet have the crown of all the earth.

What wonder if such a sight awakens a responsive song?
What wonder if immediately we have, as if from some
unseen chorus that cannot keep silence, a joyous
doxology: "To Him that loves was not this love one of His
manifold perfections that made Him the faithful witness?
"And washed us from our sins in His own blood."

Was it not to this that God turned that death to be for
us? And did He not raise Him from the dead, as evidence
of its perfect sufficiency and effectiveness? Aye, no
angels are singing here, but it is all who know His name
Jesus Christ.

"And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His
Father." So that Love works on. And if He is to be King,
as He surely is, not alone will He reign, but the objects
of His love shall be with Him; for 'tis "Love that gives
not as the world, but shares All it possesses with its
loved co-heirs."

Do you not see, dear reader, with me, that each form in
which this Blessed One presents Himself is met by its
corresponding cry of responsive delight? And do not you
and I too want to add our little "Amen" to the ascription
of "glory and dominion to Him for ever and ever?"

There can surely be no possible uncertainty as to the
company that is here singing. Who in all the wide
creation can thus boldly declare that the Lord Jesus
Christ loves them? You may answer that all the elect,
whether angels or men, know this. Granted; but who
could add, "and washed us from our sins in His own
blood ?" Angels are quite silent now, and must leave this
sweetest melody to the redeemed from among men, and
of these, the church alone could so sing; for no Israelite
ever knew thus surely the infinite blessing of a

redemption accomplished. No blood of any sacrifice he ever offered could thus make him perfect. And this saves us from the more modern error of taking the whole book away from the Lord's people of this dispensation, and giving it exclusively to the Jew, or Israel. It is simply impossible to think of any Jew in unbelief in the present day, or any pious remnant of the future, when in the gloom of that tribulation in which they suffer the "terrors of God," raising this joyous song. They greatly err who exclude the church from her part in the book. For how strong, how sure, how clear is the joy - there is no question and no veil. Sin has been a barrier, but is so no longer - this company like Enoch is walking with God; and a joyous happy walk that ever is.

But not only did Enoch walk with God; he lifted up, in his day, a prophetic voice to the evil about him. To him, in that holy walk of separation, God told the secrets of coming judgment, and Enoch prophesied, saying: "Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints to execute judgment."

Surely it is another Enoch that now again utters exactly the same prophetic warning, only now it is not a single person, but a company, yet with but one testimony, one voice, since indwelt by One Spirit. "Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced Him, and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him."

Yes, one may enjoy the comfort of this thought; that every single one who can share in the song can share in the prophetic warning. We differ to our shame amongst ourselves in details, but there is not one, no matter what the differences, who has been "washed from his sins in

His blood," but knows surely that "He is coming with clouds;" we are "of one heart, of one mouth here." But may we not go a little further thus hand in hand? Can there be the slightest question as to point of time that is here in view? It is the revelation in power and glory of the earth-rejected Jesus. The world saw Him last with every mark of its hatred on His holy Body: His Head, still bearing the marks of thorny crown, was bowed in death; His hands and feet were still nailed to the shameful cross with a dead thief on either side; His side was pierced with the spear; and there it looked on Him, as it went its way that Friday evening so long ago. It has never, from that hour, seen Him since; for then Love and Faith alone were permitted to wait upon Him, and only to His Own dear people did He show Himself alive after His resurrection.

But how sharp the contrast!

Once more as of old "He maketh the clouds His chariot;" and, in a majesty that is no less than divine, every eye beholds Him. No saint or angel are here noticed, although He shall not lack such attendance. He must have the unrivalled place, the undivided gaze of every eye, and when that is the case there is little room for controversy. "They also that pierced Him"- not the one hired soldier whose spear proved that He was dead - but all the hatred and unbelief that lay focussed, as it were behind that spear; all fleshly enmity that is on earth at that time (for it is the earth that is in view) shall clearly see Him then. Is there one element of joy for them that dwell on the earth in this revelation? Not one, for wails resound as the kindreds of the earth who rejected its King, see Him coming in a power they can no longer resist, to claim His own.

Who would or could confound such a scene of solemn judgment with that joyful morning when we are caught up in the same chariot, the clouds, to meet Him in the air? Then there is nothing but grace, now there is nothing but judgment. Then there is nothing but song, now only wails are heard. Oh, no, Enoch had gone long before the judgment - flood poured over the earth; and the church, that is here heard, both singing and prophesying, shall too have been translated to her home long before - God be thanked! Yet should we learn that the burden of our testimony to the world today is not one syllable of that rapture which should ever be held strictly a family secret, not to be spoken of to the world to which we should ever faithfully witness alone of the return in glory and power of the One it rejected.

A still more solemn voice is now heard confirming the prophecy with "Yea, amen" (which words belong to verse 8 not 7, as in our A.V.). I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

A reference to the other places where a similar declaration is made leaves no doubt as to the Speaker. It is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Jesus of the New. He who is "The Word," begins and ends all speech. His voice spoke all creation into being in the beginning; and He alone shall be heard at last, in that same creation, saying "It is done." For who, or what, can resist Him. He is The Almighty.

The Vision

CHAPTER

IV.

THE VISION.

John the human writer is our brother -This tribulation, not the Great Tribulation, distinctions - The Kingdom and Patience - Force of "In the Spirit" - The "Lord's Day" not the first day of the week - Akin to, but slightly differing from, The Day of the Lord - What are the differences? - The Sabbath, its significance and the Christian's relation to it - Opposite error of confusing "The Lord's Day" absolutely with "The Day of the Lord" - Varying powers of hearing - Is Heaven near or far? - What John sees on turning - The ten dignities.

Verse 9-19. The

Vision.

"I, John, who also am your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the island that is called Patmos, because of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus. I became in the Spirit in the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice as of a trumpet saying, "What thou seest write in a book and send to the seven assemblies, to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." John, the beloved disciple, first tells us how closely he is related to us and we to him by the bond of a common life. He is our brother. Is it not a precious thing to be one in a family with such an one? John, Peter, Paul,

are our brothers. Are we not, through rich grace, "well connected?"

But next he lets us know the present lot of this one family in the world. Not in Kings' Courts, nor indeed in the comforts of earth, were these our brethren found. The earth has sent them along the same path as their Lord, for here is the beloved disciple in close fellowship with His Master, and so he calls himself our "companion in the tribulation of Jesus Christ."

But, beloved, permit me a word of warning here against a line of teaching that would identify this with "the Great Tribulation." There is the widest difference between them. The church's path, and, indeed, we may say, the path of faith through all time, has been and ever is through tribulation. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." "In the world ye shall have tribulation." No one would for a moment successfully dispute that this is the normal portion of the child of God. From the first moment of new-birth, we find ourselves opposed by the whole course of world.

But there is no element of penalty in all this.. It is the "tribulation of Jesus Christ." It is the path hallowed by His dear feet. It is marked by the footsteps of all the flock through all ages of the past. But "The Great Tribulation" is not only marked off as distinct from this by difference in degree; but there is a radical difference in essence, in kind, in character. It is not "the tribulation of Jesus Christ." It is the nation of Israel, as such, receiving, under the righteous government of God on the earth, the retributive penalty of its rejection of Christ, their true Messiah.

There was not one element of penalty under God's government in John's being a prisoner in Patmos, or Paul at Philippi or Rome, or Peter at Jerusalem. Far, far from that, their hearts were joyous in the sense of their present perfect acceptance with God; but that penal element which is quite lacking in these tribulations, will be the prominent one in "The Great Tribulation;" and the deepest suffering of that awful time will be in the sense of the Hand of God upon the nation in its sorrows. No comfort of the "fellowship of His sufferings" that cheered John, will it have; whilst man's arch enemy, the devil, confined to earth, will, by his supernatural malignancy, add unspeakable intensity to the persecutions (Rev. xii). It is thus because God's holy Word distinguishes the Great Tribulation, being peculiarly and characteristically (Jer. xxx:7) the time of Jacob's trouble (and Jacob must surely mean rather Jacob's sons than the church) - as peculiarly linked with Jerusalem and Israel's land (Matt. xxiv) - as being different in character from the present afflictions of the church, that the discrimination is necessitated; and that it is only by the rapture of the heavenly people that God is free, as it were, again to take up His dealings with His people on the earth.

Thus when a well-known writer, a strong advocate of the 'Delayed-Coming theory,' says: "Side by side with converted Israel, the church goes through the Great Tribulation to the end," he certainly has not the slightest justification, for it is simple confusion. As long as believers in the Son of God, whether Jew or Gentile, are "of the same body," and, in Him, cease to be either Jew or Gentile, there cannot be the two distinct and opposite operations going on side by side. From the day of

Pentecost, as soon as a Jew was "converted" he really ceased to be a Jew (Gal. iii:28), and although God's mercy lingered over Israel, so that offers of restoration were made to the nation, and the doctrine as to church was not at once proclaimed, yet converted Israel and the church have never, as yet, gone on side by side. When will they begin to do so? At what moment will a Jew being "converted," or new-born, be separate and distinct from another Jew; like Paul, for instance, or Adolf Saphir; so that one believing Jew is a member of the Body of Christ; and as such has his mind set on Christ and the things above, whilst side by side with him another believing Jew, not a member of His Body, has his thoughts on God's dwelling on the earth? 'What will cause this strange difference? One "convert," or child of God, turns away from earth and looks for deliverance by being caught up to meet His Lord in the air, and only prays for his enemies, whilst at the same moment and side by side with him another "convert," or child of God, longs only for God's "righteous judgments to be abroad in the earth" (Is. xxvi:8-il), and only looks for deliverance by the destruction of his foes! Surely there are many things "clearer than" this, to use the words of this same writer, in the Bible!

But we are in the

"Kingdom" of Jesus Christ, a kingdom, however, not yet displayed. He has it not in power and actuality yet. He sits not yet on His own Throne; but is still on His Father's; and there, In patience, He awaits His Father's will as to the tune of taking that kingdom. Oh, my dear reader, let us be very careful to make no mistake here, it is vital to our whole view of life. The Corinthians were in grave danger, for they were "reigning as Kings." They

had forgotten that we share the patience of the Lord Jesus, and the apostle adds "without us:" he would have nothing of this world without Christ. We are in "the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience of Jesus Christ."

We now come to a verse full of interest. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and heard, behind me, a great voice as of a trumpet" as the verse reads in our A.V. and R.V. Yet, whilst thus supported there are a few differences that there can be no question are permissible. For instance, there is no article before "Spirit." "On" may be "in" the Lord's Day, and "was" may be equally correctly translated "became." It is not the ordinary, normal, spiritual state of a Christian that is here predicted; it is something abnormal. "I became."

What is the force of the expression "en pneutnati" in Spirit. We have exactly the same form in Matt. xxii. "How doth David in Spirit, etc.," where it is very clearly not his own spirit, but the Holy Spirit, that is referred to; for so Mark xii:36 divinely assures us. In i Cor. vii:34 it is equally clearly the human spirit. There seems an intended indefiniteness about the expression; as if it might include both the human spirit and the divine; the human spirit being caught up and energized by the divine: the body is dropped, no longer is it the medium of communication; the soul too takes a subservient place, and the spirit free, but helpless by its own powers, is transported into other scenes by the Spirit of God, who communicates to that which is now the man, the visions here related. The 4th chapter is evidently in a way a new beginning analogous to this; there, too, the same trumpet-voice speaks; there, too, the Seer becomes in the Spirit and there, too, there is a movement, a change of place in response to the

invitation, "Come up higher." There was no movement of the body necessarily, that was still captive in Patmos, but of the divinely-possessed spirit. Compare c. xvii:3 and c. xxi:10.

So here the words "in the Lord's day" are closely connected with "in Spirit." In the power of the Spirit of God his spirit is carried outside the region of physical sight or sense. He sees with another eye now than with that of the body; he is in quite another surrounding. Patmos with its persecution; man's day with its evil spirit in ascendancy is gone; he is in the Lord's Day, where his Lord is all, where He is even now "judging in the midst of the churches."

This brings us to the next words "in the Lord's day." This must refer either to the first day of the week, or is a practical equivalent to "the day of the Lord." It is, by the great majority of commentators, taken to be the former. So many, and so worthy of respect, are the names that can be marshalled in support of this - so very early in the history of the church was the first day of the week called the Lord's Day, that it is not hastily, or without hesitation, that one ventures to oppose what is so powerfully accredited. Yet, even if the truth depended on human authorities, names might be given in support of the other interpretation, that would represent neither poor scholarship nor inferior spiritual intelligence.

A foundation truth for scriptural interpretation we have taken to be this, the Spirit of God is here with us "to lead us into all truth," and that thus even the "little children" "need not that any one should teach" them, for "the anointing teaches them all things" (1 John 1:2) Nor is this intended clearly to foster a proud spirit of

independence of one another. Far from it; but that we must not submit ourselves blindly to the teaching of any, but cherish humble dependence on the Lord, and His Word, Which is in itself quite able to make the man of God perfect.

And this is important here. If we are dependent on ecclesiastical history, how many of us could fulfil the injunction to "prove all things"? If, however, the Word in our hands, and the Spirit in our hearts, give perfect competency, then indeed may the youngest, or most ignorant, be preserved from mistake. If the "Lord's Day" be the First day of the week, then of course it has little or no connection with the words "in the Spirit." John must have been in the first day of the week, in any event, apart altogether from the Spirit. It is a mere note of the time, or day, on which these events occurred. Whether they suit that day, or not, we will consider directly. Or it is stated as a fact worthy of divine record that the aged saint was in a peculiarly spiritual state of mind on this day!

Thus, if these words mean our Sunday, then they would alter, and I may say alter in a way utterly out of harmony with their unquestioned bearing in chapter iv:5, the being "in the Spirit," which, in this case, would be little more than a spiritual state of mind, instead of a "transport," as is, I am assured, the literal force of the phrase. Nowhere else in the Scriptures does exactly the same term "the Lord's Day" occur, so that we must judge of its bearing from the context. Thus there is really little or no force in the common objection that when "the Day of the Lord" as a dispensational epoch is intended a different form of words is used: not "hee kuriakee

hemera" The Lord's Day, but "hee heemera tou kuriou," The Day of the Lord.

A fair and complete answer to this would be that when "the first day of the week" is referred to, not only a slightly different, but a completely distinct form of words is used; it is always called "the first of the week" "tee inia toon Sabbatoon" as Luke xxvi:1, and it is not unworthy of remark that this form occurs exactly seven times, as if completing, in a perfect way, the references to the Resurrection Day, and thus confirming the thoughts that no reference to this day is intended here.

Surely the form of words "The Lord's Day" have, in themselves, and apart from the traditional meaning we have attached to them, greater affinity to "The Day of the Lord" than they have to "The First of the Week."

Indeed it is difficult to see more difference between "the Lord's Day" and the "Day of Lord" than between the "fleshly lusts" of i Pet. ii and "the lusts of our flesh" of Eph. ii:3. or than there would be between "the Lord's Supper" and "the Supper of the Lord." Yet may there not be a reason for the very slight of distinction in the form, even though both expressions refer to the scene of the Lord's judgment. This, when displayed on the earth, is "the Day of the Lord," the emphasis being on "day," as in contrast with the day of the display of man's evil. But even now there is a scene in which the Lord is judging - it is in His own House, where judgment must ever begin (i Peter iv, Ez. ix), and in this scene it is even now the Lord's Day. From man's authority, from man's persecution and injustice, John is transported to a day in which the Lord alone is seen judging, as He soon will on earth. The differences in terms may be intended to

suggest these distinctions of scenes, or spheres of judgment. But judgment it most clearly is, in both cases, as the contents of our book evidence, and how perfectly this is in harmony with the meaning given the words need hardly be pointed out.

But is the idea of judgment consonant with the memories of that day in which He arose, the first of the week? That is not a day of judgment in any sense, surely. That is, as it ever was, a day in which He still reminds us of the Peace He has made, ever and again calling our wandering eyes and hearts back to consider the cost of it in wounded hands and feet, and the remembrance of His love for us in death. Not one vestige of this do we see here in this glorious majestic Personage, before whom, he, who had put his head so confidently and with such holy intimacy, upon His breast, falls as dead.

And, after all, the bearing of the context is always of the first importance as a proof - it is the atmosphere in which the true meaning alone lives. Tradition, and tradition alone, is against this; and for those who reject unsupported tradition as authority; there remains little or nothing to uphold any other interpretation.

But so universally is the term Lord's Day identified with the first day of the week, that whilst for the sake of a correct interpretation, and the bearing this must have on our understanding of this book as a whole, I have given my convictions on the point, yet I would not desire to be understood as contending against the sense in which it is universally understood.

Our blessed Lord has significantly enough marked this first day of the week as His own, in a sense. On its first morning, before its sun had risen on His tomb. He had

burst the gates of that tomb, and brought a more joyous light than any natural sun could give on our death-shadowed world, in "Life and Immortality." Ere its close He had appeared again and again to His beloved flock; and He permitted the whole week to pass before He again appeared to them on the next first-day. So the book of the Acts tells us that the disciples were accustomed to come together on the day thus marked off by their Lord, to break bread in the remembrance of Him (Acts xx). Little wonder is it, therefore, if the term "Lord's Day" very early began to be applied to it. Nor do I see any need to quarrel with such a usage.

A more serious matter is the other name by which it is also known among Christians, the "Sabbath." This, too, comes to us with its head all hoary with antiquity, and decked with all the venerableness of religious pretension, and on this account, making claim upon our reverence. To such claims we must ever say, the Word of God is older still, and this must govern our every thought with absolute authority. We are quite safe as long as we prefer this to all mere tradition. My dear reader, turn to your Concordance now, and note how many times, and in what way, the Word Sabbath is used in connection with distinctive Christianity; that is, after the coming of the Holy Spirit to abide with us. Just once and in this way. "Let no man therefore urge you in respect of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of good things to come." Does that look as if the Sabbath were in existence, or a continuation of its enforcement?

The Sabbath speaks of rest from work, and is certainly of true value when it can be enjoyed with God i e., when He, too, can rest. But He can only rest when "everything is very good." Thus He saw everything after the six days'

work; everything was exactly as it should be; there was nothing that needed to be put right; no sin, no death, no sorrow, no pain, no groan, no tear anywhere. He could rest. Thus He sanctified and blessed the seventh day, i. e., Saturday, so called, but not for long did He rest. Man's sin and sorrow broke rudely into God's Sabbath, and He, in a tenderness we so little appreciate, has never, from that moment up to the present, enjoyed any rest, any Sabbath. On the contrary, as the Lord said when He had done some mighty work of kindness on the Sabbath day, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," and as long as there is a groan heard, or a tear-drop to be seen in any eye, God will not, can not rest; or He would not be the God of love He is.

This has ever been the contention between God and religious man, who would maintain his own righteousness: man ever claiming that he could keep the Sabbath; the Lord ever insisting that on all sides were proofs that this was impossible. Man claiming everything to be "very good;" the Lord pointing to sin and its consequences. Aye, in order that the Sabbath might be maintained in its integrity, they begged that the legs of the crucified be broken and their bodies taken from the cross. It was thus that the last Sabbath was ushered in by man, religious man, whilst God looking down on the earth to see if "everything was very good," so that He might rest; saw His Son slain and His holy body lying in Joseph's tomb! Was that "very good"? Can we, dare we, beloved reader, claim the Sabbath, in any scriptural sense, now? Nay, nay, we look for one yet to come.

"There remaineth a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God;" but it is not here nor now. "Let us therefore labour

to enter into that rest" (Heb. iv). And yet as one so beautifully speaks, "In the work finished by the Lord Jesus Christ God again rests, as in His works of old, with fullest complacency. This finished work is altogether according to His mind. By the resurrection of Christ the Father has said of it, "Behold, it is very good." It is His rest forever; He has an abiding delight in it; His eyes and His heart are on it continually. The work of Christ, accomplished for sinners has given God a rest." Through mercy, the first day of the week has been given us when we may be in freedom from earth's cares and occupations, and this privilege no spiritual mind would undervalue for itself, or seek to diminish for others; nor, whilst maintaining o the liberty from legal observances wherewith Christ has made us free, would Christian love ever throw a stumbling-block before saints who, in this day of confusion, are still bound by a conscience which lacks light, to consider the first-day a Sabbath.

To return to our Book.

John the apostle, thus in the Spirit in the Lord's day, heard behind him a loud voice, as of a trumpet; which speaks of majestic authority, expressed with unmistakable clearness, every word understood instantly. Have you noticed how moral or spiritual condition affects the hearing? The bodily ears of a company of men may all be in the same condition exactly, yet when God speaks, some men will hear nothing, some will hear a mere sound, yet not giving an intelligible idea, whilst to others, every word will be simple and clear. In John xii the Lord sent up a prayer to His Father, "Glorify Thy name;" the response was in a "voice from heaven," and some of the people "said it thundered;" they could distinguish no words at all:

others caught something more intelligible, and said "an angel spoke to Him," but to His ear every word was simple and clear. Again, when He Himself, exalted to the highest glory, struck down by that glory, Saul of Tarsus upon his way to Damascus, the men travelling with Saul heard a voice, but not a single word did they catch. Yet had' they the same ears, and were in the same external position, as he to whom every word was so clear.

Aye, my brethren, heaven is near or far, within speaking distance, or beyond the power of any voice to reach, or eye to pierce, as our spirits are awake or asleep, alive or dead. Stephen, about to die, filled with the Holy Ghost, needed no help to look into it as if it were beyond the farthest star. To him the sight of heaven was very near and clear, but to no one else in all that throng, nor would the most powerful telescope man ever made have brought it one inch nearer to them. So when this glorious voice shall be heard awakening the dead, not all the dead shall hear it, but those only who are Christ's, and have become more or less familiar with it in life; nor shall all the living see that wondrous sight of the rapture of His own to Himself; it is a secret rapture.

So John is told to write what he sees in a book, and to send it to the seven assemblies now named specifically. But John has to "turn" in order to see what he is to record. He is not naturally facing in the right direction. The voice is "behind" him. He has been looking on a scene where the shades of declension and degeneracy were fast falling on the churches as God's witnesses on the earth. He has been looking at the constant triumph of evil; the strength of all that was of Satan, the apparent weakness of all that is of God. Depressing enough is such a view of things, and he must "turn" to

see another sight, and it is this he is told to record, in order that he may not alone have the comfort of it, but that even you and I, dear reader, if grace opens our eyes, may see what he saw. But we must be, in some measure, by the side of suffering John. He that is very near the world, basking in its sunshine, will always be too far off to see these precious visions. Alas, beloved, that our eyes are so world-filmed, and our ears so heavy; that is, if I may be permitted to speak for any but myself.

Verse 12: "And I turned to see the voice that spoke to me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lamps, and in the midst of the lampstands one like (the) Son of man." What a change from the earth he had been contemplating from the mines of Patmos. It was long since one had mourned because "all they that are of Asia are turned away from me," and had told the young Thessalonians that the "mystery of iniquity was already working." Here, when turned, John looks on a scene of perfect order and beauty, and the assemblies are all golden lampstands. But evidently the lampstands are only referred to in order to give the surroundings, as it were, of that wondrous personage who is "in the midst," i.e., the place of importance none must have but One who is seen like unto the Son of Man." And this title "Son of Man" is the first of ten dignities that John here sees upon Him. Yet it marks Him out not merely man, but like unto the Son of Man. He has marks that no mere man ever had, as we shall see. It is only in the guise in which He has suffered rejection and humiliation that the Father has decreed He shall receive the highest honour and glory, for it is written "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the

Father." "And hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is (the) Son of Man" (John v: 22-23, 27).

That title Son of Man so often taken by that blessed One is filled with significance. It speaks of the grace whereby He became a little lower than the angels, and it speaks too of His claim to take that kingdom which the first man lost and which none of his sons has been able to regain. He is the One who is heir to all that was given to man. As heir, He takes the name "Son of Man." He, as such, has once more stood on the battlefield in which the first man was defeated, and conquering, He binds the strong man, and spoils his goods. Yet that we may have part with Him in that victory, He must suffer, and that suffering has its double character, of an atoning work towards God for men, and persecution and rejection from them. Thus it is, as Son of Man that He shall yet be seen in His glory, and as Son of Man it is we see Him here with that glory commencing in the judgment of His own house, which shall spread in ever widening circles, till the universe is cleared of all that is opposed to God.

Second: "Covered with a garment reaching to the feet." The nature of this garment is not given; nor indeed is there any word for garment. It is, literally, "enclothed to the feet." The one idea to be brought before our minds is the complete en-veloping of His body. This is His dignity. Now His work is done. Not, as once, is He now seen with garments "laid aside," John xiii. No longer are His loins girt for active service. That is past; His robe drops in easy dignity to His feet. He is here now, not to work, but to judge.

Third: "Girt about the breasts with a golden girdle." Why at the breasts is He girt? Many years before this had that same John seen that same beloved Person and also "girded"; but not with a golden girdle for He had work to do; and then He girded Himself with a towel; symbol of lowly ministry of the love that put Him even at the defiled feet of His people. What a striking contrast now! A contrast upon which we may meditate to our profit. Then love flowed out "to the end" following His poor saints in all their needs, and meeting those needs; but now, His breasts are girt and with gold. Here in every detail it is the dignity of His person that is expressed. As the girding of the loins spoke of toil and work to be done, the breasts are expressive of tenderness - affection - hence these seats of affections are now encircled - held in by that which speaks to us of God's own holy nature. His affections are there indeed, but they must only move now in the circle of divine holiness, of which gold speaks. It is as Judge He appears, and not as ministering grace, but seeing how the churches fulfill their ministry and calling them to account for it. It is as if the priest were walking with the golden snuffers in the sanctuary of old, and tending the lamp therein.

Fourth: "His head and His hair white, as white -as wool - as snow." No priestly mitre, nor diadem of sovereignty, now adorn His head, yet is He crowned with a mysterious dignity, that another o seer had earlier seen on Him and recorded. If you will turn to 7th chapter of Daniel, you will find "the Ancient of Days with the hair of His head like the pure wool." Our Lord Jesus is then here the Ancient of Days, i.e., with all the dignity of Age and that of an immeasurable Eternity. Not years or days of time whiten His glorious Head, or are the measure of

his wisdom or experience. Far less is there a gray hair to speak of impaired powers through the sapping of time. No, indeed, no. It is the glory of perfect holiness (white) only; and the wisdom of Eternity that crowns Him! He is "the Word who was in the beginning with God, and God." Can any question be too difficult - any problem too intricate - for that glorious Head to answer or to solve?

Fifth: "His eyes as a flame of fire." How thoroughly judicial is this figure. Those eyes that had been dimmed with human tears, how different now! They are piercing, searching, all-devouring, unmerciful towards everything that will not bear them as fire. They burn up "wood, hay, stubble." They spare nothing opposed to holiness, light, truth. It is not time nor place, again it is evident, for pity or compassion towards sin or sinner. He maintains, in other character, the position of His true saints through all their weakness, failure, and errors, but it is not mercy or love to allow those errors. He will not. His eyes, as a flame of fire, insure the holiness of His people. No darkness covers, no secret thought is hidden, from them.

Sixth: "His feet like white-hot brass, as if in a furnace they glowed." Whilst the word translated "Fine brass" (in A. V.) is difficult as occurring nowhere else in literature, one may at least safely see in it, in connection with the explanatory words that follow, "as if they glowed in a furnace," a bright glowing metal instinct in itself with life - that inherent: principle, that so emphatically ever characterizes the glorious Person of the Lord. He is never dependent on anything outside of Himself. He is in Himself the Source of Light and Love. As in the transfiguration, His very raiment not only does not hide His glory, but itself glitters effulgent, flashing

forth light, justifying the touch of need and faith, which ever discerned that His garments were affected by His Person. He gave them honour; they gave Him none, as they do to us.

Brass,- or more properly copper, to which His feet are like, is, as the hardest of metals, the symbol of endurance. It resembles closely in appearance Gold, and said in one case to be of equal value (Ezra viii:27); therefore, I judge, that it also figures His divinity. The altar of Burnt-Offering was made of this metal, and so shadowed forth that Him which alone enabled Him so endure the judgment of God. But here it is not passive, but active, and therefore must speak of unyielding, unflinching, irresistible judgment, alive and instinct with the essential glory of His divine Person; and this further intensified by the accompanying idea of the glowing furnace. Who or what can resist the treading down of such feet?

Seventh: "His voice as the voice of many waters." All must be in harmony with His majesty, and so that voice that has been sung by David's harp in the 29th Psalm, Jehovah's voice, is here heard outbalancing the murmurs of the seas, and all waters. It is thus Ezekiel has told us of Him, "And behold the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the East, and His voice was like the voice of many waters" (chap. 19 xliii:2). Surely all this tells us that it is no mere man here, but Jehovah, like unto the Son of Man.

Eighth: "In His right hand seven stars." We will not permit any diversion by asking what the stars mean; that will come up later. Now it is solely the glory of Him who has this dignity, that we see; He holds in His right

hand all that gives light to the earth through the dark night. They are supported alone by Him and are in His complete control. What strength, what glory!

Ninth: "Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." This shows how purely and intensely figurative is every feature. He speaks, and that speech is the Word of God. Not as the scribes does He teach, but with an Authority that is alone possible to One who is Divine, and Himself the source of all authority. That Word is sharp and cuts between soul and spirit. It explores the innermost recesses of man's complex being, and throws its light into the central chambers of the heart. It is a divine glory!

Tenth:

"His countenance as the Sun shining in its power." Transfigured once again, but not now temporarily, as on the holy mount, but forever in glory transcendent. What a contrast with the day when that Face was blindfolded, smitten, mocked, and spit upon!

Beloved, may I venture to ask if you have thought much of this aspect of the Lord Jesus? We so naturally linger about what speaks of His grace, His tenderness; suiting our present needs so well; but here it is not the needs of the individual paint that are in view, and which He, in a never-failing grace, meets; but the testimony of His churches in the world that is before Him, and how different the character He bears. It does not contradict the other, but balances it, as God is not only Love but Light (and this needs equally to be taken to our hearts and consciences), so is He who is the exact expression of God. He is not here in that tender character so fully in harmony with the "first day of the week;" but in all the

glorious, holy, judicial dignity that conforms to "the Lord's Day." May we behold Him thus, for the Name of the "Son born," the "Child given," is "Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Father of Eternity, The Prince of Peace."

The Vision contd.

CHAPTER

V. THE VISION (continued).

The effect on man of the divine presence—Shall it be as when we see Him?—The touch—The commission of supreme importance - "Mystery" - Stars, Lampstands, Angels, Churches - What is the angel? - Local responsibility, as well as a unity, dependent on grace.

John, the beloved John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, even he falls at His feet as dead! This is never the effect on man when in the presence of another man. In such case there may be prostration, an acknowledgment of the official dignity of the presence into which men come, but it is quite voluntary. It is only when man finds himself in the presence of God that the prostration is quite involuntary, it is the tribute humanity ever pays to the Divine. Thus had prophet after prophet of old confessed the divinity of the same glorious One; and even at times when He was a humbled Man on earth, did flashes of that same glory cast men down on their faces; as in Gethsemane. (John xviii.)

And soon, very soon, you and I, beloved reader, shall also look upon that same One! Shall we too fall at His feet as dead? No, no, I trow not. For not as Judge, - not in this judicial glory do the Scriptures lead us to look for Him. It is "without sin unto salvation" He comes, and we who are alive and remain to that coming are first "changed in a moment," so that we are no longer in a body of flesh and blood; mortal, corruptible, which ever takes its place in its native dust involuntarily; but in a

Body like His own! Wondrous is the grace that has met our deepest need here. Love and joy, not fear, will then be the overpowering emotions, and whilst we shall want no higher place than "at His feet," it is not "as dead" we shall be there; for the dead do not praise (Psalm 115-17).

"And He laid His right hand upon me." The Hand of Omnipotence holding up the seven stars, and from whose shelter He had in an earlier day said that none could pluck His sheep. The touch communicates the strength needed to the Body, and now to the soul and spirit He speaks, "Fear not, I am the first, and the last, and the living (One) and I became dead, and behold I am alive to the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades." It is now, and for the last time in Scripture, He speaks that gracious word so often spoken through the ages to His saints; so often spoken in the days of His sojourn on earth to His disciples, "Fear not." Oh, the wave of calm that must have swept over John's troubled spirit as he heard it! But He gives a reason why John should not fear, and again that reason is marked with the mystic number present everywhere throughout the Book: - it is seven-fold. Nor is it ever necessary for any to go outside of Himself, for all fear to vanish. All that is needed for John, as well as for you, for me, is a closer intimacy - a deeper knowledge of Himself - so thus He speaks, "I am the First" Long before mountains were brought forth, or ever God had formed the earth or fields, He was. Long before there was any creature to hymn His praise: Angel or archangel or Sons of God or morning- stars, He was there. He has met every intricate problem from the beginning. His are the wonders of creation: and shall we fear?

The Last; after all; though heaven and earth pass away - through all changes of time; when the drama of the ages is over, He is there. Cf. Isaiah xliii:io. "Before me was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." He is the Fountain, Source, Spring of Life; but in order that that life might be the Light of men, He, even He, must suffer death, feel its chill touch, and be within its grasp. Wondrous mystery of humiliation! But death could not hold Him, nor shall it, all through eternal ages, touch Him more. Poor Lazarus, as he left his charnel-cave, brought his grave-clothes with him, for it would not be long before he would need them again; this glorious Speaker left His behind; they were useless to Him now, He should need them again, never. At His girdle hang the keys of those terror-strikers, "Death" and "Hades," the one claiming the material, the other the spiritual part of man's being. Death, what we do see and know so well, with all its gloomy and sorrowful associations; tears, broken heart-strings and all - He has it in His power. And Hades, what we do not know or see - what is on the other side. He has His Hand there. It lies in His power who died for us. He has conquered death's citadel;- God's enemy, our enemy is defeated, and Hosea in His case is fulfilled -"O Death, I will be thy plagues; O Grave, I will be thy destruction." Why fear if He who died, and died for us, fills all the past and futhre of eternity with the essence of Life? Yet He has gone into death only to deliver us, its prey, and has full power over death's kingdom forever!

And now we come to a word, the importance of which, to a correct interpretation of the Book, it is difficult to exaggerate. It is the commission from the Lord Jesus; Verse 19.

"Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which are about to take place after these." It is, beyond all controversy, a three-fold commission, dealing with past, present, and future in the three-fold repetition of the one word translated "the things which." He is to record in writing, first, what he had already personally seen; past things: second; what there was, and now is; present things; a certain condition that had already begun and was to continue for a time: and lastly, when that condition should be past and present things were gone into history, what should even then come to pass. It is an ever-widening series of circles, first, in relation to himself, personally, what had come within the sphere of his own vision. Then the wider one in which all the churches had part. And finally the divine point of view, for none can "declare the former things from the beginning before it come to pass," but God (Isaiah Xlviii:3-5).

This would clearly appear to be the Lord's gracious way of putting another key of the Book in our hands at its opening. We have already read of the things that John had seen, nor is the importance of these things to be measured by the amount of space they cover. They involve the judicial glories of His Person, and His relation to the assemblies amidst which He was, and this necessarily precedes the actual movement of the Lord in discerning and judging in the midst of those assemblies.

Nor is there any other book in the Scriptures of which the Lord personally and directly gives us the divisions. It is a most gracious and indispensable guide to the correct understanding of this confessedly difficult book; and any system of interpretation that overlooks it, sets it aside or minimizes its value and importance is really

self- condemned as far astray, even without further examination.

This fact of the three-fold commission is further continued by the fourth chapter, which after the letters to the assemblies are written, opens with exactly the same words with which this commission closes: "meta tuata" "after these things." John was to write what was to take place after "the things that are" were over; and in conformity with this, chapter 4 opens with "meta tauta," "after these things," I beheld, etc. Thus chapters ii and iii comprise "the things that are."

Had not the divine Speaker, many years before, when Peter asked Him as to John's specific work, said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" and whilst we know that this was wrongly understood at the time, so universal was the thought that the Lord's return was near, that "this saying went abroad that this disciple should not die," yet John corrects this error, not by saying positively that he should pass away, in every sense; but by a careful repetition of the exact words used, as if to invite our special attention to their force, and may they not - nay do they not suggest, a sense in which John, in his work (for this, mark, is the bearing of Peter's question) was to tarry, or be with us, until He come. In conformity with this, John is placed here amongst "the things that are," and these "things that are" go down to the Lord's coming and the rapture of His redeemed people. John is here naturally part of "the things that are," and thus he, in a real sense, abides on the earth to their end; he is in that circle, and thus continues to the rapture. Now, this is absolutely true of John, for he is, in the fourth chapter, caught up to heaven, and thus himself stands for that company with

which he is vitally connected. All is intensely spiritual, figurative, symbolical, as is the character of this book; but all is in perfect harmony with all Scripture, which must throw its light on every symbol.

Verse 20, "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candle sticks, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches." The word "mystery" first strikes us. It refers in Scripture to something on which no previous Scripture throws its light. These stars and lamp-stands must not then be interpreted by the occurrence of the same words in the Old Testament Scriptures at all. We must not conclude that the seven stars have any affinity with those mentioned in Daniel viii and x, etc.; or that the seven lamp-stands are the same, as the one lamp-stand that stood in the tabernacle, or the ten that were in the temple, or the one seen by Zechariah.

Old Testament Scripture has not revealed what these stars, these lamp-stands are; and thus it is a mystery; but we have now a divine interpretation. The seven stars, which John had seen in heaven, stood for seven angels in heaven, which angels could not see; and the seven lamp-stands which he seen on earth, represented the seven churches themselves on earth, which he could not see. But now we, in our turn, need to throw all the light that Scripture affords us, in order to understand what is meant even by the explanation. The stars that shine during the absence of the sun that, with the moon, are appointed as rulers of the night, are the angels of the seven churches. What then, or who are these angels of the churches?

As to this there has been endless conflict. Naturally ecclesiastical systems that have no plain Scripture for their justification, are not sorry to take advantage of any questionable word to claim its support. Thus amongst other interpretations these "angels" we are assured are what are called today rectors, clergymen, pastors of churches, each church having its own Pastor; who, as a matter of fact, has to do its evangelizing, its teaching, its shepherding, its marrying, its burying, its distribution of the so-called sacraments, with all their benefits. In fact, every single work and gift that Christ, when he "ascended on high and received gifts for men," gave to the church; and more too, even those that He did not give, are now to be centred in one man alone! Well, a man certainly may well be an "angel," for he must needs "excel in strength," (Ps. ciii), if he can fill all these places with their vast responsibilities. But when we go to Scripture, we find that the whole system has not one letter of support. On the contrary, the pastor was a gift quite separate and distinct from any other, and the possession of one gift was prima-facie evidence of the absence of the others. It is true that in certain special cases, as with the apostle Paul, more than one gift might be given to one man, but this is not the rule. He gave some to be pastors, some to be teachers, some to be evangelists; not one man to be all these. We must if we are content to stand firmly on the Scripture, dismiss these claims of clericalism of every character, altogether as having no support at least in the word "Angel."

Nor will it be necessary to look at all that has been written on this matter. I will only give the conclusion at which I have arrived, and, briefly, the path in the Scriptures by which (I trust by the Spirit of God, but that

is for others to judge) I have been led to that conclusion. The word angel means, primarily, "a messenger," and as the messenger represents him who sends him, the word has in it strongly the idea of "representative." Thus evidently and clearly is it used in Acts xii. Peter, freed from prison, knocks at the door of the house where many were assembled in prayer on his behalf; the damsel Rhoda recognizes his voice; and, in her glad excitement, overcomes by her vehemence the doubts of the others, until they say "it is his angel." Not his guardian angel in this case surely, as men speak; for why should they think that such would vainly knock, or assume Peter's voice so as to be mistaken for him; but it is his spirit, - himself indeed, but not in the body - it is his ghost, who has come representing him. It was a foolish explanation, but it was the best they could think of.

Now turn to Matthew xviii:io, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." This has been assumed to teach that every individual has a guardian angel. I doubt the fact; and this Scripture certainly does not justify it, for it is not true, in any event of all; but characterizes these little ones only. Nor are the "little ones" synonymous with believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the disciples would not thus despise each other; and it was a veritable child that stood in their midst. But these little ones in their dependence and helplessness, the little place they fill or the little account that is made of them in this world, their simplicity and trustfulness - it is this spirit that is the "angel" that represents them before, and secures the interest and solicitude of the Father of

the Lord Jesus. Automatically, as the spirit of the little one develops, and grows up to self confidence, self dependence, rejection of the truth as to his helpless condition, as alas, in the evil trend of human nature, "little ones" but too often do, they take their lot into their own hands and the "angel" in that proportion disappears; otherwise adults as well, and not the "little ones" only, would have an angel in heaven; and this would cease to be the peculiar dignity of the little one alone, as it evidently is here. In new birth and by constant conversions (not by a single one), we learn more and more the absolute dependence of our life, and thus again become "as little children," and sing "Our Times are in Thy Hand, Father, we wish them there."

To turn the light of these

Scriptures on the word "Angel" as used in our verse in Revelation; it is not a personal entity, any more than in the case of a little child; not a literal individual, any more than in the case of Peter. It is the ideal spirit that characterizes (and rules, as the stars are rulers of the night) the church; and, as personified, stands as the representative of each church before the Lord here, and whom He addresses; and even in addressing, it is "what the Spirit said to the ie., we are thus specifically told, that "the angels" are not separate and distinct actual persons, for they disappear at the end of each letter, but each one is the spirit that is, at the time, governing or characterizing each church. Just as we now say, in ordinary language, "a company of people is characterized by a missionary spirit," or "such and such a church is governed by an aggressive gospel spirit."

Now no one could truly discern the actual condition of each church - could recognize its "angel," but He whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and He addresses each in exactly that character that their condition demands, - as we shall see later if the Lord will.*

*But some may ask, "Does not the first chapter of Hebrews clearly authorize the idea of guardianship of angels; are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation?" I reply, Most surely there is no thought of individual guardianship there. It gives angels, who are the highest of created ranks, a place of service as in contrast with the uncreated glories of the Son. All, even the highest archangel, are servants, and so must all ever be, except the Creator Himself. They are servants sent forth to serve those who are the objects of the Son's salvation. Thus is the glory of the Lord Jesus enhanced; the highest of created Intelligences are at the service of those who are the objects of His salvation. There is nothing about individual guardianship in it; nor indeed must we let anything rival the Lord Jesus in our thoughts or hearts. He alone, and His most gracious ministry is "better" than even that which was so highly appreciated by the Hebrews of old, the ministry of angels.

Returning to the candlesticks, or lamp-stand, it clearly represents the church on earth as the vessel of the testimony of God. Each separate lamp-stand, as here seen, is on its own base, that is in its individual responsibility. Whatever condition one is in does not necessarily affect the other; one may be approved, another may be blamed, one may be removed, another may be left. It is not, if one be blamed, all are blamed; or if one removed, all are removed.

The view that sees only the unity of the one church, when looked at in every connection, is thus one-sided and becomes in application, positive error; for there is such a thing as local responsibility as there is individual responsibility, and this is seen here. Indeed, responsibility is necessarily local. Can there be true responsibility and consequent accounting for what is beyond the ken altogether? Does He ever judge thus? There were, and are, sins of ignorance - nor can God lower His standard to human ignorance - nor do His children desire it - but these were all of quite a different character from making one responsible for what another, somewhere else, did. The recovery of the truth of the vital organic unity of the church, which is so denied by the multitude of sects all around, has eventuated in the pendulum swinging so far in the other direction, as practically to nullify every other truth, and every other aspect in which the church is regarded in the Scripture.

We are told that Achan's sin brought punishment on the whole of Israel, therefore one sin brings its penalty on the whole church. But it is hardly just to put it in this way. When Israel first crossed Jordan, God was with her as a unit: Achan's sin affected that unit, and God could not be with His people with sin, unknown though it was, in their midst. He Himself divinely, and without the slightest possibility of error, makes it known, first showing it by the defeat of Ai, and then the guilty, and ONLY the guilty one, is punished by stoning. If this case is parallel, it must be carried out consistently in every single feature. The whole of Israel must represent the whole of the Lord's people now, not a single section of them, and next there must be the same divine wisdom

and prescience that excludes all possibility of error, in the discovery of, and the putting away of, the evil-doer. We read of nothing of this kind at the end of Israel's history. Quite the reverse, and it is vain for us who are living at a similar end, to affect the powers of the first fresh morning. Not one word of this is written as apology for, or in defence of the slightest degree of any communion of the slightest character, with positive clearly revealed wickedness, or indifference to any degree of evil; but on the other hand, let us take the lesson afforded by these seven lamp-stands, each on its own base, and the seven letters written to seven churches, each needing a different word, for it is here we may learn the Lord's mind, as to His churches and their government.